2011-09-08

Making Sadza with Deaf Zimbabwean Women: A Missiological Reorientation of Practical Theological Method toward Self-Theologizing Agency among Subaltern Communities

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http://hdl.handle.net/2144/1446
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MAKING SADZA WITH DEAF ZIMBABWEAN WOMEN: A MISSIOLOGICAL REORIENTATION OF PRACTICAL THEOLOGICAL METHOD TOWARD SELF-THEOLOGIZING AGENCY AMONG SUBALTERN COMMUNITIES

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

2011
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(Order No. )

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Doctor of Philosophy

Boston University School of Theology, 2011

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Abstract

Missiological calls for self-theologizing among faith communities present the field of practical theology with a challenge to develop methodological approaches that address the complexities of cross-cultural, practical theological research. Although a variety of approaches can be considered critical correlative practical theology, existing methods are often built on assumptions that limit their use in subaltern contexts. This study seeks to address these concerns by analyzing existing theological methodologies with sustained attention to a community of Deaf Zimbabwean women struggling to develop their own agency in relation to child rearing practices. This dilemma serves as an entry point to an examination of the limitations of existing methodologies and a constructive, interdisciplinary theological exploration. The use of theological modeling
methodology employs my experience of learning to cook sadza, a staple dish of Zimbabwe, as a guide for analyzing and reorienting practical theological methodology.

The study explores a variety of theological approaches from practical theology, mission oriented theologians, theology among Deaf communities, and African women’s theology in relationship to the challenges presented by subaltern communities such as Deaf Zimbabwean women. Analysis reveals that although there is much to commend in these existing methodologies, questions about who does the critical correlation, whose interests are guiding the study, and consideration for the cross-cultural and power dynamics between researchers and faith communities remain problematic for developing self-theologizing agency.

Rather than frame a comprehensive methodology, this study proposes three attitudes and guideposts to reorient practical theological researchers who wish to engender self-theologizing agency in subaltern communities. The creativity of enacted theology, the humility of using checks and balances in research methods, and the grace of finding strategies to build bridges of commonality and community offer ways to reorient practical theological methodologies toward the development of self-theologizing agency among subaltern people. This study concludes with discussion of how these guideposts can not only benefit particular work with a community of Deaf Zimbabwean women, but also provide research and theological reflection in other subaltern contexts.
PART I

THE NEED FOR A THEOLOGICAL SADZA

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCING THE STUDY

Statement of the Problem

The emergence of the global South as an influence on world Christianity presents the field of practical theology with a challenge to develop methodological approaches that incorporate the complexities of cross-cultural practical theological research. Missiology has long been familiar with the “three self” methods of mission developed by Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson, which seek to develop new churches that are self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating.¹ More recently, missiologists have advocated for a “fourth self” that would constitute a self-theologizing church.² The emergence of self-theologizing in the global South brings a specific goal to theology that focuses the task of theology on the empowerment of faith communities to determine their own questions, approaches, and conclusions. The field of practical theology can benefit from a re-examination of its methodologies with an eye toward this aim of empowering


² Bosch, 451-52.
faith communities to become self-theologizing in an increasingly global Christian context.

The legacy of colonialism in the non-Western world includes the silencing and marginalization of human expression and experience in the global South. Postcolonial theorists refer to communities on the margins of society with an underdeveloped sense of unity and class consciousness as *subaltern* communities. These communities are continually under the pressure of hegemonic social forces which silence their contributions to larger social discourses. The observations of theologians from the global South and those who have researched subaltern communities suggest that there is a disconnection between the theological work being done in relation to these communities and the lived experiences of communities of faith. In Africa, the emergence of a plethora of theologies developed by Africans provides a diverse and rich patina of how African contexts shape theological thinking. However, Laurenti Magesa’s study, *Anatomy of Inculturation: Transforming the Church in Africa*, shows that much of the innovation presented and produced by indigenous African theologians has yet to gain a foothold in the theological imagination of most of Africa’s mainline denominational congregations. ^5^ Among African Independent Churches, M. L. Daneel’s study, *Fambidzano: Ecumenical*

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^4^ Paddy Ladd, *Understanding Deaf Culture: In Search of Deafhood* (Clevedon, UK; Buffalo: Multilingual Matters, 2003), 81-82.

Movement of Zimbabwe’s Independent Churches, shows a marked desire among African Southern Shona Independent Churches for more sophisticated theological reflection. This desire resulted in the establishment of a program of theological education designed not only to provide skilled leadership training to these churches, but also to foster the development of indigenous theologizing. In Africa, the historical disenfranchisement and deprivation of communities, including the churches, results in significant barriers to the development of a self-theologizing church. Practical theology’s concern with rooting theological inquiry and construction in the practices of actual communities so that they might address the questions confronting them seems well suited for addressing these barriers.

The emerging Deaf community in Zimbabwe presents a specific context for exploring how practical theological method can be reoriented toward the task of engendering self-theologizing participation among subaltern communities in the global Christian community. My own encounter with the practical theological questions raised by the women of this community left me questioning the appropriateness of a wide variety of theological methodologies. While every methodology I considered has its benefits, I have yet to find a methodology that combines the elements necessary to be sensitive to all the factors involved with my encounter with Deaf Zimbabwean women.


7 The capitalization of the term “Deaf” here is a usage from the field of Deaf Studies which signifies a socio-cultural understanding of the existential state of being “Deaf” rather than merely the absence of the ability to hear.
In some regard, my search for a methodology leads me to the realization that every context may require its own unique combination of elements in order to be effective in engendering self-theologizing agency. If that is the case, then perhaps the field of practical theology needs to consider new methodological strategies which reorient its task toward engendering self-theologizing agency among subaltern people.

As a historically overlooked and underserved population, Deaf Zimbabweans in the town of Mutare have struggled to form communal bonds that allow them to begin to advocate for participation in larger societal structures in Zimbabwe. One of their earliest spheres of involvement has been The United Methodist Church. Through a series of short term mission trips, continued correspondence, and financial support of the goals of Deaf Zimbabweans, Deaf and hearing United Methodists in the U.S. have been partners in seeing this community begin to come together and articulate its desires and beliefs. This study aims to examine the preparedness of current practical theological methodologies to engage in the development of self-theologizing agency among subaltern communities. Ultimately, this study seeks to work toward a practical theological methodological approach, informed by Deaf Studies, missiological approaches, and theologians from the global South, that enables outsider researchers to assist in engendering subaltern groups with self-theologizing agency allowing them to break through the hegemonic forces that silence them from participation in larger social discourse.
Methodology: A Recipe for Theological Sadza

As this study seeks to evaluate existing theological methods with the aim of creating a methodology in response to a specific context, it will be guided by specific attention to a particular community and context. The context that will guide this project is my own missional experience as a white male Deaf theologian in conversation with the women of an emerging community of Deaf Zimbabweans. Sustained attention to this community offers a unique opportunity to examine a subaltern community coming into contact with outsiders and outside sources as they begin to articulate questions about their being in the world as women of faith.

During four separate trips between 2000 and 2006, I deepened my relationship in working with Deaf people in Zimbabwe and their own relationships with hearing members of The United Methodist Church in establishing a Deaf ministry, a Deaf club, and a Deaf work project in the Sakubva area of Mutare, Zimbabwe. In their group discussions in meetings and casual discussions over meals or during breaks in their daily routine, Deaf women often express concerns over their struggles in child rearing practices. A large majority of these Deaf women have hearing children. Upon childbirth, they find themselves confronted with fears and misunderstandings from extended family members about their ability to raise their hearing children. Often these Deaf women have been denied the advantages of clear communication with their own hearing parents as their parents lacked opportunities and resources to learn signed language or other means of communicating with their Deaf daughters. Thus, when their daughter becomes a
mother, there are often misunderstandings and miscommunications that arise around their Deaf daughter’s understanding and ability to raise her child. The pressures brought by poverty and disruption of traditional extended family life by urbanization faced by all mothers in Zimbabwe further complicate this situation. These factors often result in the hearing children of Deaf women being taken and raised by their grandparents from infancy to the age of six or seven when the child is ready to enter school.

The phenomenon of children being raised by extended family members is not necessarily unusual in Zimbabwean society. However the Deaf women I have met have shared a variety of painful stories that seem to indicate that they may be experiencing additional marginalization from the decision making processes about the rearing of their own children as a result of the breach of communication with their hearing family members. Also, the practice of hearing relatives becoming the primary child rearing agents disrupts hearing children from being able to communicate with their mother when they return to their birth home. Such disruption causes additional stigma to the experiences of Deaf women as a mother and woman. As being a mother is perhaps one of the most critical aspects of being a woman in traditional Zimbabwean culture, the emotional and social impact of these disruptions is significant. Each Deaf woman’s story is unique and has various social, economic, and cultural factors that lead to different results. Therefore, every Deaf woman copes with their situation differently and articulates it in her own way. As these women become aware of The United Methodist Church as a both a social resource and community of faith, they have begun to inquire as to “what can be done to help us and what can we do to help?”
When this question raised by Deaf Zimbabwean women is posed as a question for practical theological research, their community presents itself as a subaltern community seeking to discover its practical theological agency in relation to the pressing problems of their lives. However, Deaf Zimbabwean women often face a complex set of significant barriers to developing their self-theologizing agency. Lacking adequate communication access to formal education, worship and church activities, familial conversation and means of social support only compounds the problems faced by every Zimbabwean woman. As they attempt to understand and employ theological resources that might assist them in developing their self-theologizing agency, these women struggle to define and articulate themselves on their own terms. Although they are well aware that their marginalization as mothers and women is unjust, they lack the resources to explore and explain how it is unjust and what alternative actions could be taken to provide what is best for their children without minimizing their involvement in child rearing decisions and practices.

In working with these women, I face a complex set of cross-cultural dynamics as a white North American Deaf male researcher. This disclosure of my social location reveals my radical difference and relative position of power in relation to Deaf Zimbabwean women. I am very much an outsider to the privilege of knowledge about the practices of Zimbabwean women. However, as a Deaf practical theologian who has worked with Deaf Zimbabwean women,\(^8\) I have a unique social relationship to these

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\(^8\) I have participated in four mission trips to Zimbabwe in 2000, 2004, and 2006. These mission trips were generally two weeks long and involved intensive immersion in
women that hearing practical theologians do not. The challenges I face in relating to these women are not entirely unique. Much of the theological work done with communities in the global South is marked by the disparities of power, education, and social location between researchers and faith communities. Yet theological works engaging in missional contexts are also marked by moments of profound connection and solidarity. This study will examine a variety of theological methodologies that have relevance to practical theological research or theology done in cross-cultural settings with subaltern people. The selection of these theological methodologies reflects a desire to bring together a variety of theological approaches that are relevant to this community of Deaf Zimbabwean women to explore what arises from a conversation between the contributions of these theologians. While this study is driven by my need for a practical theological approach in relation to a specific contextual community, I believe it will reveal concerns and strategies that have wider application for practical theologians seeking to work with subaltern communities of faith.

Therefore, this study consists of a variety of interacting layers of theologizing. The layer functioning as the catalyst is the struggle of Deaf Zimbabwean women to develop their own self-theologizing agency. The dilemma these women face as

Deaf life and ministry in the city of Mutare. Visits to schools, churches, and emerging Deaf communities in Harare, Masvingo (Morgenster mission), Mutambara, and Nidyere were also included in these trips. Although these trips were of a short nature, they were preceded and followed by a great deal of communication and preparation to maximize the impact of our time there. As a result, a lasting bond has been created between Deaf people and their hearing allies in Zimbabwe and those who have participated in these mission trips.
marginalized mothers to their own hearing children has led to them discussing their problems with one another. Yet their struggle to understand and move beyond their current circumstances indicates a need for further development of their self-theologizing agency. This study must recognize this dilemma as the core problem that drives my inquiry into practical theological methodology. A second layer of this study is my own involvement this community of Deaf Zimbabwean women as an outsider. The missional context of my visits provides a framework for understanding my own motivations in engaging with the dilemma these women face. Yet my own dilemma of finding an appropriate methodological approach for this engagement is the primary focus of this study. The wider dialogue about and between practical theological methodology, mission theology, and Deaf studies forms a third layer. This third layer provides an academic discourse that attempts to examine the wider contribution of this study to practical theological methodology.

In addition to specific attention to the dilemmas facing a community of Deaf Zimbabwean women, I employ a postcolonial stance which seeks to mitigate the dangers of overwriting the contributions of subaltern people with those of researchers and intellectuals. In an effort to de-center my own social location and privilege the experience and culture of Deaf Zimbabwean women, I employ an extended metaphor of cooking sadza as a model for discussing the practical theological process. Sadza is a staple dish of Zimbabwe as well as a cultural symbol of home and hearth. In learning to cook sadza, I was trained in a very simple fashion of being shown by one woman how to mix the cornmeal with cold water to create a paste then slowly add it to a pot of boiling
water and then add more cornmeal as needed to ensure the proper consistency and texture. Yet when I made my first attempt to cook up a pot of sadza I quickly found myself the center of attention of a diverse group of Zimbabwean women eager to observe and advise this adventurous white Deaf American man who wanted to learn to cook a staple dish — traditionally the task of a woman in their culture. The end result of my first attempt caused much giggling and teasing as my sadza turned lumpy and was proclaimed as pimply because I did not fully understand the process and timing of adding the various elements together in the proper manner. Nevertheless, they assisted me in working with my pot of lumpy sadza until it developed into a smooth and firm warm dish to accompany the evening’s stew. In this way, I was both a pupil and partner of a diverse set of women who came together to share the common goal of ensuring that the evening’s sadza was good and proper for the meal at hand. While this story remains a fond memory of a moment of solidarity and bonding, it was an extremely awkward experience for me.

I was charged with the task of cooking, but found myself needing to employ skills other than those I brought to the sadza pot. I see a strong model here for how I envision practical theology working to engender self-theologizing agency among subaltern people. In this model, the outsider encounters new processes and gains new skills at the hands of experienced cooks who bring their varied expertise into the process of creating something good and proper.

While the simplicity of an “add and stir” process offers one level of understanding my methodology, a deeper alchemy of flavors simmers just beneath the surface of the practical theological sadza developed in this study. Cooking is more than a mere mixing
of ingredients. The use of heat or cooling can radically alter the taste of ingredients. Also, what might taste great on its own may take on an unpleasant flavor when mixed with something else. In extending this metaphor to my analysis of practical theological methodology, this cooking model captures the essence of the interdisciplinary conversation I seek between various methodologies and viewpoints. While each element of this study has its own merit, when brought into a new context or combined with other elements, one can discover new things about these methodologies that identify areas where they need to be examined more deeply. In addition, the combining of various methodologies in conversation with one another enables this interdisciplinary approach to give birth to new formulations of how to approach practical theological research. When cooking sadza, a Zimbabwean woman is careful to stir from bottom to top to ensure that the entire mixture is heated properly. What I propose in cooking a practical theological sadza is to stir from bottom to top in order to unearth that which may be hidden under the surface of our interdisciplinary dialogues that enriches our understanding of how we engage with various communities of faith.

The use of a theological model of cooking sadza will provide the overall strategy this study will employ in discussing a number of theological methodologies. I begin with the dilemma created when Deaf Zimbabwean women present me with a challenge for practical theological consideration. This causes me to reflect on the resources or ingredients I have on hand from my own theological training. The addition of other ingredients and techniques from those I am cooking alongside initiates further reflection and results. Finally, I note what additional elements or techniques might be required to
finish the theological sadza created by mixing elements together. This process of mixing ingredients in the sadza pot seeks to explore what bubbles to the top in an interdisciplinary academic discourse on theological methodology in relation to the specific attention given to the dilemma of developing self-theologizing agency among a community of Deaf Zimbabwean women. Denise Ackermann views such interdisciplinary dialogue as a critical and necessary part of practical theology in stating that, “Encouraging both inter- and intradisciplinary exchange should lead, hopefully, to more open attitudes and the willingness to learn on the basis of mutual co-operation.”

This mutual co-operation then corrects any unidirectional exchange by replacing it with multiple avenues for influence and learning.

Overall this study seeks to be open-ended in its proposal to reorient practical theological methodology toward developing self-theologizing agency for subaltern communities. This open-endedness implies that it does not seek to construct a final and definitive methodology for myself and other researchers working with Deaf Zimbabwean women and other subaltern communities. Such a conclusive result would be premature and require far too many dangerous assumptions on my part as a white North American Deaf male practical theologian. Rather this project seeks to bring the sources in the literature review into a fruitful dialogue with reference to a community of Deaf Zimbabwean women to see what emerges as potentially inappropriate approaches and potentially positive contributions for future research. Such future projects would require

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more direct relationship with these women to test the proposals this study creates in its sadza pot.

**Audience of the Study**

Initially, I desired for this study to directly address subaltern communities in a way that would enact the prioritization of self/theologizing agency in their communities of faith. However, to focus this study toward such an audience would be a premature move inasmuch as a great deal of the consideration this study engages in is necessary prior to actual engagement with subaltern communities. Thus the primary audience of this study is fellow practical theological researchers who desire to work with and among subaltern communities to further self-theologizing agency. However, I do not wish for this study to be entirely inaccessible to subaltern communities. One need not have attained specialized theological training, mastered technical vocabulary, or become an ordained leader or lay member of a faith community to engage in the practical theological inquiry. Therefore, this study will seek to remain as forthright in its presentation as possible while retaining a fidelity to the academic discourse it engages. The use of the theological model of cooking sadza will serve as a metaphorical means of bridging between potential audiences.

The necessity of this study to be produced in written English presents a particular barrier to certain audiences as well. Deaf communities who use a variety of signed languages will be limited by the use of written English. Similarly, some of the ideas
conveyed in written English were first developed in American Sign Language as I recorded my thoughts on what I was reading and how I was conversing with others as I developed this study. These ideas have gone through a translation process to arrive in written English. While, they remain as faithful to my original conceptualization, they may at times be missing some of the nuances and subtleties better expressed in a visual-spatial language. The translated nature of this study provides yet another significant aspect of my approach to practical theological methodology. The necessity for translation in order to produce this study in written English impacts every chapter. Therefore, translation will arise again as a key strategy for the re-orientation of practical theological methodology.

**Limitations of the Study**

Any study requires limitations to remain manageable and focused. This study embodies numerous limitations in order to maintain its focus on the central question of examining the reorientation of practical theology toward the development of self-theologizing for subaltern communities. The most obvious limitation is that while this study gives specific attention to community that presents a real and pressing need from an actual community of faith, it does not aim to provide a practical theological response directly to the issues of motherhood and child rearing practices raised by Deaf women in Zimbabwe. While an extended discussion and exploration of this problem is warranted to illustrate the theological nature of the task these Deaf women face, any effort to provide
specific strategies to address the problems of child rearing in Zimbabwe on my part as a white North American male Deaf theologian would be premature. Such conclusions would risk embodying the dangers of imposing my own interests and framing of theological questions this study raises about existing methodologies. Instead, this study seeks to be methodological groundwork for future research and activism with not only Deaf Zimbabwean mothers, but potentially, for other practical theologians working with subaltern communities. The dilemma this study seeks to resolve is my own lack of a suitable practical theological methodology to begin engagement with Deaf Zimbabwean women.

A second limitation is that the ecclesial setting of this community of Deaf Zimbabwean women is primarily embodied in The United Methodist Church in Zimbabwe. The women who attend the Sanganai Deaf Club in Mutare come from a variety of denominational backgrounds and many retain a relationship through their extended family or personal attendance with these churches. However, the denomination most active with the Deaf women in question is The United Methodist Church and a large majority of these women are members in local United Methodist congregations. United Methodism is also my own denominational affiliation as a clergyperson and thus provides a common and familiar ecclesial setting to limit this study. This boundary does not seek to limit the usefulness of this study to United Methodist communities of faith. This study uses sources from a variety of denominational affiliations and also examines studies of African Independent Churches. These resources provide theological inquiry of features of African Christianity that are explicit in AICs but remain under the surface, if present at
all, in mainline denominations in Africa. As a result, many other historical mission
denominations and even African initiated churches as well as unaffiliated scholars and
practitioners of Christian faith may find elements of this study useful for their own work
toward self-theologizing communities of faith.

**Terminology**

One of the most vexing issues for this study is to define the parameters of
practical theology itself. In my selection of existing theological methods for examination
in this study, I cover a wide range of approaches. While each of these methodologies can
be classified in a particular genre of theological inquiry, they share a common thread of
starting with the lived experiences of people. Contemporary practical theology has
developed in response to dissatisfaction with a theory to practice application of
systematic theology in the daily lives of believers. In shifting the starting place of
theological inquiry to the lived experiences and practices of communities of faith,
practical theological methodology represents a turn to the practical within theological
methodology. Such concerns are not necessarily new despite the recent developments of
contemporary practical theology. Mission theology has long been concerned with the
issues of contextualizing Christianity and placed the starting point for theological
reflection in the cultural life of communities receiving missionary presence. Liberation
theologies have also framed theological inquiry with a starting point in the lived
experience of the poor and marginalized.
Edward Farley recognizes that contemporary popular definitions of what constitutes theology connote academic tasks that are detached from everyday life.\textsuperscript{10} Instead, he proposes that theology is, “something broader than the scholarship and teaching offered by professional schools. Theology is a deliberate, focused, and self-conscious thinking that has its origin in faith’s need to interpret itself and its situation. Theology is stirred into existence as believers struggle for clarity and understanding.”\textsuperscript{11} Farley identifies the practice of theology as feature of faithful living akin to prayer, worship, and service.\textsuperscript{12} Understanding theology as the continual task of encountering the traditional sources of faith and interpreting their contemporary meaning then sits at the very center of Christian tradition. In framing theology as an embodiment of the Gospel into the present age, Farley presents a deeply incarnational understanding of practical theology that values the process of becoming incarnated as much as the resultant direct action or belief that results from this process. Farley’s view of practical theology as a process occurring within communities of faith as reasoned reflection and action implies an inward looking orientation for practical theology. This orientation constructs practical theology as a task the church does primarily for its own understanding and function.

Denise Ackermann provides an alternative viewpoint to practical theology from her own context as a white South African feminist theologian. She views practical


\textsuperscript{11} Farley, 3.

\textsuperscript{12} Farley, 5.
theology as being the “theological theory of Christian communicative actions.” Thus while the reflective task of theology is vital, so is the empirical task of examining social practices that embody this reflection in action. For Ackermann, “practical theology is concerned with Christian faith in action.” She suggests that the relationship between theory and praxis in practical theology is bipolar in nature and the tension between these two poles creates outward oriented movement by communities of faith. “Praxis in our context means actions by believers, either as individuals or as groups which further God’s Kingdom, bringing about liberating and healing change.” Ackermann therefore sees practical theology as faith in action. She employs a Christological focus in stating,

The liberating dimension of practical theology is embodied in the paradigm of Jesus, the truth that sets us free. Practical theology needs to investigate the relevance of liberating truth in particular situations. If, for instance, the organizational forms of a congregation are investigated, it would be valid to ask whether those forms which structure relations, mirror the relation that God wants with humankind in our world.

Ackermann’s view of practical theology is clearly shaped by her experiences in the Apartheid society of South Africa and her struggle as a theologian to dismantle such oppressive structures. Yet her overall orientation of theology is missiological in nature in that it aims to do theology not only for the sake of the internal religious life of a community of faith, but also for the external mission of extending liberating principles

13 Ackermann, 30.
14 Ackermann, 31.
15 Ackermann, 31.
16 Ackermann, 32-33.
derived from Christian practical theology to wider societal practices. She proposes an outward oriented function for practical theology by conceptualizing practical theology as communicative action that makes it possible to, “join in the human struggle against all that is dehumanizing in life.”

In this study, I will analyze a variety of theological methodologies. While some are explicit in naming themselves as practical theologies, others are typically seen as mission theologies or liberation theologies. I seek to cast a fairly large net in considering all of these methodologies as practical theology in some regard. This does not negate that these methodologies can also be classified in other ways. In this study, I do not seek to typify any theological genre and judge it as a whole by those methodologies that I have selected. Rather, I have selected these methodologies for their relevance to my own starting point—my dilemma to find a practical theological methodology that allows me to be in relation with Deaf Zimbabwean women in a manner that engenders their self-theologizing agency.

Any extended study will necessarily find itself employing specific terminology in a manner than may differ from common use. This study is no exception as it employs terminology from various academic disciplines in an analysis of practical theological method. Postcolonial studies are fond of using the term “voice” in countering the “silence” imposed upon subaltern communities by hegemonic social forces. As I am addressing a subaltern community that employs a signed language and non-verbal

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17 Ackermann, 33.
communication, I am hesitant to employ to term “voice” even in a metaphorical sense. The histories of Deaf communities are rife with attempts of hearing people to overwrite Deaf expressions of their language and culture with a view of deafness as inherently bad. This dominant hegemonic discourse, called oralism, seeks to eradicate the social effects of hearing loss on people by pressuring them to function and behave as much like hearing people as possible. Thus I am employing terminological constructions of agency and expression to avoid complicating the detrimental history of oralism with the desire for what postcolonial studies terms as “coming to one’s own voice.” Thus when this study refers to self-theologizing agency and theological expression it attempts to go beyond simply “speaking” one’s story but also becoming an active participant in how that story is presented and what future direction it may take.

As noted above, the capitalization of the term Deaf is used in Deaf studies to indicate a cultural-linguistic construction of identities that have been forged by people with hearing loss who use signed languages as their primary means of communication. In a related fashion, Deaf studies will use the lowercase term of deaf to indicate a more general category of all those with significant hearing loss without regard to the cultural and linguistic features of their identity formation. Deafhood is a term proposed by Paddy Ladd to give a more complex picture of a culturally centered identity formation as a work in progress in a postcolonial scholarly framework. The adoption of the term Deafhood provides a reimagining of Deafness as an ontological state of being that one grows into
akin to that of adulthood rather than a static physical state of audiological nature.\textsuperscript{18}

Further elaboration on Ladd’s conception of Deafhood can be found later in this study. This study will employ the use of \textit{Deaf} and \textit{Deafhood} in quotations from Deaf studies. However, some discussion regarding the appropriateness and potential inappropriateness of employing \textit{Deaf} and \textit{Deafhood} in discussing deaf life in Zimbabwe is necessary. In Zimbabwe, the social characteristics of those with hearing loss that use signed languages as their primary means of communication and their resulting identity formation processes are in their infancy. It may come to pass that they develop in unique ways responding to unique local influences and thus may eventually alter the conceptualization of Deafhood as constructed by Ladd. Overwriting this emergence with identity concepts developed in Western societal concepts is a real danger and care must be taken to allow for fluidity in deaf and Deaf identities. Thus when reading either \textit{Deaf} or \textit{deaf} in this study, one should keep in mind that there is far more than an audiological condition being signified, rather a complex and emerging network of socio-cultural considerations are at play in developing a fluid ontological understanding of \textit{Deafhood} as a state of being in the world.

\textbf{Outline of the Study}

The first section of this study continues with chapter two. This chapter begins with a description of the cultural context of Deaf Zimbabwean women and the dilemma

they face in relation to child rearing practices. This description is preliminary in nature and should not be understood as a conclusive description. It is an interweaving of my own impressions of being in Zimbabwe and stories shared by Deaf women in public conversation with scholarly research and demographic data about Zimbabwean life. However, it should not be understood as an accurate self-expression of Deaf Zimbabwean women as much as it is a co-mixture of their stories with other information. The aim of this section is to provide a preliminary glimpse into the complexity of the lives of Deaf Zimbabwean women and how their questions in relation to child rearing practices present a practical theological question. Also in chapter two, I include a discussion of the use of postcolonial studies as a framework for guiding my study. I conclude with a discussion of theological models in the use of the extended metaphor of cooking sadza.

Section two of this study is a series of chapters comprising a literature review bringing various theological methodologies together in conversation with the context of Deaf Zimbabwean women. My selection of these nine methodologies for discussion is guided by their relationship to my encounter with Deaf Zimbabwean women and my dilemma of needing a methodology to proceed with practical theological research that engenders self-theologizing agency. My discussion of methodologies is interrupted by periodic interludes that consider how the methodologies discussed up to that point relate to the context of Deaf Zimbabwean women.

I begin with critical correlative practical theological methodologies as those are the ingredients I had on hand as a result of my own theological training when meeting these Deaf Zimbabwean women. My evaluation of these methodologies leads to an
awareness of a need for theological methodologies that explicitly engage with the issues of cross-cultural mission. This need is addressed with a discussion of two theological approaches from mission theology. I then address two theological approaches arising from Deaf studies. Finally, I add in two theological approaches from African women. Again, I want to stress that I do not view these selections as representative of these genres of theological inquiry in any way. They stand on their own as expressions of individual theological construction. All theological genres are too diverse to be represented in any fashion by the selection of a handful of examples. Yet any study needs some limitations in order to be able to discuss theological methodology at all. These methodologies were not selected to be representative of an entire genre but to present methodologies I find helpful in my search for a satisfactory methodology for engagement with Deaf Zimbabwean women.

The third section is comprised of chapters seven and eight. Chapter seven completes the “add and stir” process found in the previous section by considering what is still lacking to complete the sadza created by this interdisciplinary conversation about theological methodology. As mentioned earlier, any cook knows that sometimes a dish is more than the sum of its parts. This section stirs the mixture of the previous literature review from bottom to top in order to bring to the fore various techniques and attitudes that are required to smooth out lumps discovered when discussing existing methodologies in relation to my search for a methodology that enables me to engage with Deaf Zimbabwean women. Chapter seven identifies three of these techniques and proposes strategies that can be added to existing theological methods to assist practical theologians
in their research relationships with subaltern communities and keep them oriented toward engendering self-theologizing agency.

Chapter eight seeks to summarize the findings of this study and sketch out a possible way forward for the applications of the proposed strategies in research done with Deaf Zimbabwean women. I also briefly address the third layer of this study by noting how the addition of missiological categories into practical theological methodology reorients practical theological to more missiological aims. I then conclude with some consideration of the wider applicability of the strategies proposed in chapter seven in other contexts. Although these strategies arise from a theological sadza developed for my own dilemma in engaging in practical theology with Deaf Zimbabwean women, I believe they also present general strategies that can be adapted for a variety of contexts.
CHAPTER TWO
EXPLAINING THE PROBLEM AND CONTEXT

Deaf Life in Zimbabwe

Deaf life in Zimbabwe is largely undocumented and overlooked in literature. Dr. Maria Chiswanda’s dissertation on mediated learning experiences between hearing mothers and their deaf children is the only formal study of which I am aware that examines the lives of Deaf Zimbabweans. One of the limitations of her research is that she focuses primarily on the infancy and early childhood years of deaf children. While Chiswanda’s research provides valuable insights into how Shona culture perceives deafness and the challenges hearing mothers face in raising their deaf children, the limitations of her study leave unanswered questions of how these children are perceived after growing to adulthood. This examination of Deaf life in Zimbabwe relies on Chiswanda’s research and supplements it with general information regarding Shona culture and child rearing practices. Also included are my own perspectives on Deaf life observed while on short-term mission trips in Zimbabwe. Therefore, this description of Deaf life in Zimbabwe is preliminary in nature as it is not a self-expression of Deaf Zimbabweans. Much more work needs to be done as Deaf Zimbabweans begin to discover and develop their agency as narrators of their own lives and experiences. This chapter seeks to provide a glimpse into the struggles Deaf Zimbabwean women face upon becoming mothers and place their struggles within the large context of Shona society.
Although these struggles are the core problem that drives this study, the use of anecdotal narrative in this study based on my own experiences in Zimbabwe reflects my primary focus on the dilemma I face as a researcher in attempting to forge a working relationship with Deaf Zimbabwean women that allows them to tell their own stories.

In 2000, I traveled to Mutare, Zimbabwe with a team of seventeen Deaf and hearing people from the United States. This was the first of several short term volunteer mission trips aimed at supporting local efforts of Deaf people to organize for socialization, ministry, and mutual support. Our trips were intensive sessions of mutual learning between Zimbabweans, both Deaf and hearing, and North Americans, both Deaf and hearing. They were the culmination of much preparatory work and communication on both sides of the Atlantic which sought to meet the goals of local Zimbabwean organizers with the resources, both material and interpersonal, of our visiting teams. In the course of these mission trips, I became close with several members of the emerging Deaf community in Mutare.

This closeness reflects the transnational nature of Deaf experiences noted by Joseph Murray in his examination of continued contact between Deaf communities worldwide as a factor in how Deaf identities are formed and maintained. Murray recounts an 1889 presentation by Amos Draper, a Deaf American travelling through England as part of a delegation their way to the first International Congress of the Deaf in Paris, who stood before an audience of Deaf Britons and expressed this feeling of commonality by quoting Shakespeare, “One touch of nature makes the whole world
The physical “touch of nature” of audiological deafness had become a ground for similar experiences of living as people who do not hear among a wider society of hearing people. These similar experiences became the foundation creating meaning out of such lives that formed socio-culturally Deaf identities that were recognizable across various other socio-cultural factors. This feeling of kinship is noted by Deaf people wherever they meet whether it be local gatherings of Deaf people who spend their work week separated in hearing environments or national and international conferences of Deaf people gathering for political strategizing, academic inquiry, mutual assistance, or sporting events.

In June of 2006, I was in attendance at the first nation wide call for Deaf people to meet in Zimbabwe. This conference was called by the Deaf community in Mutare, a city in the Eastern Highlands on the border with Mozambique, along with their colleagues in the capital city of Harare. Funded by both local funds and mission money raised by Deaf ministries in the United Methodist Church, this week long conference at Hilltop United Methodist Church attracted Deaf participants from as far away as the Western city of Bulawayo and from remote Northeastern rural areas in the vicinity of Nyadire. The goals of this conference were to bring disparate and desperate Deaf people together to share experiences, discuss problems, learn of solutions being tried in various areas and enjoy

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20 Murray, 106.
one another’s company in an environment of spiritual care including worship, Bible study, workshops, small group discussions, shared dining, performing arts, and sporting competition. My own experience of being a participant in this conference was one of being among my own kind despite the persistent and deep differences that remained obvious and did present barriers to understanding.

This conference drew together a wide variety of Zimbabwean Deaf people who came together and recognized their struggles and gifts as a common struggle and shared gifts. Despite a diversity of levels of formal education, family life, gender, age, and social differences, the 130 Deaf Zimbabweans attending this conference presented a strong sense of oneness that permeated the event. Murray points out that this sort of commonality should not be viewed on a continuum of development narrative where some are seen as being in a state of backwardness on the way to where others already exist.  

What I observed in small group at this 2006 Deaf Zimbabwean Conference did at times include advice from Deaf people from more urbanized and formally educated backgrounds about how they had addressed similar struggles. But I also observed moments where Deaf people from other municipalities presented solutions that fit the political climate of their city which varied greatly from that of the host area. I also observed rural Deaf Zimbabweans raising questions and problems that were beyond the experience of their more urbanized peers and thus became discussions where they took

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21 Murray, 107.
the lead in providing and processing information as more urbanized Deaf participants confessed that they didn’t know what to do in such a situation.

Of the many concerns that I was made aware of by working in relationship with Deaf Zimbabweans in Mutare on the several visits I have made, Deaf women often shared stories regarding their status as mothers within their society. These stories often expressed personal pain around the circumstances of their lives that ultimately left them separated from their children. Sometimes, these women would share these stories with me while viewing me as a pastoral figure. My involvement as a Deaf clergy person in a missionary effort to establish a Deaf ministry that would address some of their social and spiritual needs may have made me an ideal person to approach with these concerns. It seemed to me they shared their stories regarding their status as mothers in hope that perhaps something could be done about these issues as well. At times the issues of being separated from their children and feeling generally distanced from decision making agency in raising their own children were shared as an aside. In other situations, they became the theme of formal and informal small group discussions about what Deaf life in Zimbabwe was like. Some group discussions were more casual and would shift into discussing motherhood and child rearing issues as women shared upcoming travel plans or hopes for marriage and starting a family.

Nearly always, women raised these issues of family planning and child rearing. Deaf men, while aware of these struggles, rarely bought up child rearing and separation as a specific issue facing Deaf people in Zimbabwe. Men were more likely to raise issues about job access, income generation, and struggles with government or law enforcement.
While Deaf men’s concern with income generation relates to their fathering role as a financial provider for their family, they did not raise this concern in relationship to their direct contact with their children. In some aspects, this reflects how traditional roles of extended family relations come together to constitute child rearing in the Shona culture of this area of Zimbabwe.

**Shona Child Rearing Practices**

Chiswanda includes an overview of child rearing practices among the Shona peoples of Zimbabwe in her study of mediated learning experiences between hearing mothers and their deaf children. Her overview recognizes that there is little formal literature published on matters of Shona child rearing and deaf children and she supplements what she finds in researching various missionary and anthropological studies with her own experience as a Shona woman. Zimbabwe is a landlocked nation in Southern Africa bordered by South Africa, Mozambique, Zambia, and Botswana. With an area of 390,580 square kilometers, Zimbabwe is slightly larger than the US state of Montana. A 2002 census counted a population of 14 million with 70% of those being of Shona ethnicity, 18% of Ndebele ethnicity, and 12% comprised of various other ethnic

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22 Maria V. Chiswanda, “Hearing Mothers and Their Deaf Children in Zimbabwe: Mediated Learning Experiences” (Dr. Scient. diss., University of Oslo, 1997), 18.
minorities of African, European, and Asian origin. Zimbabwe gained independence from a white minority government in 1980 after a long guerilla war for independence. After a period of reconciliatory politics which brought much acclaim from the international community, land ownership reform issues ushered in a political crisis that has destabilized the Zimbabwean economy and pushed Zimbabwe into extreme political struggles and economic collapse. The Zimbabwean experience with colonization and subsequent liberation along with the continuing crisis makes this context a rapidly changing socio-economic setting where traditional practices and social relationships are constantly being adapted. Nevertheless, traditional Shona values and attitudes about child rearing still exert strong influence over how families cope with the impact social and economic pressures have on their practices.

Chiswanda posits that children are generally viewed as a benefit to the family for the increased labor and economic benefit they bring. Whether this view remains in difficult economic times where a lack of access to food leads to starvation is uncertain but most of the women I spoke with in Zimbabwe still greatly desired children despite their awareness of the difficulties they would encounter raising them. Childlessness


25 Chiswanda, 19.
continues to be viewed a great misfortune for women and the consequences of childlessness are a theme in Shona visual and theater arts. The birth of a child is something that an entire extended family becomes involved in celebrating. Chiswanda notes that Gelfand found that the celebration of a newborn could last up to three months and involve many visits by extend family bearing gifts of food. It is likely that during these celebratory visits, new mothers received advice and guidance in child rearing practices from the women of their extended family as well as practical assistance in the daily care of their newborn.

The first three years of most infants in Zimbabwe are spent on the backs of their mother or close family female relatives being carried about in a cloth wrap that enables the mother to remain attentive to her child’s needs while going about her daily activities. An infant and young child’s earliest socialization occurs within the immediate and extended family as well. Rather than organized play groups with children from other families, young children will play with older siblings and nearby cousins and begin learning their duties in the family structure by assisting them with daily household chores. The supportive role of the extended family in traditional Shona child rearing should not be underestimated. Generally, a child’s biological mother is their primary

26 Chiswanda, 19.
27 Chiswanda, 19.
28 Chiswanda, 19-20.
29 Chiswanda, 20.
mother figure but grandmothers, aunts, and older sisters often take part in providing various mothering roles as well. Shona society sees women as the providers of food and social needs for the extended family and thus all female family members are expected to take part in the provision of such care.\textsuperscript{30} Chiswanda does note that urbanization has a significant impact on how extended family support takes place in contemporary times. She observes that while women’s work remains largely in the home, a number of women living in urban areas seek employment outside of the home to supplement family income. These families often would hire a woman that serves the traditional role of an older female sibling in the care of their children.\textsuperscript{31} Whether this practice remains widespread in the current economic crisis is questionable. Instead, another common practice of young couples of sending their children to live with their grandparents for a period of time is likely to be more prevalent.\textsuperscript{32}

Aside from the economic pressures that make temporary grandparent child rearing an option, the role of grandmothers as a source of socialization into Shona cultural values also contributes in family decisions about child rearing. From an early age, children learn Shona social values of gratitude and respect of their familial elders. Various spoken greetings, postures, and hand-clapping gestures are used to indicate respect and deference.

\textsuperscript{30} Chiswanda, 20.
\textsuperscript{31} Chiswanda, 21.
\textsuperscript{32} Chiswanda, 21.
These values and actions are often taught to young children by family elders themselves giving grandmothers a specific role in the socialization of their grandchildren. As a result, grandmothers are often a favorite relative of young children because of the increased range of activities and careful attention they experience with them. Despite the wide number of caregivers a Shona child will have growing up, a special bond remains with their birth mother. Breast-feeding, attention to infant distress, and care for a child experiencing illness are all considered to be the domain of the birth mother alone. Chiswanda stresses the importance of these roles by stating, “Other mothers cannot replace the mother, save as a substitute, in the event of permanent separation.” Infants are permitted to breast-feed when they desire, sleep on the back or lap of their mother when needed and will otherwise remain on a mat in the same room as the mother goes about her daily work. This constant attention state of attention is the particular focus of a child’s first two years of life as they rely on breast-feeding for sustenance.

This general overview of traditional child rearing practices in Shona society therefore indicates the primacy of both birth mothers and the importance of grandmothers in the process of child rearing. Again, the actual practices of child rearing in Zimbabwe

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33 Chiswanda, 23.
34 Chiswanda, 24.
35 Chiswanda, 22.
36 Chiswanda, 22.
are probably much more varied as families grapple with the severe impact of economic deprivation, scarcity of access to food and health care, and in many cases, geographic distance between urbanized areas and more rural homesteads. However, traditional practices exert a strong influence on the varied adaptive practices, as they remain normative of what should be done in ideal circumstances.

The capacity to adapt and adjust traditional child rearing practices also relates to how Shona families and society address the birth of a deaf or disabled child. Deafness is generally viewed as a disability in Zimbabwe although Deaf Zimbabweans themselves seem to recognize some of the same sort of distinctive differences Western Deaf people note in how using a signed language to communicate differs from mobility or visual disabilities. In Shona society, the severity of the impact of a disability in the life of a child is generally gauged by how it influences their ability to carry out their expected household chores and activities. This leads to a general impression that deaf children are less severely disabled than those with cerebral palsy or other mobility restrictive conditions because deafness doesn’t impede children from the usual tasks of herding livestock, working the farmland, or basic errands. As Chiswanda focuses her research primarily on hearing mothers with deaf children, the severity of deafness as an impediment to the usual duties of a child seem somewhat less critical. However light this severity may be in comparison to physical disabilities, it may become a more serious consideration in the view of the family when deaf children grow up and become parents.

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37 Chiswanda, 25.
themselves and are expected to have gained the knowledge and skills of parenting via means of oral transmission.

Another aspect of Shona child rearing practices that Chiswanda focuses on is the strong role of sound and orality. While Chiswanda’s concern is examining ways that hearing mothers can adapt their practices to meet the needs of their deaf children, a review of some of these practices may provide a glimpse into possible reservations hearing grandmothers may have about the ability of their Deaf daughters to provide their hearing children with a normative Shona upbringing. Chiswanda notes that children are encouraged to sit up at a very early age in most sub-Saharan indigenous cultures and that this practice appears in Shona farming communities where an infant is propped up in a sand pit in a sitting position while the mother works in the fields. Children are also encouraged to begin walking as soon as possible with traditional singing rhymes and clapping rhythms aimed at assisting them in maintaining progress in their efforts. \(^{38}\) This information confirms my general observation while in Zimbabwe that, when not being carried or nursed, infants were encouraged to maintain a sitting position and mimic walking activities at very early stages rather than being encouraged to crawl or scoot around.

Similarly, speech and sound play an important role in the grandmother’s role of socializing young children. Values and proper behavior are taught through the telling of stories, riddles, and proverbs often in the form of demonstrations and trials encouraged.

\(^{38}\) Chiswanda, 22.
by adults. Strong significance is placed on childhood milestones related to speech as well. Because deafness impedes the acquisition of proper spoken expression, Shona society often views it as a problem with the mouth as much as the ears. To this end, deaf children sometimes are subjected to having the frenulum beneath the tongue cut in an effort to loosen the tongue in hopes of improving a child’s ability to speak. This practice reflects the high value placed on the development of spoken ability and the location of the problem of deafness in its ability to impede spoken communication in both expressive and receptive forms. Many of the Deaf adults I met in Mutare had been subjected to this procedure when they were children and explained it as an attempt to help them speak but shrugged it off as something that was unsuccessful.

Matthew Engelke also notes the centrality of sound in Shona culture in his study of the Friday Masowe Church in Zimbabwe. Although Engelke’s study focuses on one particular Zimbabwean Independent Church community, members of this community attribute the high value placed on sound and orality as a mark of Shona culture.

In Shona, for example, the verb kunzwa, “to hear,” is often used to describe sensations that an English speaker would describe using “taste” and “smell.” When I was first learning Shona the emphasis on hearing confused me. I remember learning the verb kunzwa in an early language lesson; for the corresponding homework assignment I had to translate a series of sentences in which it appeared. A number of the sentences made no sense in English. I came to the next lesson with awkward translations, such as “Oranges hear good.” My

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39 Chiswanda, 23.

40 Chiswanda, 27.
teacher had played the trick on purpose; she wanted me to understand this sensual aspect of what she called “Shona culture.”

The significance of sound and hearing in Shona society that is reflected in the language itself provides a glimpse into the possible anxieties that would arise over child rearing practices where such orality and hearing is either not present or not as highly valued. Because certain features of the ideal form of child rearing practices remain centered on oral transmission and sound, the abilities of a Deaf mother to carry out these tasks in an optimal manner may be questioned. As most children are expected to be socialized within their family household rather than playgroups, the strategy of a Deaf couple taking their hearing children to regular social settings outside of their home that include hearing families and their children may not be seen as a most favorable option. Instead, the option of a grandmother taking the primary role of raising a child from late infancy until school age and raising this child with cousins may be preferred by the extended family.

As noted above, this particular child rearing arrangement is not necessarily unique to the situation of Deaf mothers. Hearing mothers, particularly those who are young, may send their young children to live with their grandparents out of economic necessity or for socialization reasons. However, what is often not recognized in the case of Deaf mothers is the impact on the mother-child relationship when a hearing child grows up and becomes socialized in spoken language and is unable to communicate with his or her birth mother. This disjunction seems to rupture the maintenance of a primary role for the

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birth mother even when other women in the extended family take on vital roles in child rearing.

Another possible unique factor for Deaf mothers in these decisions on separation is that for a hearing mother, her general capability of being a primary mother is not called into question. However, for a Deaf mother, her very ability to be a mother is questioned and this destabilizes her agency in decision making processes that often take place among family elders who may or may not be able to communicate with her well. Chiswanda notes that many hearing mothers with deaf children desire to learn signed language but in many cases do not develop their communication skill beyond a basic level. These hearing mothers may not have the additional time to commit to learning signed language and their communities may lack people to teach them or opportunities to use signed language beyond rudimentary phrases with their deaf child. As a result, Chiswanda noted that hearing mothers who became frustrated with communication with their deaf children resorted to physical discipline methods rather than verbal/signed methods. The use of physical punishment gave rise to a concern among hearing mothers that children would not understand the meaning of their being disciplined sufficiently to learn the lesson they needed to learn. In a similar fashion, Chiswanda also found that in teaching behaviors to their deaf children, hearing mothers would sometimes struggle with communication to the point they would just carry out the task for the child. Both of these instances

\[42\] Chiswanda, 258-9.

\[43\] Chiswanda, 258-9.
indicate that hearing mothers of deaf children begin at an early stage to assume that their child won’t be able to learn certain tasks through the usual methods of child rearing. Given that Shona culture transmits much of its values and norms through oral culture and that child rearing practices are shared and passed along in extended family structures through primarily oral transmission, it is probable that hearing mothers of adult Deaf women have reservations about how much their Deaf daughters know about child rearing practices and have already adopted a habit of doing tasks for their Deaf daughter that they can’t communicate how to do effectively.

As many Deaf Zimbabwe women shared their experiences of being separated from their children during early childhood in conversation and discussion, I noticed that the exact circumstances of each case were widely divergent. Although each woman experienced the pain of feeling that they lived only on the periphery of their children’s lives, the reasons they gave for this separation were at times unique to their own personal situation. Despite these differences, they expressed their situations as interrelated with their common identity as Deaf mothers. For Deaf women who were not yet mothers, these stories raised fears that such things could happen to them as well. Therefore, despite a diversity of reasons and circumstances, Deaf women seemed to identify their dilemma as a unified but multi-faceted problem.

Some women explained their separation from their children in terms of inter-familial tensions and relationships. Despite the fact that some mothers have achieved a relatively high level of education and both they and their husbands have paying jobs, their parents and in-laws still make decisions about how their children are raised. One
mother in this situation feels her family’s distrust of her is related to her hearing loss as her first child died a crib death. This cast doubt on her ability to be an attentive mother as her hearing family members were concerned that perhaps she didn’t hear her infant in distress. Crib death of course has many causes and not all crib deaths are signaled by a crying baby alerting the mother to take action. When her second and third children were born, she sent them to be raised with their paternal and maternal grandparents respectively. She would like to visit her children regularly, but shares that she is often discouraged from doing so as the emotion of her visits causes her children to be upset afterwards.

Other women expressed economic considerations and travel distance as the primary factors that separated them from their children. Many women and their husbands struggle to find work to gain the financial means to support their children because of discrimination and lack of opportunity as Deaf people. One woman in this situation decided when her son was born to send him to live with his grandmother in a rural area far from the city where she and her husband lived while seeking work. This geographical distance prevented her from being able to travel and visit her son during his early formative years and she recalls when he returned to her, that he hid behind his grandmother when re-introduced to her. Her second child stayed with her as she had gained temporary employment at the time. However, when she was expecting twins in her next pregnancy, she decided to move the entire family to the rural area where her extended family lived instead of being separated once again.
The financial and political disruption of Zimbabwean society causes hardships for many people but it creates particular fears for some Deaf women. Women in extremely remote areas where food shortages often lead to famine face particularly challenging situations. One woman in such a situation believes her child had been taken from her upon birth and left to be exposed as a result of a decision of the community elders with her family. She recounts remembering holding her living child after delivery then later being told her child was stillborn. In her view, a decision to expose her child was a decision of the community arising from both the struggle they would face having a young infant to feed and their doubts of her ability as a Deaf woman to provide for her child. It must be recognized that her story was shaped by her own views and emotions as there was no one else present in the discussion group familiar with the circumstances of her delivery. Stillbirths and infant mortality shortly after childbirth are significant risks in Zimbabwe. The World Factbook cites an infant mortality rate of 32.31 deaths per 1000 live births in 2009. A 2011 report of the non-governmental organization, Save the Children, found that 90 of 1000 live births in Zimbabwe would die prior to age 5. Given that the remote area this woman lived in was undergoing severe disruption because

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of farmland seizures that resulted in widespread limited access to food during her pregnancy, it is quite possible that her child was stillborn or died shortly after birth. Save the Children’s 2011 report confirms this reality by noting that, “Remote rural areas tend to have fewer services and more dire statistics. War, violence and lawlessness also do great harm to the well-being of mothers and children, and often affect certain segments of the population disproportionately.”

Chiswanda notes that Gelfand found in cases where a child was born with physical deformity in traditional Shona society, midwives would take the child before the mother could see it and family elders would decide if the child would be allowed to live or not. This could be construed as an expression of care for the mother who would be distressed at learning her child was born with a deformity, or it could be construed as a decision on whether the disability was so severe as to be a barrier in the child becoming a constructive asset to the family. In talking with both Deaf and hearing people about this woman’s story, they expressed that while such practices were now illegal and considered very shameful, they could imagine that such practices may occur in remote rural areas where traditional values and practices are still the preferred solution to extremely difficult circumstances.

Together, these three situations present a snapshot of the varied circumstances that leads to Deaf mothers being separated from their children by circumstances beyond

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46 Champions for Children, 27.

their control. This separation leaves them marginalized in child rearing practices and
decision making. Being a mother in contemporary Zimbabwe is no easy task. Save the
Children’s report also found that a Zimbabwean woman has a 1 in 42 lifetime chance of
maternal death. Such statistics serve to highlight the necessity for a variety of relatives
to be involved in child rearing practices. However, the lack of agency experienced by
Deaf women in the midst of such trying circumstances remains problematic for these
women. They express and manage this difficulty in a number of ways. Some become
depressed, tearful, and distraught in efforts to gain involvement in their children’s lives
while others express regret but resign themselves to the reality of their situation and
attempt to make the best choices they can within the limitations they face. In nearly all
cases, the seriousness of what they experience is a fear in the minds of many Deaf
women in Zimbabwe. These women’s accounts of being unable to effectively
communicate with those who had the authority to make the decisions about their children
leaves them feeling left out of their children’s lives.

Confronting Dilemmas in Research Methodology: Postcolonial Considerations

Although these stories remain anecdotal, they stand out as real problems faced by
real women. The desire these women have to find a way to address their struggle
resonated strongly as a practical theological question about the meaning and performance

48 Champions for Children, 30-31. This statistic is found in the Complete
Mothers’ Index 2011 found between pages 30-31.
of child rearing practices. Yet I also was immediately aware that I faced a significant dilemma in relation to methodology. Most practical theological methods would start by seeking to provide a thick description of these women’s socio-cultural and religious settings before further steps to develop a theological response. While the actual thickening of these stories would require investigative research beyond the scope of this project, consideration on what would be required to thicken these stories and what ‘next steps’ would be taken is worth examination. As a white male North American Deaf theologian, my mere presence within the context impacts the type of information that is shared with me and how it is shared. The use of native informants to assist in the gathering of narrative data might provide one way around the disruption of my presence as a researcher but would still largely be guided by the questions and concerns I interpolate from the stories of these Deaf Zimbabwean women. Is this an appropriate role for the practical theological researcher? Does it further the goal of orienting practical theological inquiry toward developing the self-theologizing agency of subaltern subjects? Would even the most careful thickening of these women’s stories provide me, an outsider, with sufficient data to build strategic proposals for a theological response following these methods?

The dilemma I would face as a researcher of these questions in concert with Deaf Zimbabwean women is serious and complex. This dilemma forms the crux of the problem this study seeks to address. How can I as an outsider, regardless of my social connections with these women as a Deaf person, begin to engage in practical theological research of questions they bring to me without skewing the research to my own interests,
my own interpretations on what is happening, and my own avenues for strategic action? As a subaltern community, these women have experienced enough disempowerment which has caused difficulty in their lives. The goal of any practical theological process with these women must seriously consider ways in which they can build their own self-theologizing agency and thus social agency to bring redress to the issues that confront them as Deaf Zimbabwean mothers. To this end, I seek to employ strategies from postcolonial theorists who share similar aims in developing self-expression and agency.

The term *subaltern* originally referred to an officer of inferior status in the British Army and was in use in the period of British colonization. In more general usage, it referred to any person or thing in a subordinate or inferior rank in relationship to others. Postcolonial theorists adopted the term to refer to colonized people in their examination of the complex relationship between subaltern peoples and colonial powers. Guha’s examination of peasant revolts in India that led to India’s independence movement makes use of Gramsci’s notion that subaltern agency developing only with some sort of conscious leadership. Guha’s concern is that too often there is an elitist assumption that subaltern agency only arises when a leader who is not of the subaltern class takes the reins of a situation and guides it toward action. His entire postcolonial examination focuses on the various ways that subaltern peasants developed the beginnings of their

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own agency in spontaneous response to their situation of marginalization. Guha notes
that a class consciousness among peasants began to arise somewhat spontaneously in
various independent locations around India and although it was not without some sort of
central leadership in each locale, “in no instance was it fully in control of the many local
initiatives originating within grassroots leaders whose authority was as fragmented as
their standing short in duration.” This presents a grassroots image of how marginalized
people come to a realization of their common social circumstances and begin to coalesce
into communities who could develop agency and begin to address their situation. Such a
formulation of how class consciousness comes into being stands in contrast to much of
Marxist thought up to that point which relied on an educated elite to initiate and guide
class consciousness. Such an analysis suggests that while an elite leadership may serve a
significant role in the formation of class consciousness and the agency that follows, it is
by no means the initial catalyst or even ultimate guide to the development of subaltern
agency. This raises questions about whether an academic theologian is necessary to
guide a process of theological development or is better positioned as a smaller contributor
to an overall process of engendering self-theologizing agency.

Australian researcher Tanya Lyons also grapples with the issue of how an outsider
researcher engages with subaltern communities. She encountered a dilemma similar to
my own when seeking to research the roles and experiences of women in the
Zimbabwean struggle for liberation and independence. Feminist methodology has long

51 Guha, 10.
emphasized the need for the disclosure of a researcher’s social location vis-à-vis the context being researched. However, as Gayatri Spivak notes in her article *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, “calling the place of the investigator into question remains a meaningless piety in many recent critiques of the sovereign subject,” and that disclosure of social location that does not prevent a co-opting of subaltern expression is a gesture that “can never suffice.”\(^5^2\) Spivak is concerned that merely referencing one’s own social location does not ensure that a researcher allows for a full awareness of how disparity in social location impacts her research. Lyons shows that Jayati Lal also shares a suspicion that superficial self-disclosure of social location by a researcher may be insufficient when she states,

[there is a] trend for women's studies scholars to make obligatory pronouncements of their positioning into the analysis without ever actually contending with their differences in the analysis, toward a mere invoking of what has been called the "mantra" of self-positioning vis-à-vis the axes of race-sex-class-sexuality. This lip service to difference does not inform an assessment of how such positionings are implicated in one's analysis, and as such it is a politically disengaged response.\(^5^3\)

Lyons affirms the meaninglessness of such empty gestures but then is confronted by the dilemma that “there appears to be very little space for the Western, feminist-Africanist to


locate her work without being situated within the neo-imperial or Africanist/Orientalist
discourse.”

This neo-imperial discourse is that which ultimately ends up speaking for
subaltern communities in what Spivak notes is a substitutional-representative fashion.
Spivak argues that the English term *representation* can be viewed in two ways. The first
meaning is substitutional in nature—one can come to represent another in a political or
social setting. The second is more artistic or philosophical in nature where one re-
presents original material allowing it to be viewed again, perhaps by a different audience.
The problem arises in subaltern studies when these two meanings begin to run together
and become muddled. Spivak sees a dangerous trend in subaltern studies to blur these
two meanings and ultimately create the silencing of subaltern expression where the
intention was to bring such expressions to light. Lyons sums up Spivak’s concerns by
saying, “regarding the subaltern, they can speak, it is just that no one is listening.”
Thus Lyons frames her approach to research in the following manner, “I do not claim to
represent the subaltern but to acknowledge the absence of subaltern representation.

To be unrepresented means to be unheard. To be heard means to be no longer
subaltern. To represent the subaltern in this way means that they can become
actors and agents of their own history. The point here is not to be the voice of the
subaltern but to engage in a dialogue with her, thus privileging her voice in the
context (and restraints) of academic research.”

54 Lyons, 3.
55 Spivak, 275.
56 Lyons, 5.
57 Lyons, 6.
Lyons illustrates this principle in action when she notes a discrepancy in what she sought to find in planning her research and what Zimbabwean women sought to use her research to achieve. In her preparation for research, Lyons aimed to gain a better understanding of the roles of Zimbabwean women in the liberation struggle. She framed her engagement with this topic by seeking to research how Zimbabwean women’s lives were portrayed in mass media and popular narrative in comparison to how Zimbabwean women narrated their lives. However, what she encountered was that the interests of Zimbabwean women were of a quite different nature. What Lyons found was, “Most of the women were concerned with getting access to financial compensation grants, funding, and rehabilitation programs for their liberation war activities. They were rather less worried about how they have been and are being represented in the mass media, novels, or by academics.” Such disjunction in aims between a researcher and the subaltern community being researched alongside a commitment to not speak for subaltern people forces fluidity in methodology that must allow for the goals of a research project to shift. When a subaltern group wishes to express its own questions and approaches and take on agency in their own history, a research methodology must learn to adapt to allow this. This type of postcolonial analysis of subaltern studies and the careful consideration of how a Western researcher enters into research with subaltern communities has potentially profound implications for practical theological methodology.

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58 Lyons, 13.
In adopting a postcolonial stance for this study, I am aware that I am less concerned with creating an overall schema for practical theological engagement in all contexts and more concerned with a narrower subset of contexts that deal with subaltern communities of faith. While many existing practical theological methodologies appear to do a fine job addressing questions coming from the same contexts that gave birth to them, my dilemma with finding a practical theological methodology to engage with Deaf Zimbabwean women suggests that significant questions may arise when attempting to employ existing methodology to questions arising from subaltern contexts. In my considerations of how a practical theological inquiry into the situations Deaf Zimbabwean women face in their struggle to gain agency in child rearing practices, I am confronted with deep cross-cultural considerations and the legacy of the colonization of Zimbabwean society, culture, and religion by people closer to my own social location as a white North American male practical theologian. My concern in this project is to engage in an interdisciplinary dialogue that reveals additional ingredients that might assist practical theological methodologies in reorienting themselves in relation to subaltern communities of faith. Such reorientation can create more fruitful processes of inquiry that engender self-theologizing agency among groups with little direct agency in their own lives who remain unaccustomed to having an arena to express, explain, and explore their own ideas.

Deaf Zimbabwean women appear very marginalized in child rearing practices and express a great deal of frustration in their apparent powerlessness to prevent or re-direct the social forces that lead to their marginalization. This problem is postcolonial in
nature inasmuch as it engages with the lives of those shut out of contemporary societal discourse. Postcolonial theorists can be seen as preferring to view the ordered world from its underside and recognize that when privileged groups view the disenfranchised, they are more likely to see a mirror image of themselves and their assumptions than the lived reality of subaltern people.\(^5^9\) The ideas of postcolonial theory not only signify the theoretical frameworks and perspectives arising from formerly colonized peoples in a chronological sense, but also an attempt to move beyond the theoretical boundaries imposed by the theories and concepts from colonizing cultures. Bhabha views this postcolonial sensibility as,

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\text{neither a new horizon, nor leaving behind of the past. \ldots Beginnings and endings may be the sustaining myths of the middle years: but in the } \text{fin de siècle, we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion.}^{6^0}
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Rather than viewing and analyzing situations and questions from singular categories such as race, gender, or class, postcolonialism seeks to deal with the interstices between such identity factors as understood in various moments in history.\(^6^1\)

Spivak’s concern with how U.S. and Western European scholarship has assumed leadership in constructing how subaltern groups are viewed and constructed in theoretical understandings is also relevant to this discussion. She notes that when Western scholars


\(^{6^0}\) Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 2.

\(^{6^1}\) Bhabha, 2.
seek to classify various identity factors, they focus in terms of race, gender, and class. This is expressed in the formula of, “Clearly if you are poor, black, and female you get it in three ways.” However, Spivak notes, “If, however, this formulation is moved from the first-world context to into the postcolonial (which is not identical with the third-world) context, the description of “black” or “color” loses persuasive significance.” Her point here is that in formulating the category of race in Western terms and experiences, the Western scholar then applies this construction into a context that may view the meaning of skin color in radically different ways or not place as strong significance on it as a socially stratifying characteristic. In transplanting Western perceptions and interpretations of race, gender and class into postcolonial contexts and giving them primacy in social analysis, many scholars then effectively silence the expression of subaltern self-understandings and priorities.

Guha and Spivak’s presentations of the issues in postcolonial scholarship in relation to subaltern agency and expression are extremely significant to consider in cases such as Deaf Zimbabwean women as they can easily be identified as the triad of black, poor, and female in addition to socially silenced in using a signed language understood by very few people around them. Therefore, any practical theological methodology dealing with subaltern communities such as Deaf Zimbabwean women who are in perhaps the earliest stages of their coming to awareness of themselves as a group of

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62 Spivak, 294.

63 Spivak, 294.
people with common experiences and struggles needs to go beyond the usual self
disclosure of a researcher’s social location and cursory disclaimer of how that social
location might color a researcher’s analysis in a hermeneutical approach. A careful
consideration of the process of practical theological inquiry itself needs to be paramount
in allowing subaltern people to guide the process so that theoretical constructions of
identity and meaning present in analytical tools and ideas or normative sources of
traditional theology used in a correlative method do not overwrite the development of
self-theologizing agency among subaltern people. These concerns undergird my entire
inquiry into contemporary practical theological methodologies and criteria for evaluation
of these methodologies. My search for methodological principles that do not overwrite
the experiences of subaltern peoples with the perceptions and categories of researchers is
at the center of my desire to reorient practical theological methodology. Such
reorientation allows practical theology to be more aware of the need for developing self-
theologizing agency in cross-cultural contexts.

**Framing the Questions of Deaf Zimbabwean Women as a Practical Theological Issue**

While it is obvious that the struggles Deaf Zimbabwean women face in gaining
agency as mothers in child rearing practices is an acute problem involving social
practices, it may not be immediately clear to some how this is a theological problem or at
least a problem that practical theologians should consider. This section will examine
viewpoints from both practical theological thinking and Shona culture that explain how the questions Deaf Zimbabwean women raise are of a theological nature not only from the view of practical theologians interested in engaging the public practices of a society from the vantage point of faith traditions, but also from the view of traditional African cultures who view all matters of life and relationship as inherently spiritual in nature.

Heitink defines practical theology as a theory of action which “is the empirically oriented theological theory of the mediation of the Christian faith in the praxis of modern society.” In his unpacking of this definition, Heitink notes that in being empirically oriented, practical theology starts with the experience of humans as they encounter contemporary life in relation to both church and society. Practical theology therefore concerns itself with problems and issues in a wide variety of contexts with the general aim of developing ideas of how people of Christian faith can respond to the problems they face as people of faith. This response may take the form of actions internal to the life of a church or it may engage with a wider societal milieu. Heitink identifies two forms of praxis that operate in this definition.

Praxis 1 indicates that the unique object of practical theology is related to intentional, more specifically, intermediary or mediative, actions, with a view to changing a given situation through agogics.

Praxis 2 emphasizes the context, where these actions take place, as a dynamic context in which men and women in society interact, whether or not their actions are religiously motivated while pursuing various goals.

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65 Heitink, 8.
The relationship between these two praxes is one of interdependence where the internal practices of the church in worship, teaching and ministry embody praxis 1 but the church also functions as a social institution exerting some influence on how society at large views issues and addresses problems. Heitink therefore views practical theology as a socially engaged theological action in domains that extend far beyond simply what the communities of faith do and believe within their own social structures. The interdependence that exists between praxes that are both internal and external to communities of faith joins these two domains of action together in a way that defies public/private dualistic compartmentalization.

Such integration of public and private spheres of influence is also found in traditional and contemporary Shona society where the traditional understanding of society being permeated by spiritual agents finds expression and persistence in times of personal and family crisis. In his development of a pastoral theology of care, Mucherera notes that contemporary Shona people living in urban settings tend to address crises in personal and family life in ways that defy compartmentalization as well. Mucherera depicts the contemporary urban Shona as a postcolonial hybrid who exists in a world of shifting values and practices and thus holds tenuous and sometimes conflicting sets of values that reflect both interpretations of traditional Shona values and the cultural values

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66 Heitink, 9.
present in Westernized urban contexts in Zimbabwe. This hybridity then creates contemporary urban Shona life as bi-cultural and bi-religious in how people will address issues with reasoning and values from both Christianity and African Traditional Religions. The tension between these two streams of religious influence can be quite dramatic where social pressure within mainline Christian denominations can lead people to outwardly express disdain for the views and practices African Traditional Religions as not entirely Christian or in some way corrupted versions of the Christian faith while they remain valid and influential in the family life of contemporary urban Shona people.

Thus in moments of personal and familial crisis, they will often understand and address their situation using a framework of traditional Shona spiritual beliefs alongside a more Westernized mainline Christian framework.

Shona worldviews are permeated by a variety of spiritual agents. While traditional Shona religious beliefs conceive of a single High-God, Mwari, as the ultimate source of creation and authority, this High-God may not seem directly involved in the lives of people in comparison to other spiritual beings. These spiritual agents can be categorized into three types; midzimu, or ancestor spirits, shavi, or spirits from outside of one’s family clan, and ngozi, or avenging spirits who seek retribution for wrongs.

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67 Tapiwa Mucherera, *Pastoral Care From a Third World Perspective: A Pastoral Theology of Care for the Urban Contemporary Shona in Zimbabwe* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Group, 2005), 9-12.


committed. The ancestral spirits or *midzimu* are viewed as both protective and guiding in their roles and influence on living Shona. One does not act before considering how one’s *midzimu* might react to such action and in most important matters, one’s *midzimu* might be consulted through a medium or medicine person to attempt to discern what they feel a proper response to a situation should be. Neglecting to remember and honor one’s ancestors may anger one’s *midzimu* and cause them to act destructively in an attempt to gain the attention of an offender and redirect their actions. Avenging sprits, or *ngozi*, are considered to be spirits of people who were wronged by someone and seeking retribution either on that person or their family by creating havoc and misfortune among them. These spirits are often seen as threats to pregnant women and newborn children as they seek their revenge. From the moment their pregnancy is suspected, women would traditionally seek the services of medicine people to offer protective wards against *ngozi* that might seek to harm her child. Similarly, upon birth, charms will be placed on and around a newborn child to maximize their immunity to the attacks of *ngozi* spirits.

Contemporary urban Shona mainline Christians will publically eschew these traditional practices as pagan or backwards if not outright prohibited by their denomination. Despite these prohibitions, Shona Christians facing severe personal and

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73 Mucherera, *Pastoral Care*, 39.
family crises will often continue to consult traditional healers and advisors. While they may refrain from taking part in prescribed rituals aimed at analyzing the problem, mediating between aggrieved parties, and transmitting knowledge that traditional healers provide, they may make provision for non-Christian family members to partake in these rituals while also seeking avenues of support from their church community. This sort of bi-religious approach to crises that Mucherera and others observe is not uncommon among contemporary urban Shona Christians and reflects their general view of all life events having both socio-cultural and spiritual causes as well as socio-cultural and spiritual consequences. This permeation of religious sensibility is strong in Shona African traditional religion. Daneel cites Taylor in showing that Shona sensibilities do not separate the world into sacred and secular or natural and supernatural. In this sense, all questions of serious consideration take on a theological dimension in the Shona mindset. In this mindset, the answer to questions such as, “Why are things this way?” includes both natural and supernatural components. While this sensibility arises from Shona African traditional religion, it finds expression in contemporary Shona Christianity as well. Shona Christians instinctively seek both spiritual and social reasons and solutions to their problems and expect their faith communities to be places where they find resources and support in addressing their problems.

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The permeation of life by spiritual and religious concerns and bi-religious thinking appear in the emerging Deaf community in Mutare as well. In 2000, Deaf people in the Mutare area decided to form the Sanganai Deaf Club in response to the energy and attention to their needs created by the visit of the mission team of which I was a member. *Sanganai* means “Let’s meet” in Shona and was chosen for its simple articulation of the initial goal of this club to gather the isolated Deaf adults in the Mutare area for mutual support, fellowship, learning, and advocacy in relation to the struggles they face in their daily lives. One of their first requests was to the local United Methodist Churches for pastoral guidance in having a worship service in signed language. Shortly after this, many of them also began attending Hilltop United Methodist Church with the assistance of a pastor who signed then and later an interpreter. Their attendance sparked the creation of a Deaf ministry where Deaf adults taught interested hearing people their signed language and began to build a pool of hearing people who could assist and serve as interpreters in their interaction with local government, schools, churches, and law enforcement. In light of the previous discussion on religiosity and bi-religiousness, these actions of the Deaf club appear to be a natural response to frame their struggles in both social and spiritual terms. They also seem to view the social institution of the church as a resource for building stronger community ties and finding solutions to their needs. When Deaf Zimbabwean women shared their stories and fears about motherhood and child rearing practices, they too seem to address them both as social and spiritual problems that will require both social and spiritual solutions. This nexus of social and spiritual
A Problem of Audience and Context: Using Theological Models to Communicate

The problem of audience vexes many theological studies. Questions of how theological ideas are communicated to various groups require careful attention and consideration. As mentioned earlier, the primary audience of this study is fellow practical theologians who share a common concern for using practical theological methodologies as a means to engender self-theologizing agency among subaltern communities. However, I also do not want this study to become entirely inaccessible to secondary audiences because of technical language. The use of written English precludes many Deaf audiences both in the US and Zimbabwe from accessing this study without the assistance of translation and interpretation, but some careful consideration of how the questions that will guide the analysis of this study are phrased may assist in making such projects of translation and interpretation easier.

The use of theological models provides writers and readers with allegorical ties to everyday commonplace experiences. In employing a model, the complex relationships between various aspects and agents of a theological process can be expressed in a less technical and intimidating manner. Such expression provides the benefit of widening the audience that receives a theological proposal. The scriptural example here is that of the parables of Jesus which use stories of commonplace activities to provide more accessible
images of more abstract and unknown concepts regarding religious life. This section seeks to provide an overview of how theological models function and discuss their benefits and drawbacks. This discussion also includes some examples of theological modeling to illustrate how these models present theological concepts in relation to particular audiences. Lastly, I develop a model of cooking based on my own experiences in learning to cook sadza in Zimbabwe that serves as an apt expression of how I view my approach to this study of practical theological methodology seeking to engender self-theologizing agency among Deaf Zimbabwean women.

An Overview of Theological Modeling

In his discussion of ecclesiology, Avery Dulles employs the use of theological models as means to communicate various understandings of the nature of the church. In employing the use of models, Dulles expresses his belief that the true nature of the church is a theological mystery which cannot be adequately described in a direct manner.76 Therefore, the analogical nature of models provides a glimpse into that which we cannot fully understand by way of a commonplace experience in our lives. Recognizing certain theological concepts as mysteries has a significant impact on Dulles’ methodological considerations for doing theology.

The mysterious character of the Church has important implications for methodology. It rules out the possibility of proceeding from clear and univocal concepts, or from definitions in the usual sense of the word. The concepts abstracted from the realities we observe in the objective world about us are thus not applicable, at least directly, to the mystery of man’s [sic] communion with God.\textsuperscript{77}

Thus, being unable to speak directly about something, we then turn to speaking about images that reflect, in part, what we wish to address while keeping in mind that we are seeing “but a poor reflection as in a mirror.”\textsuperscript{78} Stephen Bevans also employs the use of models in \textit{Models of Contextual Theology}. Bevans sees a model as a theoretical apparatus which “is useful in simplifying a complex reality, and although such simplification does not fully capture that reality, it does yield true knowledge of it.”\textsuperscript{79} Bevans’ use of models is somewhat different from those of Dulles inasmuch as rather than being models of an image they are “models of operation, models of theological method.”\textsuperscript{80} These models of operation therefore provide rich descriptions of a process that occurs when the task of theologizing is engaged.

While the use of a theological model might seem to limit the perspective and scope of a theological statement, the use of models need not be restrictive or exclusive. To pose several models for the same mystery does not necessarily always create

\textsuperscript{77} Dulles, 14.

\textsuperscript{78} 1 Cor. 1:12 (NRSV).


\textsuperscript{80} Bevans, 31.
conflicting options one must choose from as Bevans sees Niebuhr’s models for presenting how Christ can be seen in relation to culture. In Bevans’ view, one simply cannot hold Niebhur’s model of Christ above culture in tandem with his model of Christ transforming culture without significant theoretical contradiction. In contrast, Bevans and Dulles both offer alternative ways of seeing models as complementary glimpses that offer a fuller understanding of the subject at hand. While recognizing that his various models for understanding the church contain elements that resist harmonization if not outright conflict with one another, Dulles seeks to hold them in a mutually critical relationship that can transcend any understanding that a single model can provide.

Bevans also notes that in developing sets of models that are complementary in nature, one posits a more tentative position that avoids making final declarative statements about the nature of the subject at hand. Such a tentative position leaves the technique of using a model open-ended and subject to reinterpretation and reshaping depending on the context from which it arises. Therefore, it follows that multiple complementary models will most likely be autochthonous products of various peoples in various situations. What makes a model take hold and be useful in understanding and discussing concepts is its rootedness in the contemporary experience of the community at hand. Dulles notes that, “in times of rapid cultural change, such as our own, a crisis of images is to be

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81 Bevans, 30.
82 Dulles, 208.
83 Bevans, 30.
expected. Many traditional images lose their former hold on people, while new images have not yet had their time to gain full power.\textsuperscript{84} Rather than being weakened by their tentative nature, models can offer a theologian or community of faith self-conceived expressions of concepts being discussed.

Dulles makes a further distinction between two types of models that is helpful for this discussion on the use of theological models. An explanatory model is one that attempts to communicate and systematize our thoughts on things we already understand to some degree.\textsuperscript{85} Dulles points to the parables of Jesus about the Reign of God as explanatory in nature as they attempt to give expression to experiences and understandings that are observable in the life of a Christian community.\textsuperscript{86} In contrast, exploratory model takes on a heuristic function in offering a venue for discovering new understandings of the subject at hand.\textsuperscript{87} It is this heuristic function of models that makes many models employed by practical theologians effective vehicles for theological development and effective communication.

\textsuperscript{84} Dulles, 18.

\textsuperscript{85} Dulles, 21.

\textsuperscript{86} Dulles, 22.

\textsuperscript{87} Dulles, 22.
Examples of Theological Modeling

Gerben Heitink offers an architectural model for practical theology in *Practical Theology: History, Theory, Action Domains* when he lays out the organization of his book as that of a building with a floor plan much like a museum. Such a model allows one to visit the various components of what constitutes practical theology in either a sequential order through the various wings of the building, or to view the entire spatial relationship between these components as a whole. To this end, Heitink even includes a floor plan diagram of his entire book with each sub-section, or wing of the building, being introduced with a map of areas to be covered. By employing an architectural model, Heitink is able to build his overall argument for describing practical theology as a discipline and guide a reader through his preferred path while allowing others to jump into the section they wish to explore in more detail and begin there while retaining a general sense of what precedes this section.

Beyond this explanatory role, the architectural model also provides a strong vehicle for Heitink’s exploration of the various components and action domains of practical theology. In his examination of Farley, Heitink notices a general difference between European and American approaches to practical theology.

European theologians think primarily in encyclopedic terms, while American theologians think primarily in hermeneutical terms. The Europeans first of all

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88 Heitink, 11-13.
search for the proper distinctions by clarifying differences, while the Americans focus on good correlations and possible connections.  

Heitink is thus not as deeply concerned as Farley with the impact of the encyclopedic organization of theology into various sub-specializations. In fact, he sees such separations of disciplines as helpful inasmuch as such separation provides clarity between various aspects and roles of practical theology. Heitink does affirm the need for a unifying theoretical understanding of the relationship between various sub-disciplines in theology but arrives at that understanding by maintaining clear distinctions between categories then considering their relationship to one another. This is reflected in how he relates the various sections of his analysis and presentation of practical theology according to his architectural model where rooms lie adjacent to one another in a particular sequence and share a common corridor of access. This encyclopedic approach contrasts with what he views as a more hermeneutical approach that places experience as the gateway to knowledge and seeks to unify disparate categories by interpreting them through the lens of that experience.

By employing an architectural model, Heitink is then able to build on to his argument as needed and reconsider the relational arrangement of spaces as well as how one might encounter these spaces upon visiting them. The need to add a new space may require a total reassessment of how the entire building fits together, but his model provides him a theoretical framework to assess the impact of such an addition. An

89 Heitink, 110.

90 Heitink, 109.
architectural model certainly makes sense for Heitink as a practical theologian from the Netherlands where there exists a long history of societal decision-making processes about land use and careful consideration of the relationship between the built environment and open space. Such considerations are a product of the severe limitation on available land and resources in the Netherlands and this sort of systematic, modular and relational thinking appears in everything from Dutch architecture and land planning to the philosophy of play in its soccer teams.\textsuperscript{91}

However, an architectural model may seem too rigid and confining in other contexts where a heavily built environment is not part of the everyday experience of a community. A more organic model such as that offered by the various writers in \textit{Inheriting our Mothers’ Gardens: Feminist Theology in Third World Perspective}\textsuperscript{92} or Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz’s gardening metaphor for theology found in \textit{Mujerista Theology} can provide a deeper level of understanding and access for grassroots communities of women.\textsuperscript{93} The guiding model in \textit{Inheriting our Mothers’ Gardens} arose from a group of women faculty at Princeton Theological Seminary who when meeting in 1986 to plan for


the Women’s Interseminary Conference to be held the next year. A passage from Alice Walker’s essay “In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens” was shared that reads:

I notice that it is only when my mother is working in her flowers that she is radiant, almost to the point of being invisible—except as Creator: hand and eye. She is involved in work her soul must have. Ordering the universe in the image of her personal conception of Beauty.  

This immediately became a shared metaphor for exploring their experiences with their own mothers and how these relationships shaped their orientation toward theological inquiry into the lives of women. When a graduate student participating in the meeting connected this discussion with a painting of scriptural account of the inheritance of the daughters of Zelophehad in Numbers 36 titled “Inherit the Promise,” the gardening metaphor took on additional significance. “Inherit the Promise” became a title for the conference, the resulting book, and a model for each participant to explore how their personal experiences as women raised by mothers who kept gardens or farmed formed deeply creative and spiritual meaning that guided their theological thinking. This participatory process shows the powerful nature of an autochthonous, or homegrown, theological model. Because this model arose naturally from the lives and shared experiences of these women as they participated in conversation, each one felt a sense of ownership and investment in exploring the nuances this model held for their own theological inquiry.

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The exploratory nature of adopting a gardening model for theological expression not only provided them with meaningful ways to talk about the process of doing theology as a creative spiritual act but also made their work more accessible to a wider audience of women who shared common experiences. Isasi-Diaz’s revision of her essay in *Inheriting Our Mothers’ Gardens* opens her expanded treatment of theology from her vantage point as a Hispanic woman in *Mujerista Theology*. In this essay she describes the garden she has inherited as being grown from a collection of clippings her mother brought with her to the United States when leaving Cuba during the political upheaval surrounding the rise of the Castro regime. Isasi-Diaz was eighteen years old when her family relocated to the United States and has since seen her theological work in the same light as her attempts to root and replant the clippings from her mother’s garden. In adopting a gardening model for practical theology, these women liken the theological process to a complex ecosystem of plants, soil, water, and sun that must be carefully nurtured to produce life-giving sustenance. Such a model both gives explanatory expression to the aim of their theological efforts to cultivate and care for the people, places, and things they are engaged with and an exploratory arena to examine how the various elements of their theological process come together to provide such growth. Isasi-Diaz’s own explanatory description of how her relationship with her mother impacts her own theological thinking by describing positive elements as flowers and struggles as weeds illustrates how this

96 Isasi-Diaz, 14.
model offered her a way to analyze her personal experience in a more meaningful manner.\textsuperscript{97}

Cooking Sazda with Deaf Zimbabwean Women: A Theological Model

In my own process of thinking through how to structure a discussion and evaluation of various practical theological methodologies in light of the type of questions raised by Deaf Zimbabwean women, my own experience in learning to cook a staple dish of stiffened corn meal porridge called sadza as the pupil of an entire group of both Deaf and hearing Zimbabwean women came to mind. Cooking is a rich and diverse metaphorical framework that offers a wide variety of avenues for exploration. Oftentimes, cuisine and culinary practices are considered one of the standard marks of describing particular cultural communities and geographical regions. Cooking can be approached through systematic following and development of recipes or as a more artistic alchemy of experimentation. One can train professionally in different styles of cooking either through a collective scholastic experience such as a class guided by a curriculum in a culinary school or an apprenticeship. But one can also simply inherit skills and techniques by being a participant in a family who shares the task of cooking meals together. A meal itself is made of a wide variety of ingredients prepared in particular ways. Depending on which ingredients are used and how they are prepared, the end

\textsuperscript{97} Isasi-Diaz, 21-26.
product of the meal may delight or dismay both the cooks and the diners. There may be a single chef or an entire team of people working together to produce a meal made from ingredients coming from the labors of gardeners and farmers that were gathered and delivered by transportation workers before they could be utilized. Even a single chef may at times experiment with his or her ingredients to try combining various flavors together or preparing known ingredients in new ways to produce startlingly different results. One might discover that combining the disparate flavors of sweet chocolate and tangy citrus results in a pleasing combination in chocolate chip cookies with a hint of orange flavoring. While such a unique combination might appeal to many, the combining of sweet ice cream with the pungent taste of garlic might appeal to far fewer people but not be without those who enjoy it. The process of experimentation in the kitchen becomes a valued exercise in developing one’s own ability to cook in much the same way a community coming together in discursive and praxeological ways develops their practical self-theologizing agency.

As noted in the previous chapter, a theological model born of my own experiences in learning to cook sadza guides my examination of practical theological methodology. In learning to cook sadza, I gained first hand experience in how Shona women value the art of cooking and transmit their knowledge and skills to new learners. The involvement of a group of women in sharing techniques and assistance as I learned to add the ingredients and stir the sadza pot provides a model for how Deaf Zimbabwean women might go about doing practical theology with their own approaches made of their own ingredients while allowing a place for the outsider to both learn their ways and participate
in the process. A theological model of cooking sadza can resonate deeply with Zimbabwean audiences as it is difficult to underemphasize the presence and importance of sadza in Zimbabwean cuisine. In my travels in Zimbabwe and in meeting Zimbabweans abroad, I have learned that sadza serves not only as a staple food but also symbol of home and hearth for many Zimbabweans. It therefore is eaten at any time of the day with any meal and often brings a warm smile to the faces of Zimbabweans who find themselves away from home.

The common thread between architectural, gardening, and cooking models for practical theology is that they all offer various conceptions of the relationship between parts and players in the process of practical theological methodology. In adopting a model of cooking, I hope to develop it as an exploratory model to assess various methodologies by exploring in issues of agency and power in the process of critical correlation in theological methodology. A common element of nearly every practical theological method is some attempt to critically correlate the views and analyses of questions and situations as viewed from contemporary society with those views and analyses that arise from a community’s faith traditions. In a cooking metaphor this is a concern with the process of combining ingredients to produce the dish. Although questions could also be asked about the selection of ingredients in a practical theological process and the ultimate direction of the practical theological process in producing a certain dish or simply “seeing what happens,” this study will focus on the issues that arise when one considers who puts the ingredients together and how they go about combining them. Will the theological sadza become lumpy due to an inadequate understanding of
what should be taking place? Who determines the correctness of the sadza and what should be done to redress any issues with it? What attitudes and approaches assist those making the theological sadza to ensure that what results is something good and proper for the meal at hand? Therefore, the general framework of this study will be to examine a variety of theological methods as ingredients in a process of bringing their varied approaches together in academic discourse. This discourse is akin to the mixing of ingredients in the sadza pot being tended primarily by myself, but with an eye to how these methods may or may not assist in allowing Deaf Zimbabwean women tend a pot of theological sadza of their own.
PART II

THE INGREDIENTS ON HAND: A REVIEW OF EXISTING METHODOLOGIES

Selecting Theological Methods for Examination

Just as the cooking of sadza often follows the whims and intuition of an individual cook or a collective of cooks, practical theological methodologies often take on the characteristics of the scholars and academic disciplines from which they arise. This section seeks to examine a variety of theological methodologies that can be considered under the general rubric of practical theologies. Returning to my experience in learning to cook sadza, I vividly recall the varied collection of women who took it upon themselves to instruct me and oversee my learning progress. While the process for cooking sadza is a generally simple exercise, these women were by no means in total agreement as to how the process should proceed. Although disagreement was generally mild in nature, various opinions were expressed about the consistency of the cold water and corn meal mixture, how rapid the boil of the water should be before adding the mixture, the rate at which the mixture should be stirred in, and how much additional corn meal would be needed to complete the sadza. There was no hint of a canonical method or written recipe to the making of sadza, yet I sensed of a range of orthodox methods that could take on various characteristics. In addition, there was some disagreement whether I should be left to my own devices to figure it out and make mistakes, which I did, or whether I should observe first and then be closely supervised in my first attempt.
This review of existing practical theological methodologies captures the same feeling of my experience in learning to cook sadza inasmuch as it presents a diverse range of theological methods. Yet all of these methodologies have some commonality in their relation to the community of Deaf Zimbabwean women and the aim of reorienting practical theological methodology toward self-theologizing agency in subaltern communities. In addition, the selection of methodologies with which I wish to engage in dialogue with reference to the community of Deaf Zimbabwean women brings together genres of theological methodology that are not often in dialogue with one another. This chapter exhibits a theological discourse which draws in critical correlative practical theology, missiological theology, theological engagement with Deaf studies, and African theology presents an opportunity to explore how practical theological discourse can become a collaborative effort. The aim of this collaboration is to examine diverse methodologies and evaluate them in light of their sensitivity to the dilemma faced by myself as a researcher seeking to work with a subaltern community in a manner leading to their self-theologizing agency. Each selection provides insights into practical theological methodology but also presents problematic issues in relation to my own dilemma in the case of working with Deaf Zimbabwean women. The selection of particular authors should not be viewed as representative of an entire theological genre, but simply a re-presentation of influential methodologies or methodologies that have a particular affinity to the context and questions of Deaf Zimbabwean women.

Don Browning’s *A Fundamental Practical Theology* remains influential in practical theological methodology as it lays out an argument for critical correlative
methodology that reorients theological thinking toward practical reasoning. James Poling
and Donald Miller’s Foundations for a Practical Theology of Ministry is also briefly
discussed as it provides some alternative views to critical correlative methodology.
Bonnie Miller-McLemore’s Let the Children Come provides a more recent application of
the critical correlative method in relation to questions of parenting, childhood, and
Christian tradition. Robert Schreiter’s Constructing Local Theologies presents a roadmap
for theological development that gives particular emphasis to the expression of theology
within local idioms and rooted in local processes. This roadmap also incorporates a
generally critical correlative approach to reconciling differences that arise between local
culture and religious traditions. Thomas John Hastings’s Practical Theology and the One
Body of Christ offers a more recent look at cross-cultural and missiologically oriented
approaches to practical theology. Hannah Lewis’ Deaf Liberation Theology remains the
only published book length theological treatise written by a Deaf person. Including her
work in this study allows for consideration of how theology and Deaf studies interact.
Wayne Morris’ Theology Without Words: Theology in the Deaf Community is a product
of his long-standing relationship as a hearing person with Deaf congregations in England.
He also addresses particular ways in which Deaf communities handle access to scripture
and biblical interpretation that share certain affinities with how some African churches
engage with these issues. Musa Dube’s Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible
examines how African women experience and read scripture. Her explicit use of a
postcolonial framework to engage with contemporary African experiences has resonance
with my own decision to employ a postcolonial framework for analysis. Musimbi
Kanyoro’s *Introducing Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics: An African Perspective* engages the way that African women read and make use of scripture. Where Dube’s work is largely an academic inquiry to the hermeneutics of reading scriptures, Kanyoro’s project involves work with a specific community of grassroots African women. The emphasis on community based grassroots theologizing has significant implications for my own dilemma as a researcher. Each of these methodologies will be examined with particular attention to elements in their approaches that intersect with my own interests of engendering self-theologizing agency among subaltern people. These examinations will be disrupted by interludes at the end of each chapter that examine specific ways in which my own search for a methodology that allows me to engage in practical theology with Deaf Zimbabwean women complexifies the methodologies being discussed.
In the introduction to *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, Browning identifies his central questions for his book. He is primarily interested in examining how religious communities can be carriers of practical reason and how their religious identities contribute to this practical reasoning. He defines this process by focusing on the use of practical reason to answer questions in the vein of “What should we do?” and “How should we live?” in the tradition of Aristotelian *phronesis*, a wisdom that addresses the nature of things rather than *techne*, a wisdom that addresses the means to an end. Thus, for Browning, practical theology is deeper than simply discovering or developing a formulaic response to questions but allows questions to be an entry point for examining the nature of a community’s identity as a people of faith and discerning what such a community rooted in their values and tradition should do in response. Browning examines three religious congregations’ attempts to address issues and questions in their community in order to illustrate how each employs practical wisdom in their theologizing together.

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99 Browning, 10.
Browning describes his methodology as four theological movements that apply reflective reasoning to the questions raised in practical theological consideration. These four theological movements of “descriptive theology, historical theology, systematic theology, and strategic practical theology” provide the ingredients for his methodological approach. Each of these four movements in his methodology move the process of practical theological thinking through stages of gathering and interpreting narrative information, correlation of varying information, and imagining and constructing proposals to address the issues and questions that initiate the process of inquiry.

The *descriptive theological movement* employs the social sciences in a way that builds a fuller understanding of the contemporary context of an issue or question being addressed in practical theological research. Rather than viewing descriptions as neutral, Browning sees the social sciences of sociology, psychology, and anthropology as laden with the pre-knowledge and pre-suppositions of researchers. Therefore the descriptive theological movement is a hermeneutical and dialogical process between the context itself and the pre-commitments of researchers. Browning acknowledges that this hermeneutical aspect of descriptive theology is often overlooked and the written product of practical theological research often only reflects the views of the researchers on the given context rather than those views of people participating in the communities being researched. Browning’s preference for the “active interview” methodology used by

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100 Browning, 8.

101 Browning, 78-79.
Robert Bellah, et al. in *Habits of the Heart* reflects his view of description as a dialogue between researchers and the community. He notes that Bellah seeks to remove the boundary between the social sciences and moral philosophy in creating an understanding of the social sciences as a set of narrative traditions deeply rooted in Western philosophical, humanistic, and religious history. The “active interview” methodology requires researchers to engage in dialogue with their subjects in full knowledge of their personal pre-suppositions about the issues at hand rather than attempting to be a neutral observer.\(^{102}\) In Browning’s view, being a participant-observer then leads to a deeper or thicker description of the context. The aim is not to impose a researcher’s view upon the subject, but to use dialogue to probe the subject’s own assumptions, feelings, and thoughts.\(^{103}\)

The *historical theological movement* of Browning’s methodology involves an analysis of Christian classics that address the situation being researched. The primary task of this movement is to identify the normative texts of one’s religious community and what they “imply for our praxis when confronted as honestly as possible.”\(^{104}\) So where the social sciences provide the technique for the previous stage of descriptive theology, the historical stage is guided by biblical studies, church history, and the history of

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\(^{102}\) Browning, 86-87.

\(^{103}\) Browning, 87.

\(^{104}\) Browning, 49.
Christian thought.\textsuperscript{105} What these disciplines can provide for the overall practical theological process is an opportunity to engage with the beliefs and practices of one’s religious community and interpret their meaning in light of current dilemmas or questions. Browning notes that what his case studies show is that this process of engaging the normative sources of faith and seeking to discover their relation to why a community does what they do and believes what they believe is not a solitary process. Instead, it is an engagement of a community in dialogue with itself as well as its historical norms resulting in a deeper understanding of their own identity and practices as a people of faith.\textsuperscript{106}

Browning’s third movement is one of \textit{systematic theology} which aims to bring together descriptive theology and historical theology. Browning identifies two guiding questions for this movement, “What new horizon of meaning is fused when questions from present practices are brought to the central Christian witness?” and “What reasons can be advanced to support the validity claims of this new fusion of meaning?”\textsuperscript{107} The task of this movement is to develop norms and evaluative criteria for assessing various proposals to address the initial dilemma or questions raised. These norms and criteria necessarily examine the justifications for why these solutions are correct in relation to a community’s practices and beliefs. The process envisioned here is a mutual critical

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{105} Browning, 49.
\textsuperscript{106} Browning, 50.
\textsuperscript{107} Browning, 51-52.
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correlation of both contemporary experience and practice with historical religious norms. Contemporary practices find themselves at times challenged and other times justified by the religious norms of a community. Similarly, the meanings of religious norms are re-evaluated in light of what they mean in contemporary contexts. Browning indicates that his case studies show that the form and character this process takes will vary in each context. Although he views this stage as primarily a reflective and philosophical critique of proposals and their justifications, it remains couched in the overall dialogical nature of practical theology as conversations within communities of faith.108

Browning’s last movement of strategic practical theology is the main focus of his methodology. The previous three movements all point toward the understanding that this movement produces. Here is where actual proposals to address the question of, “What should we do as a people of faith?” are brought forward. Browning describes this stage as the point at which,

the interpretation of present situations joins the hermeneutical process begun in descriptive theology and continued in historical and systematic theology. This is where these earlier steps join final critical efforts to advance relatively adequate justifications for new meanings and practices. . . . Strategic practical theology is the culmination of an inquiry that has been practical throughout.109

It is important to note that Browning does not see this process as a simple application of norms developed in the systematic theology stage. Instead, he views strategic practical theology as a sophisticated moment of proposing practical strategies that find their

108 Browning, 53-54.

109 Browning, 57.
justification in the norms discovered in the systematic moment. This allows for a community of faith to develop a strong critically defensible foundation for their proposed course of action that rest upon both contemporary and traditional sources.

Browning’s methodology is not developed or explained in abstraction. In explaining his methodology, he uses three case studies to illustrate how congregations engage in practical reasoning as they confront issues facing their life as a faith community. While these case studies are aimed at illustrating the various ways his methodology comes to exist in practice, they also contain specific communities with specific issues and questions for practical theological research. Thus the presentation of these two cases is two-fold; on one hand, they are presented as illustrative support for Browning’s proposal for practical theological method, on the other hand, they are presented as actual contexts where his methodology is being put into action in some fashion. As the cases of the Church of the Covenant in Centerville and the Apostolic Church of God engage directly with cross-cultural issues and the dynamics of power and agency, these cases warrant a closer look to reveal how Browning’s methodology takes shape in context.

In the case of the Church of the Covenant in Centreville, Browning examines their decision to become a sanctuary congregation and provide hospitality, refuge, and services for Salvadoran and Guatemalan refugees feeling political persecution in their homelands, yet deemed illegal immigrants by the U.S. Government. Browning’s contact with this community was his involvement with a research team examining this congregation as
part of a larger research project on congregational studies.\textsuperscript{110} Browning’s second case that involves cross-cultural dynamics of theological response to issues of power and agency is that of the Apostolic Church of God in the Woodlawn neighborhood of Chicago’s south side. Browning states he chose this African American Pentecostal congregation as a result of a desire to identify an “inner-city church that would allow me to study its practices of pastoral and congregational care.”\textsuperscript{111} Browning’s interest in this issue stems from his own theological research in pastoral care and an observation that those writing on pastoral care would benefit from more time studying what pastors and congregations actually did in practice as well as making theologically reasoned recommendations for what pastoral care should be.\textsuperscript{112}

Browning prefaces his descriptions of these communities and their contexts by revealing his own social location as an academic from a politically liberal Protestant mainline religious tradition. He acknowledges that each of these contexts are different from that which he considers his own current context and in encountering these differences, he found his own understanding of his personal context questioned and challenged.\textsuperscript{113} In recognizing these differences, he acknowledges a certain cross-cultural nature dynamic between himself as a researcher and the community being observed. In

\textsuperscript{110} Browning, 22-23.

\textsuperscript{111} Browning, 27.

\textsuperscript{112} Browning, 27.

\textsuperscript{113} Browning, 15-16.
addition, the study involving the Church of the Covenant engages a community seeking to determine its responsibility and role with Central American immigrants. This issue encompasses another dimension of cross-cultural considerations in practical theological methodology.

The employment of case studies to illustrate his methodology introduces a twofold nature to the aim to his work. While each congregation has a specific issue or aspect of their lives as a community of faith that is to be examined, there is also Browning’s overarching agenda to use these case studies to illustrate his claim that these communities engage in a process of practical wisdom that follows his view of practical theological methodology. In the case of the Church of the Covenant, the question is one that arises particularly from an immediate issue facing this congregation. A segment of a conservative Midwestern congregation had become sensitized to the complex plight of Central American refugees living in their area who were fearful of returning to their civil war torn homelands. As a result, they began educating their congregation on these issues in relation to their theological understanding of the meaning of Christian hospitality and care. This segment of the congregation then proposed that the Church of the Covenant become a sanctuary congregation to these refugees in their community. In declaring themselves a sanctuary congregation, Church of the Covenant would be providing sanctuary and refuge to those whom the U.S. Government had determined to be economic refugees rather than political refugees and therefore facing deportation. Adopting this position would put this church in direct violation of U.S. immigration law. This proposal presented a serious challenge to an otherwise conventional church that had
previously shied away from direct involvement with political affairs. A previous pastor had marched with Martin Luther King, Jr. for the establishment of civil rights protection for African Americans and was subsequently asked to resign as the congregation felt that such involvement in political affairs was inappropriate conduct for their minister. In this case, Browning is interested in illustrating how this church used practical reason to come to a decision to declare themselves a sanctuary congregation. However, the congregation’s concern was the direct question of responding to the needs of immigrants in their area and discerning what duty is as a Christian community in this instance. A third layer of practical theological questions would be the concerns of the immigrant population of Centreville as they seek assistance from religious communities to avoid deportation and the potentially dangerous consequences a return to their homeland would incur.

Where the Church of the Covenant was facing an issue of identity and direction of ministry that arose from within it’s own life as a community, it was Browning’s own research interests in examining how churches can empower the entire congregation to be providers of pastoral care that sparked his interest in the Apostolic Church of God. Browning’s report indicates the church was welcoming of his research team’s presence and participated in the project, he did not seem to clearly indicate that they raised a specific question they were struggling with that arose from within their own life as a congregation. While the congregation surely continued to struggle with the serious needs

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114 Browning, 23.
of their congregation and community members to deal with the burdens of poverty and social disenfranchisement as pastoral caregivers, there didn’t seem to be an acute moment of crisis facing this community. Browning’s interest became focused on examining how pastoral care in this congregation was not only a practice of the pastor but also how his “compassion, intelligence, energy, and clarity of religious and moral vision” had become the foundation for a wide variety of pastoral care initiatives carried out by the entire congregation.\textsuperscript{115} Browning chose to focus particularly on the Christian Action Lay Ministry, a program organized and led by a laywoman who was also a professional psychologist. This program covered a myriad of social issues from which Browning chose to focus on the congregation’s support and care for families and couples.\textsuperscript{116} Browning recognizes that the scriptural and social norms the Apostolic Church of God use to create their understanding to relationships and family life differ greatly from the feminist norms of his own understanding. He sees the dialogue within his own theological thinking on these differences as illustrative of his approach to practical theology.\textsuperscript{117}

\textsuperscript{115} Browning, 30.

\textsuperscript{116} Browning, 31.

\textsuperscript{117} Browning, 267.
James N. Poling and Donald E. Miller’s *Foundations for a Practical Theology of Ministry*

Poling and Miller offer another critical correlative approach in *Foundations for a Practical Theology of Ministry*. They define practical theology as “critical and constructive reflection within a living community about human experience and interaction, involving a correlation of the Christian story and other perspectives, leading to an interpretation of meaning and value, and resulting in everyday guidelines and skills for the formation of persons and communities.”

This definition is necessarily complex in order to capture the entirety of what they argue practical theology entails. The overall tenor of practical theology remains reflective and critical in nature but also must contain constructive proposals for action and a framework for evaluating these proposals.

Much of Poling and Miller’s methodology can be viewed as commensurate with the critical correlative approach of Don Browning. They generally agree that both descriptions of lived experience as explained by social sciences and traditional sources of Christian norms are critically correlated in some fashion to produce insights and proposals for how a community can respond to the questions they face. However they do include some unique stages in their theological method that Browning does not. As the above quoted definition states, Poling and Miller give emphasis to the agency of the community of faith rather than focusing on the engagement of researchers with a

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community. Practical theology is seen primarily as an action of communities of faith. They seek to recognize the diversity of viewpoints that will exist in any community and give careful attention to how identity factors such as race, class, and status shape individual views.\textsuperscript{119} In addition to attention to individual views, they also seek to understand how context and power shape a community’s handling of this diversity in crafting a more unified understanding of the meaning of their common narrative.\textsuperscript{120}

Poling and Miller make an additional step beyond critical correlation when they insert a confessional moment into their methodology which allows for an honest recognition that there are aspects of Christian faith that we cannot fully explain through reasoning but accept as true.\textsuperscript{121} Whereas the correlational moment in their practical theological process seeks to develop a public consensus on meaning that holds a community together, the confessional moment is that moment at which reasoning fails to explain why we believe what we believe. This declaration of belief is not intended to foreclose on the consideration of other perspectives and interpretations but to allow a community to state that while there will always be more to consider, this is what we believe.\textsuperscript{122} A second need for this confessional moment in their methodology is to create a space to recognize and experience that there is divine wisdom and knowledge that is

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{119} Poling and Miller, 76.
\item \textsuperscript{120} Poling and Miller, 78.
\item \textsuperscript{121} Poling and Miller, 87.
\item \textsuperscript{122} Poling and Miller, 87.
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beyond our comprehension. In creating a theological moment for recognition of the mystery of God’s actions, Poling and Miller seek to remain open to divine agency in the theological process where a community of faith remains open to divine revelation and guidance.\textsuperscript{123}

Poling and Miller also address the connection between theory and praxis in their methodology. “Advocates of a praxis basis for theory demand that all reflection begin and end in praxis. Praxis requires the elaboration of theory, and theory has no purpose except the formation of more praxis.”\textsuperscript{124} Thus rather than seeing practical theology as the application of theory to practice, Poling and Miller seek to form strategic proposals for how to respond to dilemmas practice to theory to practice model. They identify three general processes for developing such proposals. A pragmatic approach will suggest specific objectives and seek to carry them out with an eye to discernment about which is most effective in light of the interpretations of meaning developed in the prior steps of the practical theological process.\textsuperscript{125} An intuitive approach is illustrated by their view of Browning’s approach to the ethics of pastoral care. Browning moves from an abstract to concrete level when thinking of pastoral care ethics by beginning with a community’s discussion of story and metaphor about their identity and moving toward identifying the

\textsuperscript{123} Poling and Miller, 88.

\textsuperscript{124} Poling and Miller, 95.

\textsuperscript{125} Poling and Miller, 93-94.
rules and roles that govern when and where certain behaviors are appropriate. Lastly, they see Rodney Hunter’s proposal of “practical knowledge” as a new horizon for the consideration of actions arising from practical theology. Hunter suggests that there are three general types of knowledge; descriptive knowledge that points to “what is,” normative knowledge that points to “what ought to be,” and practical knowledge that points to “how to do things.” While Hunter views these three types of knowledge as interrelated, none are reducible to the other. The practical knowledge he identifies is something that implies a knowledge that has been built up through experience and a history of events. Rather than a knowledge that is transmitted through direct teaching, experiencing events and being engaged in the practices of a community themselves transmits practical knowledge. Hunter provides this conception of practical knowledge as something that “is not reducible to academic knowledge and which has theological content, since how something is done in the context of personal and community formation is as important as whether it is done.” Whereas Hunter roots his approach to practical theology in this conception of practical knowledge, Poling and Miller differentiate themselves by bracketing this type of practical knowledge and identifying it as only one stage in their overall methodology.

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126 Poling and Miller, 94.
127 Poling and Miller, 95-96.
128 Poling and Miller, 96.
129 Poling and Miller, 96-97.
Bonnie Miller-McLemore’s *Let the Children Come: Reimagining Childhood from a Christian Perspective*

Miller-McLemore’s own experience with child rearing practices drives her interest in undertaking a practical theological study of childhood. While acknowledging the personal nature of her interests, she also recognizes that her experience is far from unique. She notes that while various memoirs and examinations of childhood and parenting have focused on the earliest years of a child’s life, questions remain in regard to the nature of Christian parenting between the ages of eight and fourteen. Miller-McLemore asks, “What will faithful parenting look like when you have to fight with the market, other parents, and other cultural pressures over your child’s desires, ambitions and ultimate commitments? How will communications with God and the Christian community figure in?”

These questions initiate her theological inquiry into the meaning of childhood and parenting as she applies a feminist stance to guide her study. She aims to produce a re-imagination of childhood and children that considers the reality of contemporary Western society, feminist viewpoints, and Christian norms that, “will lead to a renewed conception of the care of children as a religious practice.”

Miller-McLemore’s methodology in this study is a feminist critical correlative practical theological approach. She states that the selection of children as a central theme

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131 Miller-McLemore, xxvi.
for theological concern is itself a challenge to the traditional organization of theology into biblical, historical, systematic, and practical reflection. She situates her approach within contemporary practical theological discourse as she seeks to critically correlate contemporary views of children from historical and popular psychological views with Christian sources to arrive at a renewed practice. Her commitment to feminist principles in her theologizing allows her to ask questions about how much adults can understand children and frame these questions as moral issues. The diversity of historical and cultural viewpoints on childhood offers a bewildering array of options as to how adults understand children. Miller-McLemore’s commitment to a feminist approach is also revealed in her desire to view children as agents in their own right as she seeks to favor the voice of the subject in her methodology. In order to address these concerns, she draws upon her previous work in Also a Mother to envision a “feminist maternal theology.”

This approach seeks to enter into an understanding of childhood from the viewpoint of their mothers by understanding the intersection of children’s concerns with those of mothers. “Women may be enabled to hear children precisely because they have stood where children have stood, at the intersection of society’s contradictory outward

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132 Miller-McLemore, xxviii.
133 Miller-McLemore, xxix.
134 Miller-McLemore, xxx.
135 Miller-McLemore, xxxi.
idealization and subtle devaluation of child care and children.”\textsuperscript{136} In more broad terms, Miller-McLemore seeks to promote two distinct agendas by employing her feminist maternal theological approach. She desires to present reflection on daily life as essential to the theological task, and also promote respect for the expressions of marginalized people as a normative guideline.\textsuperscript{137}

From this vantage point, Miller-McLemore engages in a historical overview of childhood. She notes how societal shifts from agricultural to industrialized societies accompanied a concern over the role of children in relation to work. Her own son reflects this shift in stating that the major difference between adulthood and childhood is that adults go to work and children do not.\textsuperscript{138} Such shifts have led to a gradual reduction of visibility of children in society. While child labor reforms are lauded as a necessary step for safety concerns, the presence of children in society has become limited to “age-segregated institutions, whether school or Sunday School.”\textsuperscript{139} The movement of children and child rearing from the public sphere to the private sphere of society has also reduced the general societal concern with the children of others.\textsuperscript{140} In addition, Miller-McLemore sees a trend within popular psychology to increasingly view children as victims. Whether

\textsuperscript{136} Miller-McLemore, xxxi.

\textsuperscript{137} Miller-McLemore, xxxii.

\textsuperscript{138} Miller-McLemore, 4.

\textsuperscript{139} Miller-McLemore, 9.

\textsuperscript{140} Miller-McLemore, 12.
children are viewed as victims of narcissistic parents more concerned with their own needs than those of their children, victims of a culture that distorts the self-image of both girls and boys in unique ways, or victims of a Christianity that is punitive and restrictive rather than sensitive to the needs of children, popular psychology presents children primarily as powerless recipients of the actions of others.\textsuperscript{141}

Miller-McLemore continues with an examination of various views within the Christian faith on the nature of children. Issues of sinfulness and innocence are examined to note how various theologians have grappled with the question of children and childhood as well as the responsibility of parents in providing moral guidance and upbringing.\textsuperscript{142} However, she also identifies trends within Christian thought that view children as a gift. She views the valuation of children by Jesus as a sign of the proper humility required for receptiveness to the message of Jesus.\textsuperscript{143}

Miller-McLemore also examines feminist views of childhood and child rearing practices. She seeks to explore specifically what Christian feminist theologians bring to the traditional Christian sources that may offer unique revisions of Christian views on children. She acknowledges that feminism is traditionally viewed as antagonistic in regard to religion and seen by many as “anti-children” in favor of women’s priorities.\textsuperscript{144}

\textsuperscript{141} Miller-McLemore, 30-38.

\textsuperscript{142} Miller-McLemore, 74-81.

\textsuperscript{143} Miller-McLemore, 94-101.

\textsuperscript{144} Miller-McLemore, 105-107.
However, she posits that while second-generation feminism did challenge the preconceptions of who is responsible for child care and how it should take place, this was done out of a concern that such practices were not contributive to a constructive and healthy family for all. She notes that, “fresh views from women of color and second- and third-generation feminists, greater awareness of the influence of class, frustrations in the workplace, and intensified globalization have revealed diverse child-bearing experiences and forced reconsideration of previously uncontested feminist assumptions about women’s desires and needs.”145 Thus she views a shift in feminism itself to a more complex view of child rearing as a labor of love based on mutual respect between parents and children.146

Lastly, Miller-McLemore concerns herself with feminism’s correction of the view of children as marginalized non-participants in society. She views the agency of children through their influence on parental decisions in child rearing. In viewing children as moral agents, she brings attention to recent exploration into children’s rights. If children are to be understood as full persons with their own agency, then body rights need to be considered and respected. Parents cannot assume that children understand their rights and thus parenting includes careful consideration and teaching of things that seem trivial and straightforward to adults such as rules of appropriate touching and exceptions to rules.

145 Miller-McLemore, 112.

146 Miller-McLemore, 123-125.
such as when in a doctor’s examination. She views children’s agency in light of spiritual aspects as well. A child making fundamental spiritual or religious reflections can illuminate things that adults have learned to ignore or overlook. She provides examples of how children notice social inequalities in relation to race and gender in society that don’t measure up to the lessons of fairness they learn. She also provides examples of how adults will redirect or ignore the spiritual questions children raise. Miller-McLemore’s feminist commitment insists that if we take children’s agency seriously, we must allow these observations and questions to be recognized and addressed in child rearing practices.

In her epilogue, Miller-McLemore examines what changes a reimagined view of childhood might have on Christian child rearing practices. She recognizes the largely North-American context of her study in making note of her experience with a Nicaraguan woman who shared her family’s decision to give up the security of their wealth and status in the 1980s and embrace a movement that challenged the government’s continuation of a society of personal wealth and power.

What was most striking to me, however, was Pinita’s understanding of her role as a parent and the support she received from the faith community. Initiating regular family meetings, she and her husband intentionally chose to engage their children in the religious and moral questions they faced about how to live well—that is, how to pursue justice and compassion for the poor—in times of great strife and inequity.

147 Miller-McLemore, 142.

148 Miller-McLemore, 150-151.

149 Miller-McLemore, 163.
Miller-McLemore’s analysis of this woman’s story of her family’s decision noted that as a mother, Pinita engaged with her children’s agency as members of a family and prepared them to, “live with less so others could have more.”\textsuperscript{150} She also notes the contribution of Womanist theologians who seek to challenge both African-American liberationist thought and feminism to consider the intersections of race and gender. These women have advocated for recognition and development of the practice of “othermothering” or the role of other women in the extended family and community in the tasks of child rearing.\textsuperscript{151} In recognizing these examples, Miller-McLemore suggests that renewed and revised practices of Christian child rearing, “calls for a distinctive kind of personal discipline and community practice.”\textsuperscript{152} This unites the private concerns and needs of parents and children in families with those of the wider community.

\textbf{Interlude: Cooking Sadza with Browning, Poling and Miller, and Miller-McLemore}

Having outlined three approaches to critical correlative method in practical theology, I would like to pause and offer some reflections on how these methodologies might interact with my own search for a methodology which would allow me to engage in practical theology with Deaf Zimbabwean women in a manner that develops their self-

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{150} Miller-McLemore, 163.
\item \textsuperscript{151} Miller-McLemore, 165.
\item \textsuperscript{152} Miller-McLemore, 167.
\end{enumerate}
theologizing agency. All three methodological approaches offer commendable general frameworks for approaching the task of practical theological research. Both Browning’s methodology and Poling and Miller’s methodology present clear step-by-step roadmaps for engaging in practical theological inquiry. The initial stages of Poling and Miller’s methodology seek to guide a community of faith in building a description of their lived experience that is as comprehensive and multifaceted as possible. They clearly see these stages as a community effort to both tell and interpret the deeper meanings of their own stories. Also, their confessional moment acknowledges that there are some aspects of this process that will always be incomplete and so any decision made by a community must be viewed as somewhat tentative and open for further review should circumstances warrant it. Miller-McLemore’s approach gives attention to the issue of agency in relation to children and attempts to devise an avenue for solidarity with children’s views through her use of feminist maternal theology. This strategy allows her to include the insights of women from their narratives about what their children say and do that causes them to act in certain ways. Despite these positive features, these three methodologies also share some common assumptions or strategic moves that prove problematic in working with subaltern communities such as Deaf Zimbabwean women. This interlude seeks to discuss those problems.

The first issue is related to descriptive stages where data is collected to comprise a thick description of current lived experience. Browning arrives at his thick description via the use of an “active interview” technique developed by Bellah, et al. However, the issue of how wide disparity in social location between a researcher and subject can be a
disruptive influence on the gathering of data for Browning’s descriptive theology is largely unexamined. Spivak’s concerns regarding empty statements of self-disclosure come to mind if one considers Browning’s mere declaration of his social location as sufficient to guard against the impact of his difference from the churches he studies.

Another reservation with Browning’s use of active listening technique is that it carries the assumption that the community being studied has sufficient awareness of their own position, circumstances, and context as well as agency to articulate these things in dialogue with someone who may have a vastly wider array of general knowledge and skill in narrating life experiences. As mentioned previously, subaltern communities are by definition those subjected to severe social marginalization and silencing. In the situation facing Deaf Zimbabwean women, their general awareness of their marginalization and its causes may only just be emerging due to a lack of educational access and opportunity to socialize with other people. I observed on several occasions that Deaf Zimbabweans were at a loss to articulate their life stories in a reflective manner if only because no one had ever taken interest to ask them to tell their stories before.

The severe degree of imbalance in skill in framing life narratives between myself as an academic researcher and the resources of subaltern community such as Deaf Zimbabwean women creates a significant barrier to most interview processes. A researcher engaging in an active interview methodology to build a descriptive theological picture of this context may inadvertently lead these women to employ certain theoretical constructs regarding identity, society, and faith simply because these women may borrow such constructs in telling their own story in conversation with someone with more
familiarity with constructing self-narratives. Whether borrowed constructs are helpful in the communication of a subaltern woman’s experience is debatable given her general inability to critically analyze the tools she is borrowing in conversation.

Ideally, an interview process that seeks to engender self-theologizing agency among subaltern people should actively avoid producing a description that replaces the expression of a subaltern woman and, as Lyons states, “engage in a dialogue with her, thus privileging her voice in the context (and constraints) of academic research. This act of privileging the agency of the subaltern requires an interview process that constantly offers and encourages critique about its direction. The subaltern participant must be continually invited to challenge the assumptions they or the interviewer may make about what is being shared and how it is being shared. This may drive the conversation far from the interviewer’s intended path, but it allows an opportunity for the subaltern to adequately express her experience on her own terms. Browning’s use of the active interview technique of Bellah, et al. in his descriptive theology seems be open to the risk of merely presenting the context of a subject community from the view of the researcher. Such risks can be mitigated if a researcher is adequately sensitized to the influence of hegemony in the research of subaltern communities, but such concerns remain largely unaddressed in Browning’s outline of his methodology. While Browning’s descriptive theology is not incompatible with additional guidelines for careful interviewing of subaltern communities, he seems to overlook these risks as a significant issue and

153 Lyons, 6.
therefore nothing specific is offered in his methodological steps to hedge against the risks of overwriting a subaltern expression with one’s own perceptions.

Poling and Miller provide a general framework for considering the impact of identity factors and contextual considerations in the power relationships between participants in a community engaged in practical theological discourse. What remains somewhat unclear in their methodology is the relationship of a researcher of outsider status. Much of their methodology is situated within an assumption that the various steps they present take place within an already established community. This is somewhat different from my experience with Deaf Zimbabwean women in two significant ways. First, the community of Deaf Zimbabwean women was only in its infancy when I first had contact with them. Deaf women had only begun to come together in any significant way and were just beginning to discover commonalities in their experiences. They have since moved forward quickly and formed societal bonds with both each other and hearing Zimbabwean women at Hilltop United Methodist Church. However, the act of coming together for mutual support remains a novel experience for Deaf Zimbabwean women. To assume that they are equipped to make a descriptive theological expression overlooks that they may still be discovering how to make sense of their experiences and tell their own stories. Secondly, my presence with them is clearly that of an outsider. Despite some commonalities in how we encounter the world as Deaf people, the experience of being a Zimbabwean woman is something I will never know on a personal level. While Poling and Miller do reserve a place for academic theologians later in their methodology, it is not clear what the role of an academic theologian might look like in their descriptive
stages. Is the outsider an equal participant in the process or merely an observer of what a community is doing? Despite these ambiguities, their caution to consider how context shapes description is easily extended to an academic theologian whether he or she is an outsider/observer or a participant/observer.

A second concern of these methodologies deals with the critical correlational stage of practical theological methodology. The primary concern here is who is doing the critical correlation and how is it achieved? To employ the cooking model once again, whom are the cooks making this theological sadza? How are they putting the ingredients of the various descriptive and historical data together to arrive at theological meaning? In the case of Browning, it is helpful to recall that Browning’s case studies in *A Fundamental Practical Theology* engage several layers of interest in practical theological inquiry. One layer is Browning’s own interest in articulating how what these various faith communities are doing illustrates his proposal for what the steps of practical theological methodology should look like. However, a second layer is the faith communities’ interest in resolving the actual dilemmas and questions that confront them. Also, in the case of the Church of the Covenant, a third layer exists in the interests of undocumented immigrants from war torn countries to remain in the United States as political refugees and avoid deportation to unsafe conditions for their families.

In analyzing the Church of the Covenant in their deliberations over whether to become a sanctuary congregation to Central American refugees, Browning draws upon the work of both Mary Boys and Thomas Groome in outlining different approaches to
Christian education in his critical correlational movement. Browning selects these authors’ work as the Church of the Covenant had largely held their deliberations in the context of congregational education about the situation of refugees, learning what the Christian tradition had to say in regard to issues of hospitality, and acting in accordance to governmental laws. Browning’s use of these works serves him well in illustrating his own aim to show how this congregation used practical wisdom to arrive at its decision to become a sanctuary community and in validating his own methodological steps in practical theology. However, it seems somewhat out of step with the congregation’s own interests in coming to a decision of whether to become a sanctuary congregation or not. It is unclear whether Browning shared these sources with the congregation or if these were critical correlative reflections of his own after the fact and separate from the congregation’s actions. His description of the congregation’s own practical theological process seems to show that they were far less interested in how they were going about educating themselves and deliberating the meaning of their potential actions than the actual doing of these things. To this end, the sources that the congregation employed in critical correlation were quite different. The mission committee of the congregation employed the use of Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s The Cost of Discipleship as its guiding classic in engaging the Christian tradition on its own question of whether or not to become a sanctuary congregation.

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154 Browning, 215-218.

155 Browning, 229.
By distinguishing the two different questions or aims of the practical theological process and interests of the researcher from the interests of the congregation, it becomes easier to recognize why different texts were selected to be a part of the mutually critical correlative process in this case. What remains unclear though is what relationship these two distinct critical correlative moments have to one another in Browning’s view, if any such relationship exists. Despite the ambiguities of this situation, Browning’s approach in this case seems to allow the Church of the Covenant to employ its own agency in addressing its interests without interference or influence by him or his research team. However, it should be noted that the Church of the Covenant is already a well established faith community with a clear sense of their own agency in determining their identity and actions in the decision to declare themselves a sanctuary community. The agency of the undocumented immigrants is much less clearly defined and largely overlooked by Browning. Since these undocumented immigrants were living in fear of deportation back into life threatening situations in their home countries, they lived under social forces that worked against their willingness to speak up and be visibly active in decisions that impact their lives. Some of those within the Church of the Covenant recognized the need for these refugees to have a safe platform to express their own interests and desires and held a reception for them to interact and share with the congregation during the study process. Yet, Browning’s own focus on the how of the Church of the Covenant’s practical theological process includes very little information about how the actual

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156 Browning, 25.
refugees saw their situation or were encouraged to participate beyond this reception. A reader of Browning’s report of this case study is left with the impression that these refugees remained largely on the outside of this process and entirely at the mercy of the Church of the Covenant’s internal decision and vote. This creates the appearance that while the Church of the Covenant invited these refugees to come and share their stories, their stories served a predetermined function to buttress the interests of those wishing for the congregation to become a sanctuary congregation rather than fostering any agency, self-theologizing or otherwise, among the refugees themselves. While it is safe to assume that these refugees shared a common desire in seeing the Church of the Covenant become a sanctuary congregation, we are left with little idea of what their desires were beyond that and how they felt the congregation’s decision would impact their lives. It also remains unclear as to the level of agency these refugees attained in this practical theological process. Thus, it would seem that the interests and concerns of the Church of the Covenant rather than those of the refugees largely guided the process. If the refugees’ interests were involved at all, they seemed heavily represented in proxy form by members of the study team at the Church of the Covenant.

In the case of the Apostolic Church of God, Browning’s presentation of this case study seems even more focused on the layer of his own interest than in his presentation of the Church of the Covenant. Browning’s chief concern is to examine how practical wisdom is employed in empowering laity to do pastoral care in the Apostolic Church of God. Browning identifies that the congregation roots its ethics of pastoral care of family and couples largely in scriptural texts as interpreted and taught in the Apostolic tradition
by their pastor through his sermons.\textsuperscript{157} Thus, it would seem that there is a critical correlation of sorts going on in the congregation that engages the scriptures, sermons, and teachings of their pastor with the lived experiences of families. Yet when Browning seeks to initiate a mutually critical correlative effort in his systematic phase, he places the Apostolic ethical views of this congregation in dialogue with liberal and feminist views of the family. He admits that these feminist views are rooted in his own pre-suppositions about the family and couples.\textsuperscript{158} Browning’s critical correlational effort in this case study follows his aforementioned active listening technique of descriptive theology which employs a dialogue between a researcher’s pre-suppositions and the context of the subject community to reveal a deeper understanding of what the subject community is expressing. This dialogue goes so far as to suggest what feminist theologian Elizabeth Schussler-Fiorenza might say to the Apostolic Church of God about how they are interpreting and applying scriptural texts in their context.\textsuperscript{159} It remains unclear whether such a dialogue was expected, invited, or even welcomed by the congregation of the Apostolic Church of God. Browning admits the disjunction of this portion of his study when he states,

\begin{quote}
To develop a deeper assessment of the Apostolic Church, I need to have a critical correlation dialogue between its family theology and some modern perspectives. Let it be clear: I need to do this for my theology. The Apostolic Church may not need this for its theology. Some of its women, many of whom are educated and
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\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{157} Browning, 261-266. \\
\textsuperscript{158} Browning, 267. \\
\textsuperscript{159} Browning, 270.
\end{flushright}
exposed to liberal social philosophy, occasionally object to the rhetoric and substance of this family ethic, but the vast majority do not. They fully affirm it. Someday this may change. If it does, Brazier’s practical theology of the family may need to develop a critical correlational perspective. I need to take that extra critical step now if I am to communicate a positive appreciation of the richness and particularity of the Apostolic Church’s views to the diverse communities in which I stand.\textsuperscript{160}

Browning continues by pointing out ways that this congregation’s family ethic may challenge liberal feminist assumptions which he argues promotes a view of equality that lacks a nuanced understanding of human needs. This portion of his dialogue largely draws upon sources such as David Gutman which he is familiar with from his own knowledge of pastoral care literature.\textsuperscript{161} While his dialogue seems to address his own curiosity about how practical reason is used in the Apostolic Church of God, it seems to present very little content related to what critical correlation might be going on within the congregation itself. It seems that the practical concerns the congregation raises in seeking an Apostolic program of pastoral care to address the human needs of African Americans in an inner city context have been set aside for Browning’s own interests in engaging in a critical correlational dialogue for his own theology. This inner dialogue of Browning with his encounter with the Apostolic Church of God is beneficial in how it brings him to a deeper understanding of his own theology of care for families and couples and the limitations of his commitment to feminist theological sources. However, this dialogue is admittedly very removed from the practical theology developed by the

\textsuperscript{160} Browning, 273.

\textsuperscript{161} Browning, 273-277.
Apostolic Church of God itself. This raises significant questions as to whether Browning’s self-disclosure of his social location vis-à-vis the Apostolic Church of God was allowed to impact his methodology or if it leaves his declaration of his identity as a mere gesture which Spivak points out, “can never suffice,”\(^\text{162}\) as it fails to address the complications that arise in silencing the expression of subaltern people. However helpful Browning’s exploration into his own practical theological musings might be, it seems to replace the theologizing and expression of the Apostolic Church of God in a manner that occludes the self-theologizing agency of this congregation.

The critical correlative moment of Poling and Miller’s methodology also encounters limitations in relation to engendering self-theologizing agency among subaltern people. My reservations with the apparent operating assumption that a community of faith has sufficient self-awareness and agency to tell and interpret its own story with critical depth also applies to an assumption that a community of faith has a sufficient agency to engage in the use of social scientific methods and hermeneutical methods of interpreting Christian traditions in critical correlation. Poling and Miller do exhibit awareness that there may be gaps in a faith community’s abilities in this stage when they articulate the need for people with professional training in philosophical theology to be engaged in the process at this stage. Exactly how the professionally trained theologian and/or his or her viewpoints impact the practical theological process remains vague beyond the role they describe to, “draw out the implications of choices

\(^{162}\) Spivak, 271.
facing Christians in the world today.”

In the case of a subaltern community such as Deaf Zimbabwean women, the skill these women have in telling and critically interpreting their own stories is limited. Furthermore, their access to the type of analytical tools a professionally trained theologian would bring is severely limited. The potential for strongly developed means of seeing, interpreting, and analyzing events present in the experience of a professionally trained theologian to overwrite the emerging agency of Deaf Zimbabwean women seems very high. The temptation to impart analytical skills first then ask subaltern people to employ them threatens to undermine the development of indigenous approaches and self-theologizing agency. Poling and Miller’s methodology doesn’t seem to directly address this sort of potential disparity between the professionally trained theologian and the community of faith and presupposes the ability of a community of faith to consider the input of a professionally trained theologian and either accept, adapt, or reject the ideas he or she may bring to the process.

In addition to the risks of overwriting the agency of subaltern communities such as Deaf Zimbabwean women, Poling and Miller’s understanding of critical correlation also presents some potential issues. They see the critical correlational moment as primarily a philosophical and metaphysical task that requires some abstraction of one’s own lived experience in order to analyze it.164 This locates the critical correlative moment of their methodology in a practice of somewhat detached reflective consideration.

163 Poling and Miller, 85.

164 Poling and Miller, 85.
rather than the actual lived experiences of people in a community of faith. This differs from how they present Rodney Hunter’s understanding of practical knowledge. Hunter’s conception of practical knowledge is more deeply rooted in the actual doing of practices in a community of faith and he argues that this knowledge is not reducible to academic knowledge. Hunter’s conception of practical knowledge points to ways of knowing that are rooted in action rather than reflection. Such avenues for knowledge also imply that the creation of knowledge through critical correlation may also occur in the actual practices of the lives of a community of faith. As presented by Poling and Miller, Hunter seems to present practical knowledge as a potential foundation for theological reflection and inquiry that remains a different process and irreducible to other ways of knowing.

Matthew Engelke’s anthropological study of the Friday Masowe Church in Zimbabwe offers a glimpse into a community whose critical examination of matters of faith occurs within the actual practice and participation of worship. Such an approach seems to capture the essence of Hunter’s understanding of practical knowledge. The Friday Masowe Church is an African Independent Church that eschews and mistrusts written forms of Scripture as distortions of God’s true words. The depth of this mistrust results in a rejection of the Bible in written form and a complete reliance on what they refer to as “live and direct” communication through the Holy Spirit. Members of the Friday Masowe Church are encouraged to participate in regular frequent worship, healing

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165 Poling and Miller, 96-97.

166 Engelke, 2-4.
services, and community work to build an understanding of God’s will for how they should live. This knowledge of God’s will is termed *mutemo* in the Shona language. The standard translation of *mutemo* into English is simply *law* or *rule*, but for the Friday Masowe Church, *mutemo* also implies a particular sort of religious knowledge as well. This knowledge is not to be found by reading about it in a text or even necessarily passively receiving it in a sermon or study group. Instead, this knowledge is gained by the “live and direct” communication from the Holy Spirit as experienced in worship settings. *Mutemo* gives followers specific guidelines on how to live and act in various situations in their lives and how to address issues that confronted and challenged their well-being. In short, *mutemo* seems to operate as a system of ethical and moral guidance that is to be gained through active participation in the rituals and life of the faith community of the Friday Masowe Church.

This engagement in a process of discernment of what to do and how to act in the spirit of *mutemo* is deeply experiential as it is embedded in the practice of worship for the Friday Masowe Church. The interplay between preaching and singing as a community seeks “live and direct” engagement with the Holy Spirit to discern God’s will for the troubles they face in their lives appears to be a radically different form of critical correlation than the philosophical reflection envisioned by Poling and Miller.

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167 Engelke, 139.

168 Engelke, 139.
Such a radical disconnection raises questions as to the limits to which Poling and Miller’s methodology might be applicable in communities with different approaches to how critical correlation takes place. To approach critical correlation in a practical theological process with the understanding that it is philosophical and metaphysical on Western philosophical terms raises the risk that a practical theological methodology might overwrite local approaches and practices to critical correlation that allow for greater self-theologizing agency for subaltern people in specific contexts. Later in this study, I will again discuss the example of the Friday Masowe Church in a consideration of how such understandings might provide for a reorientation of practical theological methodology. The brief introduction of mutemo in the Friday Masowe Church at this point is simply to illustrate that there may exist very different ways to engage in critical correlation than those adopted and assumed to be generally applicable by Poling and Miller.

While Miller-McLemore’s approach in *Let the Children Come* takes the issue of children’s agency seriously, her critical correlation is largely done through her own theological discourse with her sources. I suspect this study would look radically different if it were to center its engagement with the topic of children and their moral and spiritual agency from the vantage point of children themselves. However, this seems not to be her aim with this study. While she seeks to develop a practical theology of children, it is clear that she’s developing this from the vantage point of how parents should engage in child rearing practices as informed by Christian traditions. While she identifies the marginalization of children in contemporary North American society, she frames this
phenomenon as the concern of parents more than that of children themselves. In this regard, her theology might be more aptly labeled a practical theology of child rearing. Deeper concerns with Miller-McLemore’s work are those related to issues of context and audience. Although she never explicitly states it, her intended audience appears to be North American parents struggling with the issues of commercialization of children’s desires. This limits the applicability of her study beyond this context as although child rearing in Zimbabwe is not immune from the effects of globalization and commercialization, the traditional influences and contemporary circumstances facing Zimbabwean parents in general and Deaf Zimbabwean parents in particular are very different. Similarly, the socio-economic chaos in Zimbabwe presents pressures that North American audiences can scarcely comprehend. Thus it is difficult to claim a comprehensive practical theology of childhood with these limitations in place. In some regard, restrictions of audience and applicability are necessary to focus a theological project, but theologians must qualify their conclusions accordingly.

Lastly, Miller-McLemore’s inclusion of a Nicaraguan woman’s practices in family decision making and Womanist approaches to “othermothering” in her epilogue is somewhat problematic. While she dutifully reports the origins of these practices, she neglects to weave these types of alternate viewpoints into her earlier critical correlative efforts. As a result, a reader could easily interpret her inclusion of these examples as an added on validation of her own critical correlative conclusions. The danger in doing this is that it fails to acknowledge that these child rearing practices arise from specific contexts and circumstances of their own. While such practices may neatly coincide with
her proposals for how white North Americans should approach Christian child rearing, they are a result of the critical correlation of other communities and families. By employing these examples in this manner, she occludes the critical correlation going on in these subaltern communities and misses an opportunity to allow these voices to present themselves as a contribution to her study rather than merely validation.

The methodologies presented by Browning, Poling and Miller, and Miller-McLemore are not without merit as they provide helpful initial frameworks for practical theological inquiry with and by subaltern people. The task of providing thick descriptions of both contemporary lived experience and faith traditions in order to examine how these layers of meaning interact with each other are vital ingredients in any practical theological sadza. However, the concerns raised in this interlude are problematic. If the goal of practical theological research among and with subaltern communities is to be the engendering of self-theologizing agency, the risks identified by postcolonial theorists in regard to the silencing of subaltern people must be acknowledged and mitigated in practical theological methodologies. If practical theologians neglect giving particular attention to how methodologies deal with the challenges of working with in cross-cultural settings with subaltern communities, then the practical theological sadza we create is incomplete.
Robert Schreiter’s *Constructing Local Theologies* shares the missiological aim noted by Bosch that communities in the global South ought to become more self-theologizing and that theology become more responsive to context.¹⁶⁹ Schreiter’s evaluation of recent trends in theology identifies a move toward self-theologizing expressed in terms of the “‘localization,” “contextualization,” “indigenization,” and “inculuration’’” of theology.”¹⁷⁰ In his view, these approaches reflect a shift in the basic aim of theology. “While the basic purpose of theological reflection has remained the same—namely, the reflection of Christians upon the gospel in light of their own circumstances—much more attention is now being paid to how those circumstances shape the response to the gospel.”¹⁷¹ This approach to theological reflection and construction fits well with the general aims of practical theology inasmuch as practical theology seeks to begin with questions and practices arising from lived experiences. Because any practical theological research which aims to develop self-theologizing

¹⁶⁹ Bosch, 451-52.


¹⁷¹ Schreiter, 2.
agency among Deaf Zimbabwean women will include group outsiders, cross-cultural dynamics must be explored. Schreiter’s consideration of cross-cultural mission dynamics makes his methodology an important one to examine in relation to the aims of this study.

First, an examination of the nature of local theology according to Schreiter is needed. Schreiter suggests three broad types of local theologies in categorizing them into translational models, adaption models, and contextual models. Translational models of local theology involve what Schreiter describes as a two-step procedure where one seeks to shed the Christian message of cultural particularities in order to find its core tenets. Then these tenets can be translated into a new context and given particular expression within a particular cultural idiom. He likens this to the idea of a ‘kernel and husk’ where the husk can be removed leaving behind just the kernel which can be rewrapped in a new husk.  

While Schreiter sees this as a commonly used approach, he also finds two major weaknesses in the translational model. First, a positivist understanding of culture “assumes that patterns in a culture are quickly decoded and understood by foreigners.” While Schreiter presents an example of drums being substituted for bells in calling people to services in Zambia. While those making the translations felt they were simply substituting a European musical instrument with one which was locally produced, the type of drums they selected were used in erotic dance performances within the local

\[172\] Schreiter, 6-7.

\[173\] Schreiter, 8.
culture and seen as highly inappropriate by local churchgoers. The second weakness in this approach is with the ‘kernel and husk’ idea itself. This idea assumes that the Christian message contained in biblical revelation, hermeneutical interpretations of scripture, or Church proclamations occurs in a setting that is not already deeply colored by a particular culture that frames the questions, concerns, and categories to be communicated by any given expression of Christianity. Schreiter argues that the kernel and husk are “given together” even in scriptural revelation as aspects of the Judaic-Mediterranean world color everything from the idioms people used to convey their thoughts to the way the gospels were recorded. Thus the task of separating the kernel from the husk becomes extremely problematic. Debates over what is essential in Christian practices reveal the ambiguities of attempts to separate the kernel and the husk. For example, whether bread and wine are essential for use in the Eucharist as a part of the kernel of the practice as put forth in the gospels or if local food and beverage options can be used in place of them in an effort to translate this practice into local culture remains an unsettled question.

Adaptation models of local theology attempt to take a deeper look at local cultures and employ anthropological methods to develop a rounded philosophical picture of how a local culture constructs its worldviews. This philosophical framework is then

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174 Schreiter, 8.
175 Schreiter, 8.
176 Schreiter, 8-9.
used as a foundation for developing theological statements and constructs that parallel this framework. However this approach brings with it an assumption that a well articulated philosophical framework is necessary for the development of a solid systematic theology. Schreiter notes that the grounding of theology in philosophical terms is an approach derived from 13th century European theology. While this approach is a historically important method, he notes that it is far from agreed upon in current theological thinking. Criticisms against this approach argue that it remains highly academic in nature and thus sometimes at odds with the understandings and expressions of local communities. Magesa found significant disconnection between the theological constructions of prominent African theologians and mainstream African congregations. These congregations were either largely unaware of what these African theologians had written based on the philosophical constructions that undergirded their theologies or these theologians had not grounded their work in the expressions and practices of mainstream African congregations. While the strength of these approaches is their ability to handle complex academic questions, this strength can result in theologies that are disconnected from local expressions of faith. This critique parallels concerns that practical theologians have with traditional ‘theory to practice’ frameworks of systematic theology.

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177 Schreiter, 9-10.
178 Schreiter, 10.
179 Magesa, 85.
180 Schreiter, 10.
Employing pre-set theories of philosophical categorization can obscure the meanings present in existing practices that may hold vital information for developing theological statements to address questions and crises faced by local communities of faith.

Also, in cross-cultural settings, the development of a philosophical framework on Western terms may force local culture into foreign categories and distort their meaning. Schreiter notes the tendency for Asian philosophical thought to approach differences with a both/and framework which seems relativistic and perhaps even tending toward syncretism to Western philosophical thinking with its either/or structure.\(^1\) Schreiter does point to a different type of adaptation model for local theology that does not depend on an academic examination of culture and construction of a philosophical framework. This adaptation model seeks to develop a theological expression from within a culture through a slower process of nurturing the ‘seed’ of Christian spirituality in local cultural practices. Local practices and categories of thought then form the foundation of a development of local Christian theologizing.\(^2\) In contrast to the previous construction of adaptation models, this one is more in accord with a practical theological approach which begins with an examination of practices and proceeds to critical correlation to produce strategic proposals for action.

The third type of local theology Schreiter presents is that of contextual models. Contextual models bear a close similarity to adaptation models. However, where

\(^1\) Schreiter, 10.

\(^2\) Schreiter, 11.
adaptation models place their emphasis on examining what happens to the faith being received, contextual models place their emphasis on the cultivation of the cultural context receiving a transmitted faith.\textsuperscript{183} Two variants of contextualized theology arise from two different views of how to address the rapid social change occurring in many cultures around the world. Rapid urbanization and technological advances are causing cultural changes in many societies. Along with such changes, oppression, poverty, and hunger bring additional challenges. The dehumanizing effect of rapid social change puts pressure on cultures to adapt in order to assist people in making sense of these vast changes. One emergent theological approach to these challenges is more ethnographic in nature and concerned with identifying and retaining cultural identity.\textsuperscript{184} An ethnographic approach seeks to construct and define unique identities and approaches to theological responses to rapid social change. While Schreiter sees a deep value in such projects, he remains concerned that these projects rarely go beyond their initial steps to engage in wider dialogue within Christianity. Also, they can become a force for conservative traditionalism based on a constructed ideal past when the current situation may require a more flexible understanding of identity to address social changes.\textsuperscript{185}

\textsuperscript{183} Schreiter, 12.

\textsuperscript{184} Schreiter, 13.

\textsuperscript{185} Schreiter, 14.
A second approach is more liberationist and focused on addressing social injustices.\textsuperscript{186} Rather than cultivating continuity with identity constructions of the past, liberationist approaches often seek a degree of discontinuity in fostering radical change to bring about a more just and equitable society in the midst of poverty and oppression.\textsuperscript{187} Schreiter identifies a weakness in liberationist approaches to local theology in their tendency to focus their attention on the cries of the poor at the expense of maintaining some continuity with the larger Christian tradition. He also expresses concern that liberationist emphasis on action can often fall into a pattern of using incomplete reflection as a basis for such actions or only engaging in reflection after action has occurred.\textsuperscript{188} Despite these weaknesses, Schreiter sees a great deal of usefulness in contextual models of theology and identifies them as the most helpful in growing and fostering local theologies.

Whatever form local theologizing might take, Schreiter sees it as a communal task of localized people of faith. By rooting his understanding of local theology in the community, he seeks to retain a favoring of the community as the primary audience for such theologies.\textsuperscript{189} In this assertion, he echoes the views of liberation theologies in seeing the theological process as a means to develop self-awareness in a community.

\textsuperscript{186} Schreiter, 13.

\textsuperscript{187} Schreiter, 15.

\textsuperscript{188} Schreiter, 15.

\textsuperscript{189} Schreiter, 16.
Theology then becomes more than words; it becomes also a pedagogical process liberating consciousness and inciting to action.”

The ultimate aim of creating a self-theologizing community lies at the heart of Schreiter’s thoughts about local theology. Despite the fact that the entire community plays a role in developing local theologies, Schreiter also recognizes the unique role of individuals within a community who receive the questions and lived experiences of the community and give them a particular shape and expression that is then affirmed, amended, or rejected by the community. He sees “the poet, the prophet, the teacher, [and] those experienced with other communities” as the type of individuals that will provide the crafting of a community’s life and faith and reflect it back to them for their consideration. He also acknowledges the contribution a professionally trained theologian can provide to local communities but cautions strongly against any allowance for the professional theologian to dominate such work.

To ignore the resources of the professional theologian is to prefer ignorance over knowledge. But to allow the professional theologian to dominate the development of a local theology seems to introduce a new hegemony into often already oppressed communities. …Thus the professional theologian has an indispensable but limited role. The theologian cannot create a theology in isolation from the community’s experience; but the community has need of the theologian’s knowledge to ground its own experience within the Christian traditions of faith.

Schreiter sees the professional theologian as a resource for the community but not the primary source or catalyst for the theological process itself. Such obligations must

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190 Schreiter, 17.
191 Schreiter, 17.
192 Schreiter, 18.
remain in the hands of the community in order for a local theology to be effective as a response to the questions confronting a community.

Schreiter views the process of communal development of a local theology as an action of God through a Spirit filled community seeing to develop both their own praxis in accordance to the gospel as well as connections with other churches. These preconditions for local theology point toward a divine catalyst for the creation of local theology where the reflections and practices of a community of faith are co-joined with God’s greater mission to the entire world. By placing local theology within the larger context of the missio Dei, Schreiter views the theological process as “more than an acute analysis of culture and tradition,” inasmuch as it is a part of a faith community’s spiritual journey toward God. He acknowledges that local theology then takes on the character of “wisdom style of theology (sapientia) over the sure-knowledge style (scientia) preferred in academic settings.”

Schreiter’s process of theological method opens with an ambiguous starting point. He acknowledges that previous local theological construction will most likely already be in place. It would be a rare situation where no pre-existing theological influences were shaping the lives of a community. From this starting point, Schreiter sees his local theological method beginning at moments when existing theological constructs are not

193 Schreiter, 24.

194 Schreiter, 24.

195 Schreiter, 24-25.
adequate or perhaps even a barrier to a local church’s development.\textsuperscript{196} Within missionary
churches, these pre-existing theological influences were often the local theologies of
outsiders who brought their beliefs and practices to bear on new contexts. During the
colonial era, association with the practices and beliefs of a missionary’s theology was
frequently associated with upward social mobility and disassociation with one’s
indigenous culture.\textsuperscript{197} This myth of superiority of missionary theology over indigenous
cultural expression created a comfort and valuation of outsider theology and practice
among newly initiated churches that still lingers in popular expression which at times
creates resistance to efforts to indigenize local theologies. Yet, an examination of how
these ideas became dominant in a community and how they are understood by people
today can reveal how a local community comes to incorporate new information and
construct their identities. Also, such examination can reveal the degree to which a
community engages in such issues with critical understanding. Therefore, some
understanding must be developed about how a community understands and constructs
their current theological setting as a starting point for further theological analysis.

Schreiter proceeds with this analysis in a correlative process alternating between
the general categories of church tradition and culture. From an awareness of the
influences of pre-existing theological ideas, he begins a project of opening culture
through analysis. Here he employs a Geertzian “thick description” of culture which seeks

\textsuperscript{196} Schreiter, 25-26.

\textsuperscript{197} Schreiter, 26-27.
to capture “a culture holistically and with all its complexity” as a foundation for local theology. Schreiter warns against employing a cultural romanticism that allows only the good aspects of a culture to come forward for analysis. He maintains that Christian theology requires looking at the sin in the world that leads people to harm one another as a step toward repentance, salvation, and an eschatological message of hope and change for the better. This view leads him to assert a Christological principle in his analysis of culture that makes his generally Geertzian task of listening to culture an effort to identify the presence of Christ already in a culture in balance with any notion of bringing Christ to a culture. Therefore his opening of culture seeks to be an exploratory expression of an entire culture in relation to its contributions to people’s wellbeing as well as its drawbacks.

Schreiter continues his examination of culture by noting that this opening of culture creates what he terms culture texts. These culture texts are themes of identity or social change that constitute the center of local theological development. Those themes that focus on social change are often a response to a particular social need or crisis existing in the culture. Schreiter provides an example of how this type of response can change church practices that reflect a change in the meaning of the Eucharist. People

\[198\] Schreiter, 28.

\[199\] Schreiter, 29.

\[200\] Schreiter, 29.

\[201\] Schreiter, 29-30.
in the Southern Philippines seeking to create a meaningful theological understanding of
their struggle against absentee landowners adopted a single loaf of bread in the Eucharist
rather than more traditionally used single host wafers in order to give expression and
meaning to their need for solidarity.\textsuperscript{202} Themes of identity in cultural analysis also reveal
the patterns of how local communities do things. He offers an example of how the strong
communal nature of Japanese culture, which extends the notion of family and familial
obligation even into the workplace, provides a foundation for local theological expression
of salvation as a communal experience rather than the concern of individuals.\textsuperscript{203} For
Schreiter, the understanding of culture is intimately tied to the task of developing and
interpreting theological ideas in terms that make sense to local cultures and find their
strength in local customs.

Parallel to this analysis of culture, Schreiter also expresses a need for the analysis
of church tradition. He proposes a process of opening church tradition that is analogous
to his process of opening culture. Schreiter notes that this is a parallel process to the
opening of culture rather than a new starting point.\textsuperscript{204} This opening of church tradition
seeks to analyze the role tradition plays within a faith community in shaping its beliefs
and practices. In a cross-cultural setting, this sort of opening must be done carefully in a
way that avoids the historical missionary error of “westernizing a people as they

\textsuperscript{202} Schreiter, 30.

\textsuperscript{203} Schreiter, 30.

\textsuperscript{204} Schreiter, 31.
Christianized them.” Thus the opening of church tradition seeks to examine the present religious traditions of an indigenous church from a multicultural vantage point to develop an understanding of how and why these traditions are important to a people.

This type of examination of local church traditions echoes Schreiter’s viewpoint that church tradition is a series of local theologies. His analysis of the serial nature of local theologies in understanding church tradition constitutes the next stage of his theological process. This understanding of church tradition takes into account how local issues and influences have always influenced the development of Christian doctrinal teaching from the Conciliar era to present day theological construction. Although the local issues that shaped such theological statements such as those made in the Council of Chalcedon are not the issues that face contemporary churches, the doctrines developed at Chalcedon persist because they retain significant meaning to contemporary Christians. Whether the retention of these doctrines takes on new meanings in new contexts for contemporary Christians or they are retained as a connection of spiritual lineage to earlier Christians, they remain meaningful in some manner. Seeing the variety of Christian doctrine developed throughout history as a series of local theologies raises questions as to which statements become normative within which communities and how they remain significant.

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205 Schreiter, 32.
206 Schreiter, 32.
207 Schreiter, 33.
community as well as their meaning in contemporary context opens them up to provide a fuller picture of how church tradition functions and persists in the life of a theologizing community.

Schreiter then continues his process with several layers of critical correlation between church traditions and local culture to develop local theologies. He begins this critical correlation by examining where church tradition encounters the themes of local culture.²⁰⁸ In this stage, local theologies find parallels between their own local contextual situations and those of the localities that produced scriptural and historical doctrine. Schreiter cites as an example that Latin American liberation theologians found much of their Christology in resonance with the person of Jesus found in the context of the synoptic gospels and his concern for the poor rather than those images of the Jesus found in the Gospel of John and writings of Paul.²⁰⁹ Finding this sort of resonances reveals more layers of how local theology remains rooted in both church tradition and local experience. Schreiter parallels this discovery of thematic resonances with an exploration of the impact of church tradition on local theological constructions. Here Schreiter is looking to move beyond comparison between the contextual influences of contemporary Christians and the contextual influences that shaped Christian traditions and ask what differences might exist between contemporary and historical contextual influences that

²⁰⁸ Schreiter, 33.

²⁰⁹ Schreiter, 33.
cause church tradition to challenge to contemporary practices.\textsuperscript{210} Schreiter notes that contemporary communities may actually find their closest parallel not with the historical contextual influences that formed orthodox doctrine but rather with those in contexts that formed doctrine that was deemed outside the boundaries of orthodox faith. Such a discovery can cause a contemporary community to rethink the influence of their cultural context in formulating local theological proposals. They can then compare them with church tradition and consider whether local theologies are in harmony or discordance with larger Christian teachings.\textsuperscript{211} This testing may cause contemporary local theologies to reshape themselves in drastic or subtle ways to attempt to align with their church traditions.

In addition to allowing church tradition to influence local theologies, Schreiter also flips the above analysis and allows local theology to critique the doctrines of church tradition. Schreiter notes that, “local theologies can remind us of parts of the tradition we have forgotten or chosen to ignore.”\textsuperscript{212} In bringing parallels between local theology and church tradition under the microscope of critical correlation, we can re-examine church tradition from new angles and new perspectives. This task can illuminate how traditional understandings of local contextual influences from the past may have distorted or suppressed certain theological constructions that are relevant to contemporary

\textsuperscript{210} Schreiter, 34.

\textsuperscript{211} Schreiter, 34.

\textsuperscript{212} Schreiter, 34.
Lastly, Schreiter examines how local theologies can shape the wider social practices beyond the theologizing community. He cautions that this influence can have negative consequences by raising examples of how New England Protestant interpretations of deliverance upon their arrival in America influenced American expansionist policies such as Manifest Destiny and how Dutch Reformed Church formulations of covenant theology were used to justify Apartheid in South Africa. Thus care needs to be taken that the theological constructions arising from local theologies do not result in a triumphalism of local culture at the expense of Christian understandings of love and compassion. Maintaining a balance between Christian teachings and local culture as developed in the critical correlative stages is paramount.

Schreiter concludes his presentation of his methodology with two further points of reflection. First, he considers the audience of theology by noting that it is generally a question that is overlooked by many theologians. He cites David Tracy’s categories of audience of the academy, the church, and society and notes that local theology is largely uninterested in addressing the academy but most often aimed at local churches in assisting them to address the needs and crises of their societies. Second, while noting that local theology is certainly not a new phenomenon to Christianity, the awareness of

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213 Schreiter, 34.
214 Schreiter, 35.
215 Schreiter, 35.
216 Schreiter, 36-37.
this process amid an increasingly diverse church is somewhat new. This diversity of
local theologies causes a certain amount of anxiety as to how to maintain a unity among
the universal Church as more and more localities begin to engage in theological
thinking.\textsuperscript{217} He recognizes that local theology will require some examination of
ecclesiology and understanding how the nature of the church reflects both the unity of
Christianity and the diversity of God’s creation.

\textbf{Thomas John Hastings’s Practical Theology and the One Body of Christ}

Hastings’s study of practical theological methodology is an attempt to balance
both the missional and cross-cultural tasks of practical theology. He views the missional
task of practical theology as the efforts to contextualize theological expression in local
idioms and the cross-cultural task of practical theology the effort to hold various local
theologies together in an ecumenical relationship.\textsuperscript{218} He also has reservations about the
current state of practical theology as it has developed in North America. Hastings notes
that various criticisms have arisen within the field of practical theology in North America
indicating there is a cultural captivity to North American academic norms. He discusses
this cultural captivity in relation to the critiques raised by James Fowler about Fowler’s

\textsuperscript{217} Schreiter, 37-38.

own work as well as that of David Tracy, Don Browning and Edward Farley. Fowler’s two critiques are that these critical correlative practical theological methods lack a means of engaging with divine agency in their theological approaches. Secondly, they exhibit a dependence on Enlightenment rationality that severely brackets metaphysical knowledge and attempts to use hermeneutical methodology to interpret tradition and contemporary experiences. Hastings sees these limitations arising from the academic culture of North American universities where these theories of theological method were developed. Within these contexts, “making positive theological statements about the agency of God in the practices of the contemporary church would be suicidal for practical theologians within the halls of many modern universities, where self-censorship on such questions is a virtual requirement of faculty membership.”

Hastings continues his critique of current practical theological methodology in North America by looking at the critique of these methods by Rebecca Chopp. Chopp argues that these theories of practical theological method are limited by privileging the place of middle class local congregations in correcting the errors of theologians. Her concern here is a sort of congregational navel-gazing where practical theologians from middle class North American backgrounds study congregations of the same socio-cultural context in search of new theological insights. Instead, she is concerned they only find

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219 Hastings, 5-6.

220 Hastings, 8.
self-validation of their theories of theological method. However, Hastings sees Chopp’s move to relocate the focus of practical theological methodology to the contexts of marginalized people subject to the same limitations of other North American approaches. That she struggles to create a place for divine agency in her own practical theological approach signals a shortcoming in her own approach. Although she privileges the base communities of Latin American liberation theology, in Hastings’s view, she idealizes these communities in much the same manner that those methodologies she critiques idealize middle-class American congregations.

Lastly, Hastings examines the transformational model of James Loder. Loder’s approach to practical theological method attempts to shift the ground of practical theology to center it in the confessional task of addressing theological questions rather than methodological questions. This shift seeks to focus practical theology to address the questions of “why” practices are like they are in communities of faith rather than “how” practices take place and should take place in communities of faith. In addressing the “why” questions about practices as theological concerns, Loder attempts to balance both social scientific and theological interpretations in a relationship modeled after the Christological formula of fully human and fully divine. In this manner, Hastings sees Loder reject previous critical correlational methodological preference to either privilege

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221 Hastings, 9.

222 Hastings, 10-11.

theory over praxis or vice versa. Hastings provides a generally positive view of Loder’s approach but finds that it continues to locate the transformative balance of praxis and theory in Enlightenment notions of the individual rather than communal notions of the ecclesia or communities of faith.\textsuperscript{224} Hastings posits that this is a result of monocultural experience and that by discovering the theological roots of Christian thought in a pre-modern non-Western culture where there was far less distinction between the individual and community, we can achieve the balance Loder seeks more effectively.\textsuperscript{225} In Hastings’s view, practical theology has, not yet paid adequate attention to either local missional or global ecumenical questions with which the church must wrestle if it is to resist becoming captive to some local cultural \textit{habitus}, political ideology, or world-denying mysticism. Especially in the face of the new risks and possibilities of accelerated globalization, local congregations that are becoming increasingly aware of the inescapable missional tensions with their own contexts need to devise theologically appropriate means for deepening their awareness of and conversations with churches in different spheres of the \textit{ecumene}.\textsuperscript{226} Hastings continues his search for a practical theological methodology that balances the localization of theology with the cross-cultural concerns borne of ecumenical relationships between localities with an examination of the theology and ministry of the Japanese Christian missionary, Tamura Naomi, in the late 1800s and early 1900s.\textsuperscript{227} In gleaning lessons from how Tamura formulated his theology both in a

\textsuperscript{224} Hastings, 20-21.

\textsuperscript{225} Hastings, 23-24.

\textsuperscript{226} Hastings, 135.

\textsuperscript{227} Hastings, 50-58.
Japanese context and in relation to the influences of larger ecumenical pressures from outsider missionaries and his North American theological training, Hastings develops steps toward a missional-ecumenical model of practical theology. The elements of this model emphasize a personal missional engagement at the congregational level. Hastings concurs with Chopp’s criticism of using congregational studies to validate one’s own theories yet wants to maintain a place for the role of personal engagement in congregational life as a means of contextual involvement for practical theologians.\textsuperscript{228} Furthermore, Hastings seeks to emphasize the role of personal and academic engagement across cultures. As his study of Tamura showed Tamura’s own commitment to engaging with cross-cultural awareness between his North American theological training and his Japanese ministry, Hastings sees this engagement as a requirement for a proper practical theological approach. He is critical of contemporary efforts to globalize theological education in North America as he sees very few efforts among North American theological scholars to remain in serious dialogue with their non-Western counterparts.\textsuperscript{229}

Hastings’s own experience in teaching theology in Japan also served to revise his view of practical theology. Having arrived in Japan with a Calvinistic theological formula that knowledge of God illuminates knowledge of self and vice versa, Hastings found himself confronted with radically different concepts of the self, informed by Japanese culture, which made his theological assumptions problematic. As a result, he

\textsuperscript{228} Hastings, 143.

\textsuperscript{229} Hastings, 144.
developed a theological response to this dilemma in viewing the self as primarily relational and communal by framing it as a “participation in Christ.” This response utilized Christianity as a point of mutual understanding, relationship, and belonging with others that could bridge cross-cultural gaps and provide a foundation for further understanding.

Another key characteristic Hastings presents is a need to remain humble in the face of unity and diversity in the order of creation. This principle addresses Hastings’s concerns regarding globalization. Hastings would like to avoid confusion caused by the idea that “all knowledge is local” as he sees such ideas leading to a “Babel world in which we may never really talk with but only past each other.” He would like to find a way to respect the complexities of cross-cultural communication without resorting to either a modernistic grand narrative based on Western philosophical and theological categories or complete relativism which can render everything as ultimately meaningless. In order to achieve a balance between these two extremes, he promotes the adoption of humility present in Japanese culture found in submitting oneself to others as a student does to a master in order to gain wisdom. This downplays American individualism in favor of the more participatory and communal relationship he sees in his use of Christ as a common link between cultures. Rather than seeing this as a disavowal

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230 Hastings, 146-148.

231 Hastings, 154.

232 Hastings, 154.
of one’s own cultural impulses and understandings of Christianity when relating with others cross-culturally, Hastings seeks to understand this relationship as recognition that others, “draw spiritual water from the same religious objects (scripture, ecumenical creeds, theology, etc.)” even when the forms of our expression of Christian faith is strikingly different. ²³³

**Interlude: Cooking Sadza with Schreiter and Hastings**

There are obvious benefits to these methodologies in the consideration of working with the illustrative community of Deaf Zimbabwean women. Foremost is the desire to contextualize or indigenize theological expression and give serious consideration to cross-cultural dynamics present in the missional relationship. By giving priority to the local context of theological expression, Schreiter privileges the context of the subaltern over the theological foundations of his own expressions of Christianity. Schreiter’s opening of Church tradition allows those involved in theological construction view even doctrinal theology as a series of local theologies. In turn, such a stance that all theology is local provides a radically level foundation for understanding the value of relative local theologies. This leveling effectively de-centers the authority of Western theology and offers opportunities for non-Western theologies to claim legitimacy and authority within their communities and in the larger family of Christian churches. By removing, or at least weakening, the hegemony of Western theology, Schreiter creates a process similar

²³³ Hastings, 164.
to Lyons’ approach in her research of woman combatants in Zimbabwe to, “engage in a
dialogue with her, thus privileging her voice in the context (and constraints) of academic
research.”

However, one can question whether the privileging of context in Schreiter’s
method actually fosters the development of self-theologizing. Schreiter’s methodology
seems to operate with an initial assumption that such agency already exists in a
sophisticated enough manner to engage in the successive stages of his approach. As was
noted about the difficulties of the methodologies of Browning, Poling and Miller, and
Miller-McLemore in relation to subaltern people, a failure to recognize and deal with the
silent and silenced nature of subaltern existence undermines the entire process. For
Schreiter, if the local community is to be the primary body of theological agents, one
presumes they have a base of knowledge to open their culture. Similarly, his process of
opening church tradition presumes a reflective knowledge of ones faith traditions.

In the case of Deaf Zimbabwean women, while they surely have intimate
knowledge of their own experiences as Deaf women struggling to gain or retain agency
as mothers of hearing children, the complexities of broken communication between
generations in an extended family with both Deaf and hearing members noted by
Chiswanda raises the possibility that perhaps these women lack full access to the larger
societal knowledge of Shona culture. Similarly, while some of these women grew up
attending residential schools for the deaf sponsored by religious organizations that may

234 Lyons, 6.
have included spiritual instruction, many more of them were either in the resource unit classrooms with teachers who could not sign well or had no formal education at all.

Couple this lack of educational access with the verbal and aural nature of Christian worship in general and Shona culture in particular, and it is highly unlikely that any more than a small handful of women have a clear understanding of Christian teachings or traditions beyond what they extrapolate from the visual elements of their experience.

What understandings they do have are likely to be largely gleaned from the attempts of others to impart basic religious teachings.

To what degree might Schreiter’s correlation of local theological expressions found in the opening of culture and understanding of Church tradition as a series of local theologies struggle to emerge in any meaningful way in such a community setting?

While the lives of Deaf Zimbabwean women do not present theological blank slates and their understanding of the Christian faith may not be sufficiently developed to begin the type of correlation and analysis that Schreiter proposes, their familiarity with the rhythms and patterns of Christian life is rich. Their contact with hearing Zimbabwean churches and missionary groups provides the foundation for a pre-existing framework of Christian thought that they may feel social pressure to adopt in order to maintain the support that contact with hearing people and missionary groups provides them in their daily struggles. Such pressures represent the hegemony of voices outside their experience that often overwhelm in their effort to educate and inform the “unknowing ones” and thus serve to silence Deaf Zimbabwean women from developing their own self-theologizing agency.
Hastings has his own reservations about the radical nature of declaring “all theology as local” inasmuch as it may limit cross-cultural relationships to only superficial exchange and understanding. His own approach attempts to reframe cross-cultural relationships as a mutual participation in Christ that brings together disparate practices and expressions of faith in a common task of Christian mission to one another. The practice of humility is his safeguard against notions of superiority in this relationship as participants are encouraged to continually seek wisdom from the other as a part of the ecumenical body of Christ in the world. However, Hastings’s approach also presumes that communities of faith encountered by practical theologians in missional and cross-cultural relationships have a strong understanding and skills to articulate their own theological practices and beliefs. While humility is definitely warranted when working with subaltern communities in order to ensure the privileging of their self-expression and agency, Hastings seems to overlook some potential risks for this participatory relationship and dialogue in a context such as Deaf Zimbabwean women. As previously mentioned, these women are only just developing their awareness and ability to talk about their experiences. They may quickly and uncritically borrow the ways others are talking about themselves in a participatory relationship in the same way they might borrow such ideas in the active listening technique used by Browning to gather his descriptive data. While such borrowing gives them vocabulary to get started in the task of self-expression and self-theologizing agency, an outsider practical theologian must also consider how to engage them in critical reflection on how they are telling their own stories. Therefore, what is needed is not a passive humility, but an active form that
invites Deaf Zimbabwean women to challenge uncritical adoption of the concepts and vocabulary of others in constructing their own stories. As with critical correlative practical theological methods, these missional and cross-cultural methods offer key ingredients to this theological sadza, yet they remain incomplete without further consideration as to the nature of Deaf subaltern life.
Hannah Lewis’ *Deaf Liberation Theology*

In this book, Lewis seeks to use the categories of contemporary Deaf studies to build a theological expression rooted in the history and culture of Deaf people. She begins her theologizing with a personal reflection upon the meaning of the word ‘deaf’ in her own experience as a unique and God-created state of being rather than the more commonly used meaning among hearing people of someone who is ‘not-hearing.’ From this stance, she argues that previous efforts at theology in relation to Deaf people were written by hearing people and done with a motivation to “[arouse] pity in people’s minds, so they would financially support work with deaf people.” Lewis notes that since the 1980’s, there have been more Deaf initiated efforts at theologizing which call for a liberationist framework that either re-read Christian tradition or seek to challenge its treatment of Deaf people. Her own framework for approaching this theological task is postmodern and postcolonial in her efforts as a Deaf theologian to privilege the views of Deaf people. She goes as far as saying,

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236 Lewis, 2.
I am really not interested in what hearing people, however involved with Deaf people they might be, have said about what Deaf people think and what a theology of Deaf people might look like. This is intended to be a Deaf theology full of Deaf voices, and if this makes this work more than usually partial and subjective, I don’t apologize. It is necessary to balance out the hearing-centered discourse that has dominated Deaf life for well over a century.\textsuperscript{237}

In taking such a stance, Lewis seeks to make a radical break from past theological thinking about Deaf people and seek out a means by which Deaf people ourselves can articulate our theological thinking.

She also asserts that simply constructing a Deaf articulation of theology, while contextual, is not necessarily liberationist. She adopts a stance similar to that of Latin American liberation theologian Clodovis Boff who states that Liberation theology is more than ‘one theology among others’ and instead a theological stance that critiques Church tradition and societal practices that oppress and disenfranchise people in Latin America.\textsuperscript{238} However, the larger societal and ecclesial context of Lewis’ own theological work as a Deaf theologian is the Church of England in 21\textsuperscript{st} century England. She sees her Deaf theology of liberation as committed to social change, not so much as a political aim, but rather as a prophetic proclamation of the “liberation involved in the kingdom of God.”\textsuperscript{239} Lewis also takes cues from feminist theology and Nancy Eiesland’s disability theology in how these approaches deal with a contentious relationship with scriptures of the Christian tradition that have long been interpreted in ways that are exclusionary and

\textsuperscript{237} Lewis, 6.

\textsuperscript{238} Lewis, 11.

\textsuperscript{239} Lewis, 12.
In adopting these various methodological approaches, Lewis seeks a theological process that allows for a social liberation which gives the “freedom to develop as a ‘first-class Deaf person’ rather than constantly playing ‘catch-up’ as a ‘second-class hearing person’ in today’s world.” Therefore, she norms her theological thinking by giving priority to the norms of Deaf culture over those of predominantly hearing derived norms of Christian traditions. In doing so, she seeks to view liberation as more than material and political but also a psycho-spiritual liberation of a soteriological nature.

Having laid out her general methodological stance, she proceeds with a deconstructionist analysis of the dominant views on Deaf lives, the Deaf churches within the Church of England, and the theological construction of Deaf people. In this analysis, she challenges the dominant hearing discourses that frame how hearing people view Deaf people and come to control various aspects of our lives. Furthermore, Lewis marks the specific ways in which English Deaf people found their lives proscribed by these ideas in society and the churches. This analysis finds that many hearing people employ a medical model for understanding deafness and deaf lives. Medical models locate the problem of disability or deafness in the bodies of individuals. If one’s body does not fit the usual

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240 Lewis, 15.
241 Lewis, 16.
242 Lewis, 17.
physical or functional norm of society, one becomes labeled as *disabled*. When applied to Deaf people, a medical model ignores and dismisses the historical reality of Deaf views of ourselves as members of unique and distinct communities of sign language users. Instead, our being becomes defined by a physical malfunction that must be ‘cured’ or ‘corrected’ through medical means. When this model influences the telling of the origin of Deaf churches, it frames these churches as the benevolent outreach of hearing people to provide assistance to those considered less fortunate.\(^{244}\)

Alongside this analysis, Lewis also documents an alternative viewpoint held by Deaf communities who hold different understandings of what being Deaf in the world means and how Deaf churches began. This viewpoint holds that being Deaf is primarily a cultural-linguistic difference rather than a physical difference. While the physical reality of audiological deafness is not denied, it is not what defines us as Deaf. Instead, it is the use of visual gestural language and the unique views of the world that arise from the use of such a language for understanding and communicating human experience that defines our alterity.\(^{245}\) In the cultural model, the solution to the ‘problem’ of Deafness then is located in the recognition and understanding of signed languages and Deaf people as the bearers of unique cultures developed around the use of these languages.

Lewis notes that a similar dichotomy exists between the predominantly hearing views of traditional theology and scriptural interpretation in relation to Deaf people and

\(^{244}\) Lewis, 40-42.

\(^{245}\) Lewis, 30.
the theological thought and interpretation of scripture among Deaf people ourselves. A medical model of deafness reads Deaf people as being a flawed production of human creation in the image of God.\textsuperscript{246} Alternatively, the suffering of Deaf and disabled people may be read as serving a divine purpose. The notion that one suffers so that one might overcome adversity and be stronger implies that God wants certain people to suffer either or their own good or as an example for others to follow in facing adversity.\textsuperscript{247} Such a viewpoint seems rather dismissive of the actual suffering of Deaf and disabled people and suggests that the reality of such suffering primarily benefits others more than those who suffer.

Perhaps the most damaging aspect of hearing theological mis-readings of Deaf lives has been the way in which Romans 10:17 has been interpreted. The New Revised Standard Version translates this verse as, “So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.”\textsuperscript{248} Traditionally, this verse has been interpreted to mean that Deaf people were incapable of faith due to a lack of the ability to hear what is told in the word of Christ. Many Deaf studies writers have attributed this interpretation to the early Christian theologian Augustine.\textsuperscript{249} However, the attribution of this

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\textsuperscript{246} Lewis, 68.
\textsuperscript{247} Lewis, 73-76.
\textsuperscript{248} Romans 10:17 (NRSV).
\textsuperscript{249} See John Vickrey van Cleve and Barry A. Crouch, \textit{A Place of Their Own: Creating the Deaf Community in America.} (Washington DC: Gallaudet University Press, 1989), p. 4
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interpretation to Augustine is a misperception based on a misquotation that has been carried through the centuries. As early as 1912, the American Annals of the Deaf published an article explaining how this misquotation occurred in the writings of a Spanish proponent for oral methods of educating deaf children. Augustine’s actual views on deaf people and signed language are actually very positive and commending of its capability as a language of the soul. However incorrect it is to attribute this oralist interpretation of Romans 10:17 to Augustine, it remains a commonly held interpretation in church history and is often bolstered with Augustine’s authoritative. Such readings of scripture have created numerous responses from Christian authorities in the history of deaf education preventing the use of signed languages causing a breach of trust between the church and Deaf people that still exists.

Lewis sees this disenfranchising of Deaf people within the framework of faith and salvation as the ground for viewing Deaf people as objects of pity and charity on behalf of the church. Such attitudes have undergone subtle changes over the centuries into a liberal development style model where charitable institutions seek to aid ‘lesser developed’ groups to become capable contributors to society. However, these models of development remain in the control of hearing specialists in what becomes an industry of

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services. Lewis counters such influences with sources from Latin American Liberation theology in arguing that the authority of such specialists or experts is based on a false sense of neutral judgment of what is best for poor and oppressed people. Instead, such oppression and poverty can only be ended when poor people are able to make their own decisions.

Lewis challenges traditional theological readings of Deaf lives and ministry with Deaf people with a central question, “Can Jesus Sign?” In asking this question, she is echoing concerns raised by both Deaf parishioners and community members in her context of Great Britain. She sees the development of a Christology relevant to Deaf people as the key to making Christian theology relevant to Deaf lives. In doing so, she seeks to answer the question, “Just what does a hearing Jewish man who lived in first-century Galilee have to say to Deaf people in twenty-first-century Britain?” Or more theologically stated, how might this hearing Jesus Christ be claimed as a savior of Deaf people? She builds her Christology of Jesus as a savior of Deaf people around the Johannine conception of Jesus as the logos or Word of God. In translating the Greek term logos into British Sign Language (BSL), she conceives of Jesus as the SIGN-OF

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251 Lewis, 93.

252 Lewis, 99.

253 Lewis, 133.

254 Lewis, 133.
making the coming of Jesus a physical gesture of God’s communication in the same manner that physical gestures become language in BSL.  

From this Christology, Lewis examines Deaf worship as a set of practices shaped by a tension between Deaf cultural patterns and the practices adopted and adapted from hearing ways of gathering, performing liturgy, and praising and proclaiming God. To correct this tension, Lewis suggests a liberatory revision of liturgy following cues from African liberation theologians. Such revisions go beyond a superficial translation of acts of worship into signed languages but encourage forms of worship that embody the social patterns and language expression of Deaf people. In proposing Deaf churches as sites of a revised liturgy of Deaf worship claiming Jesus Christ as a savior and liberator of Deaf people, Lewis seeks to make these churches a Deaf space where storytelling and creativity allow for Deaf people to self-determine our own theological expression.

**Wayne Morris’ *Theology Without Words***

Wayne Morris also addresses the intersection of contemporary Deaf studies and theology in *Theology Without Words*. The crux of Morris’ theological construction is 

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The use of capital letters in writing is a convention of Deaf studies to indicate that the written text is a gloss of signed vocabulary. As signs do not always correspond directly to written words, presenting them as a gloss in this manner retains an awareness of the potential difference of meaning.

Lewis, 150-151.

Lewis, 172-173.
that any Deaf theology will be an inherently non-literary theology because Deaf culture is ultimately a non-literary culture.\textsuperscript{258} In labeling Deaf cultures as non-literary in nature, he is likening them to cultures where oral transmission of information is the primary, if not sole, means of preserving memory. Morris notes that much of traditional church theology has been developed primarily through written forms of spoken languages. While not all sources in the theologies of Western Christianity are written, theological thinking comes to its highest levels of legitimization by being crafted into written form with the exact meaning of specific words leading to serious theological controversy at times.\textsuperscript{259} Therefore, hearing people can view theology as primarily an intellectual enterprise of reasoned reflection. Obviously not all hearing people and not all theologies developed from hearing contexts adopt this stance, but the primary thrust of the theological task for most hearing people in the Western context that have shaped Christian tradition have remained highly textual, academic, and reasoned in nature.\textsuperscript{260} Morris sees this as the predominant interpretation of Anselm’s famous description of theology as “Faith Seeking Understanding.”\textsuperscript{261}

Morris contrasts these characteristics of hearing Western theology to what he observes in theological conversations among Deaf people.

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\textsuperscript{259} Morris, 79.

\textsuperscript{260} Morris, 78.

\textsuperscript{261} Morris, 74.
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Deaf people’s theology as it is expressed and communicated is at times mysterious (for example, feeling God with them in a physical way) and at times reasonable (for example, considered arguments challenging discrimination in employment). I would here, then, like to suggest that theology for Deaf people is not just about giving an account of their Christian beliefs but is also about expressing something of the mysterious encounter of God. Theology for Deaf people, therefore involves reasonable ‘thinking about God’, but it is also about the expression of the ‘encounter with mystery.’

Morris sees Deaf theology arising from the interplay between the revelation of God’s mystery and the experiences of people in the world, primarily as understood through Deaf experiences. Often, Deaf uses of written sources from Christian tradition in theologizing will then take a path of development opposite of that taken by hearing theological uses of written sources. Morris notes that what hearing theology does in developing the Bible is to take oral stories and transform them into written form. These written scriptures are then deliberated and developed into reasoned and written hermeneutical theological treatises. In contrast, Deaf theological discussion often eschews the value placed on linguistic accuracy in Bible translation to embody the stories of written scripture in signed language. What is important to Deaf people in their hermeneutical approach to scripture is not so much the fidelity to the original written forms but the fidelity to the experience of encountering God’s mystery that led to the creation of the stories contained in the Bible. Such a reading often inserts the Deaf experience into Christian scripture by employing a technique Robert Evans described as

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262 Morris, 86.

263 Morris, 88-90.
reading the gaps. In making moves such as this, Morris suggests that Deaf people are creating a “theology without words” inasmuch that it is a theology that does not rely on written forms but an ever evolving process of signed communication including the art forms of storytelling and dramatization in liturgical and non-liturgical contexts. In this way, he modifies Anselm’s description of theology by characterizing Deaf theological approaches as, “Faith Seeking Life.” This formulation recognizes Deaf theology as a continual process of bringing theological sources into direct interaction with lived daily experience. Morris makes many observations of how this conception of Deaf theology contains many parallels to non-Western theological approaches, particularly those from Africa. My discussion on these aspects of his thought will be included in chapter seven of this study.

As a hearing person, Morris readily acknowledges the limitations of his own views as an outsider to Deaf theologizing. He undertook his study in an effort to investigate the nature of Deaf theology and a commitment to “encouraging a better understanding of the Deaf community in society and to pursuing greater justice and equality for Deaf people.” In taking such a stance, he discovered some methodological dilemmas of his own in beginning his research. Like Lewis, he too found a dearth of

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264 Morris, 108-111.
265 Morris, 90-93.
266 Morris, 86-87.
267 Morris, xvi.
written material researching theological thinking and dialogue among Deaf people until the last thirty years and notes that very little of it has found its way into publication and made more widely available.\textsuperscript{268} Thus he sought to work directly with Deaf communities in Great Britain in order to observe and reflect first hand on what was taking place in Deaf churches. Written questionnaires quickly proved to be an ineffective way of gathering information for analysis despite such methods often being used in hearing qualitative research. Deaf people largely rejected such questionnaires as inappropriate because they either felt inadequate at expressing themselves in written language or felt that translating their ideas from British Sign Language to written English would alter the meaning of what they were trying to express.\textsuperscript{269} Morris turned to interviews conducted in an informal setting rather than a highly structured setting in order to ensure a maximum level of comfort and allowance for dialogical interaction that ensures clarity of meaning.\textsuperscript{270} He supplemented this information with participant observation and journaling methods to note how Deaf people interacted and conversed with one another.\textsuperscript{271} Lastly, Morris employed Emmanuel Lartey’s pastoral cycle as a guide for his personal professional stance in theological research. This cycle begins with an attempt to first understand experiences as they were encountered. This is followed by an

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\item \textsuperscript{268} Morris, 46-47.
\item \textsuperscript{269} Morris, 48-49.
\item \textsuperscript{270} Morris, 49-50.
\item \textsuperscript{271} Morris, 54-57.
\end{itemize}
exploration of the meaning of these experiences through the lenses of various academic disciplines. Theological reflection follows as a third stage which Morris found to be problematic inasmuch the limited access of Deaf people to sources of Christian tradition raised issues for how he could extrapolate theological meaning from his observations. Lastly, Morris felt that the final stage of Lartey’s cycle involving action and response was not a part of his role as a hearing person. He limited his study to simply recording and discussing his observations out of sensitivity to the historical tendency for hearing and able bodied people to dominate discourse about Deaf and disabled lives in offering solutions or opinions about what is a best course of action.

Interlude: Cooking Sadza with Lewis and Morris

Both Lewis and Morris present exciting and fresh ideas about theological thinking among and with Deaf people. Both authors integrate contemporary Deaf studies with theological thinking to arrive at rich descriptions regarding the challenges faced by Deaf people as people of faith and the current practices of Deaf churches in relation to these issues. Although their focus is primarily on the Deaf communities and churches of Great Britain, their observations have strong relevance to a wide variety of Deaf people who encounter the world through primarily visual means and come to view their experiences as a normal variation of human existence. Therefore, both of these texts offer helpful

272 Morris, 58-60.
strategies toward engendering self-theologizing agency among Deaf Zimbabwean women. However, there also exist some problems in employing these two approaches. This interlude aims to identify where those problems arise.

Lewis’s use of Latin American Liberation theology as her guiding theological framework follows a well-worn path of theologizing about the lives and experiences of marginalized and oppressed people. In adopting a postmodern and postcolonial framework for liberation, she is aligning herself with other recent thinkers in Deaf studies in identifying liberation from oppression and self-determination as goals for Deaf scholarship. Her adoption of this stance is an effective means for entering into practical theological discourse as liberation theology shares some common vocabulary as it enters into various cultural contexts such as Latin American, African, African-American, American Indian, gay and lesbian, and feminist communities.

However, American Indian theologian George Tinker raises concerns about simply applying the terms of Latin American liberation theology to other contexts. He sees American Indians, “as indigenous communities, our notions of freedom and liberation will be necessarily different from the expressions of Christianity that have emerged, for example from latin american liberation theologians during the last thirty or more years.”

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273 See Ladd, Paddy. *Understanding Deaf Culture.* (Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters, 2003) for a recent influential example of this approach.

committed to the continuance of the Christian church. Given the involvement of the
Christian church in missionary efforts and colonial conquest of indigenous peoples in the
Americas, such a pre-commitment raises significant issues for American Indian
communities and theologians.

Therefore, although Tinker’s own theological construction remains Christian in
class, he seeks a theological framework that allows for American Indian liberation
theologies to either remain Christian or adopt non-Christian or even anti-Christian
characteristics. He begins with identifying four characteristics of American Indian
cultures that are significantly different from those of the Western traditions that have
shaped Christian tradition; spatial thinking, a preference for communitarian values over
individualism, interrelatedness with the natural world, a “filial attachment to particular
places” that gives rise to a relationship with the land based on responsibility rather than
ownership. In identifying what is unique to American Indian worldviews and cultures,
Tinker makes his starting point for liberation theology uniquely American Indian in
responding specifically to American Indian experiences and thoughts rather than making
any pre-commitment to a tradition arising from and heavily influenced by different
cultural sources. His scholarly suspicion is that such a pre-commitment to Christian
tradition as found in Latin American liberation theology, no matter how indigenized,

adjectives is an attempt to avoid an “unnecessary normativizing or universalizing” on the
part of the reader. Tinker, American Indian Liberation, 1 fn.

275 Tinker, 2.

276 Tinker, 7-9.
would become a hindrance to finding and articulating what liberation means and looks like to American Indians. Thus, while accepting liberation as a fundamental political and spiritual principle and aim in his theological work, he seeks to ensure some means of allowing liberation to be understood in terms of local context.

Botswanan theologian, Musa Dube, whose work is discussed in the next chapter, shares this suspicion of adopting categories and concepts uncritically. She concurs with feminist scholar Chandra Mohanty in seeing how Western feminist homogenizing and universalizing of the category of ‘woman’ as oppressed by patriarchy wherever she is imposes Western particularities of what constitutes a woman and how her oppression takes place upon non-Western women. Dube’s concern is that any such imposition automatically re-writes the experiences of African women in terms that require them to achieve liberation on Western feminist terms.

My reservations with Lewis’ adoption of Latin American liberation theology are similar, what might she be overlooking as potential sources for Deaf liberation theology by adopting the frameworks and meanings inherent in Latin American liberation theology? While she does an excellent job raising significant questions in regard to challenging traditionally held notions about what Deafness means theologically and how ministry with Deaf people should be engaged, her Christology and ecclesiology still carry the same assumptions of what is necessary for a Christian theology of liberation contained in Latin American efforts. Morris identifies one such assumption in his

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critique of Lewis’ work in her valuation of developing scriptural hermeneutics aimed at Deaf liberation. He critiques this from his own observations of Deaf theological discourse that written scripture and its interpretation of meaning may not need to take such a central role in Deaf theology. He acknowledges that this difference in their theologies arises from different methodological pre-commitments about the role of scripture in theology. Yet his stance of being willing to de-center the role of scripture in Deaf theology comes from what he observes Deaf people doing in practice rather than a pre-commitment to other theological sources as Lewis does. The resultant effect that Morris sees in Lewis’ approach is that her formulation of Deaf liturgies are still primarily written by Deaf elites using the frameworks and patterns from their theological education and training coming from hearing sources.278

Although, the type of pre-commitments Lewis makes allow for a continuity and harmony with existing Christian theology, one might wonder what Deaf liberation and Deaf liberation theologies might look like if they take Deaf sources and thought as their starting points. A recent paradigm shift in Deaf studies seeks to explore the meaning of Deaf experience and concepts in this sort of manner. As a discipline, Deaf studies arose largely as a reaction to hegemonic influences of medical definitions of deafness as hearing loss. Medical views framed the condition of being deaf as a biological and/or social deviance arising from the lack of sensory input that everyone else had. In recent years, Deaf scholars have begun to employ a different paradigm that has taken on the

278 Morris, 117-119.
name of Deaf gain. This paradigmatic shift arises from an observation of a Deaf English performance artist, Aaron Williamson who wondered why doctors all told him that he was “losing his hearing” and not one doctor told him he was “gaining his deafness.”\textsuperscript{279} This reversal of terms signals that the state of being Deaf is not necessarily required to be viewed as the lack of something, but also can be viewed as the addition of certain characteristics, viewpoints, and practices that benefit a person and society. Bauman and Murray suggest various ways in which Deaf gain provides unique contributions to human diversity in noting cultural features and practices from Deaf communities. A Deaf Swedish snowboarding coach noted that hearing snowboarders were relying on the sound of their boards cutting into the snow to gauge the quality of their turns, when having these snowboarders practice with earplugs and rely solely on the feel of the snow, their performance improved. Deaf globe-trotters often find linguistic barriers between even radically different signed languages far more easily overcome in building transnational relationships than hearing people do in confronting the barriers between spoken languages. Examining the Deaf preference for collectivism and how Deaf communities build bonds on various social levels might lead to new understandings of how human interaction and relationship can occur.\textsuperscript{280} In listing such characteristics, Bauman and

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Murray employ the concept of Deaf gain in a manner similar to what Tinker uses in his American Indian liberation theology to challenge Westernized assumptions about what liberation means. It would seem that Deaf liberation theologies might be more beneficial and more engendering of Deaf self-theologizing if they were to employ the idea of Deaf gain in maintaining suspicion regarding the pre-commitments inherent in other forms of liberation theology.

As previously mentioned, Morris’ approach in *Theology Without Words* attempts to adopt a stance of building theological ideas upon the existing practices he observes in Deaf discourses on theology. Yet he runs into methodological dilemmas as a hearing person who admits that British Sign Language is his “second language and so much of [his] thinking and reflecting takes place in using English which must influence [his] own intellectual framework for reflection.”\(^{281}\) He addresses this dilemma by applying principles of solidarity with Deaf people adopted from Latin American and African liberation theologies. However, Morris limits the use of these theologies to his stance of solidarity rather than using such conceptions of liberation as an encompassing source for the meaning of liberation itself. Much of his solidarity was framed by employing Boff and Boff’s three forms of commitment with the oppressed. These three forms are regular visitation of communities and involvement with the oppressed, alternating periods of scholarly work and pastoral work, and living permanently among the communities.\(^{282}\)

\(^{281}\) Morris, xvi.

\(^{282}\) Morris, 65-66.
acknowledges that Boff and Boff’s idea of permanently living among the poor doesn’t translate well to the Deaf community because with few exceptions, Deaf people in Great Britain live as a diaspora among hearing people. Nor does he attempt to engage in pastoral work, he sees his role as a researcher instead as a participant observer who reflects various practices he sees within the context of a Deaf church, but not as their pastor. Thus he seeks to employ the regular visitation of Deaf communities as his primary means of forming solidarity with Deaf people.\textsuperscript{283} Morris acknowledges that his work then suffers from some of the same issues that Jürgen Moltmann observed in Latin American liberation theology in asking “where is Latin America in it all?”\textsuperscript{284} He counters this question by reframing the audience of liberation theology in his own theological work as a discourse aimed primarily at the privileged class of hearing people to assist in their understanding of the nature of the oppression encountered by Deaf people as a result of hearing ways of thinking and living. Morris sees the aim of his theological research with Deaf people as joining in solidarity with Deaf expression, “to help their views be understood by using the skills of one who has opted to join the Deaf community in their struggle to bring about change.”\textsuperscript{285} He acknowledges that while many Deaf people welcome such a stance, it remains viewed with an air of suspicion as by many Deaf people as well.

\textsuperscript{283} Morris, 66-67.

\textsuperscript{284} Morris, 64.

\textsuperscript{285} Morris, 65.
However, where does this solidarity appear in his theological research? While he does a fair job in presenting what he observes, how well does his presentation reflect the width of diversity present in Deaf communities? He conducted his interviews with 40 people from the Deaf community in Birmingham, England, 20 people from other locations in Britain, 20 people from Zimbabwe, and 16 hearing people from Britain who work with Deaf communities. While this sampling of Deaf experiences proves to provide interesting and meaningful reflections, it also seems largely colored by the Deaf experience in Great Britain. Also, many of the research subjects in Birmingham were over the age of 60 and may reflect a particular generational view of Deaf life and experience that does not fully capture recent shifts in how Deaf people view themselves and express those views. Morris recognizes the limitations of time and place on his research in stating that, “A different researcher looking into this same topic could potentially produce a quite different exploration of the theology of Deaf people than will follow here.” Yet he also recognizes what many scholars in Deaf studies recognize that there are significant similarities in how Deaf people come to view themselves that cross geo-political and social differences.

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286 Morris, 50-51.
287 Morris, 51.
288 Morris, 71.
289 Morris, 71.
Morris does well to acknowledge this dilemma and outline the difficulties of being a hearing researcher studying a fluid and ever-changing non-literary theological discourse that often takes on the same challenging aspects of oral theology. However, he does seem to lack direct expression from Deaf people themselves in his study. Most of his work is presented through the lenses of his own observations, which however accurate or helpful—remain his own. This is in line with his understanding of not overstepping his role as a hearing researcher, but his work would benefit greatly from some revelation of what Deaf people think of his ideas and observations. In my own conversations about this work with some Deaf Christians in America, the notion of doing theology without the Bible is viewed as a radically dangerous idea. Some of the reservations Deaf Christians in America may have with this idea may be due to a more conservative viewpoint about what Christian theology entails and requires in relation to scripture. However, I have also seen such reservations expressed by Deaf people using many of the practices Morris advocates in re-reading scripture through storytelling, drama, and reading the gaps strategies seeking to insert contemporary Deaf viewpoints in scripture. Again, such differences may be a product of the different location that Morris observed and that which I encounter in America. It seems his analysis of his observations about Deaf theological discourse may make claims in regard to the use of scripture that reach beyond the views and expressions of those Deaf people he observes. In order for his *Theology Without Words* to become engendering of Deaf self-theologizing agency, it would seem that he needs to engage those he observes in the analysis of his own observations. Morris seems to lack an additional step of dialogical reflection that allows
the subjects of his study to also be participant-observers in this process. While self-
reflection on the part of the researcher is a welcome step in theological research
methodology with subaltern people, such self-reflection does not guarantee that the
observer is being observed and critiqued by the subaltern as well.

The addition of these two theological approaches to this theological sadza
enriches the understanding of Deaf life in relation to the concern of developing a practical
theological approach that engenders self-theologizing agency among Deaf Zimbabwean
women. However, these too are incomplete. While Morris seeks to engage with
concepts developed by African theologians and Lewis engages with the subaltern realities
of Latin American liberation theology, their theological constructions remain largely
within the context of the Deaf communities of England. Despite these limitations, they
are important ingredients in this theological sadza as they acknowledge that much work
remains in formulating self-theologizing agency and expression among Deaf
communities worldwide.
Musa Dube’s Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible

Dube begins by outlining the postcolonial condition of sub-Saharan Africa in relation to the Bible. Her guiding metaphor is a story passed through oral tradition recounted by many authors that when the white man came to Africa, he had the Bible and Africans had the land. The white man said, “let us pray,” and everyone bowed to pray. After the prayer, when everyone lifted their heads, the white man had the land and Africans had the Bible. This anecdote illustrates for Dube that the coming of the Bible to Africa was synonymous with the loss of their lands to colonial control. At the same time, this story suggests that in this transfer, the Bible became a sub-Saharan African book to be read and interpreted accordingly. Dube reviews a number of Africa postcolonial philosophers who argue that through the experience of imperialist colonialism, sub-Saharan Africa encountered a hegemonic construction of thought that undermined African self-understanding. Local histories were re-written to fit the grand economic narrative of the West and subjugated Africa a mysterious or backwards “other” in need of colonial reorganization to better fit the construct of a European dominated world. The New Testament served as an operative self-validating narrative for European

\[290\] Dube, 3.
colonizers in naming Africans as “others” in need of conversion. However, as noted earlier, Bhabha’s view of a postcolonial reading is not only a reading that comes chronologically later than this period of control, but also seeks to move beyond the strictures of this hegemonic narrative. Postcolonial readings examine what Africa means and is from African points of view without attempting to validate European concerns.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Dube also brings similar critical analysis to how Western feminisms have operated as a hegemonic force in defining how women’s experiences are understood in Western terms. Such a framework for understanding feminism leaves non-Western women in a subjugated role in need of the assistance of Western women in order to achieve liberation as defined by Western women’s concerns. She brings specific criticism to Schüssler Fiorenza’s work to reclaim the history of women’s contribution to early Christianity and scripture as Schüssler Fiorenza, “brackets and maintains imperial violence by not exposing its ideology or addressing its impact in history.” Thus Dube sees Schüssler Fiorenza’s emphasis on patriarchy without consideration of the impact of imperial control in the world of early Christianity as a disservice to current feminist Biblical scholarship. Such an approach will likely read non-Western women’s experiences as being primarily issues of patriarchy in non-

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291 Dube, 8-12.
292 Dube, 15.
293 Dube, 24.
294 Dube, 29.
Western cultures without regard for how the colonial period shaped or distorted how non-Western women viewed and view themselves.

In suggesting an alterative manner of reading that takes both patriarchy and imperialism seriously, Dube turns to the *semoya* readers of African Independent Churches (AICs). Dube recounts that AICs began as movements and reactions against the domination of African church life by exclusively white male leadership in the traditional mission churches. Such reactions raised deep questions about the spiritual and moral superiority of European religious and cultural values in relation to African traditions. The AICs therefore forged new churches where the religious content of Christianity was retained but read through African religious and cultural values.295 One of these values was the presence of the Spirit, or *moya*, as the principle agent of God’s guidance. The Spirit was available freely to both women and men allowing them, “to prophesy, heal the sick, assist those searching for jobs, restore family relations, ensure a good harvest and good rains, ensure good reproduction of livestock, and dispel the ever-intruding forces of evil from people’s lives.”296 Those who read situations and texts with the eyes of *moya* are termed *semoya* readers.

The rise of such practices in AICs has been traced back to a woman, Kimpa Vita, whose Spiritualist church in the Congo became a powerful proclamation against imperial

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295 Dube, 39-40.

296 Dube, 41.
control through the Catholic Church.\textsuperscript{297} Vita’s experience is a model for understanding the experiences of many African women who became founders and leaders of AICs in sub-Saharan Africa on the basis of receiving a vision and mandate empowered by the Spirit to prophesy and heal in ways that subverted the white male dominated control of the mission churches and colonial administrations. When confronted with scriptural interpretations of male leadership in Christian communities, one contemporary Botswanan female AIC leader replied, “When God spoke to me through the Spirit, God never opened the Bible to me. Instead, God’s Spirit told me to begin a church and heal God’s people, which is what I am doing.”\textsuperscript{298} Dube thus sees this spirit driven authority for women’s leadership as an avenue for African feminist readings of the Bible that challenge both patriarchy and colonial imperialism simultaneously.

Dube continues by examining how various methodologies of reading scripture have traditionally upheld the status quo of imperialist dominance of land, power, and people. In addition, she notes that many times, these strategies of reading have gendered such power relations by attributing male characteristics to the powerful and female characteristics to the powerless. She recounts the story of Rahab in Exodus as an example of how Israelite desires to conquer and control the land. As a prostitute, Rahab is a woman open for the sexual use of any man. But in finding her salvation and deliverance through her declaration of allegiance to the Israelites, she becomes a

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\item \textsuperscript{297} Dube, 41.
\item \textsuperscript{298} Dube, 42.
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symbolic representation of the idea that subjugation to Israelite control was a means to improvement. Such gendering of power relations continued in the writings of colonial era literature as non-Western cultures were often portrayed as a subjugated woman in relation to European colonial control. Therefore, the African woman was often portrayed as she was in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* as “savage and superb, wild eyed and magnificent” and yet find her meaning and value in her dependence on a white master whom she is said to love. Dube sees this reading of African women as not unlike the scriptural reading of Rahab in Exodus where patriarchy and imperialism converge to create a web of dominance. Such restrictive settings require African women to develop decolonizing strategies for reading such texts and understanding their own lives. Therefore, African women will come to read scripture through the eyes of Rahab and question how this telling of her story might differ if told from Rahab’s point of view.

Dube calls her methodology for African feminists reading a “doubly colonized decolonizing method.” African women have been doubly colonized through both the imperial impositions on their socio-cultural understanding of the world through European colonization and the imposition of patriarchal dominance of men over women in conjunction with colonization. Dube employs several strategies to her decolonizing method of reading scripture and experience. First, she recognizes that early feminist

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299 Dube, 76-80.

300 Dube, 94-95.

301 Dube, 111.
emphasis on patriarchy without regard to imperialism forced non-Western women to prioritize various aspects of their experiences and identities in unhelpful ways. In recognizing this tension, Dube encourages a search for new readings that do not create this tension. She also returns to the notion of the *semoya*, or spirit driven, readings of AIC women in their understanding and validation of Christian leadership. Such actions create new spaces for African women to develop their own expression of spiritual leadership and root their authority within this expression rather than continually struggling with readings of Christianity written from other experiences.

Dube also adds gender to the traditional categories of postcolonial criticism and analysis of God, gold, and glory. In adding gender to the “unholy trinity” she not only examines the religious legitimization of colonial enterprise for financial and personal gain but also encourages a reading of scripture and religious experience that notes how such narratives ascribed gender characteristics to various power relationships. In the examination of these relationships of subjugation, African feminist readers can begin to explore and express how these imperialist narratives continue to impact their lives in contemporary gender relations. She also seeks to employ this understanding of gendered relations in postcolonial examinations of land issues. Control of the land is a central theme of postcolonial analysis that deconstructs how European narratives of

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302 Dube, 112-113.

303 Dube, 115-117.

304 Dube, 117-118.
colonization legitimated their control of African lands. Dube desires to maintain an awareness of how these narratives often used gender constructs of male dominance over women to express these relations and examine how such expressions distort gender relations. All of these strategies are contained in what Dube terms, “Rahab’s Reading Prism” as a technique for African feminist reading. Her understanding of how imperial power and patriarchal power intersect in the life and body of Rahab forms an awareness of the doubly colonized nature of African women’s experiences. In a decolonizing reading method, such awareness can allow women to opt against simply parroting a doubly colonized Rahab and employ a new reading lens. In using Rahab’s reading lens, the Rahabs of a resurrection experience name the imperial oppression and analyze the representations of its narratives, but they resist constraining themselves to these texts. They construct radically hybrid discourses of decolonizing, but neither do they confine themselves to these. Rather they also insist on cultivating new postcolonial spaces for spinning new narratives of native and international relations of equity, difference, and liberation.

Dube’s doubly colonized decolonizing method of reading scripture then is an attempt to remain aware of the complexity of African women’s experiences in considering how they are subjugated both by imperialist and patriarchal constructions of their lives. This awareness allows for resistance to such hegemonic frameworks and the creation of new spaces for reading and interpreting scripture and experience. Dube seeks these new spaces in hopes of allowing for a new reading of scripture based on African women’s

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305 Dube, 118-121.
306 Dube, 121.
307 Dube, 122.
priorities and categories rather than a continual struggle to reform structures and readings that are based on “profound inequality and oppressive foundations.”

**Musimbi Kanyoro’s *Introducing Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics: An African Perspective***

Unlike Dube’s project, which is largely hermeneutic and textual in nature, Kanyoro’s methodology of handling the issues of African women’s readings of scripture and experience are situated in a field study conducted with rural Kenyan women. Kanyoro describes her home village of Bware as, “tucked safely and securely away from the hustles of fast life, in the countryside of Western Kenya. No deadlines, no fixed agendas and a lot of company.” She describes life in Bware as a state of isolation and vulnerability in rural Kenya where the struggle to survive encounters both the physical realities of disease and medical care and the social realities of being removed from yet reliant on the distant locales of modern African living. Her project in Bware sought to read the book of Ruth with African women as a means to identifying and examining cultural issues in the community in relation to their lives. In doing so, she found herself examining theological methodology among a largely non-literate community in rural

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308 Dube, 123.

Africa where the integration of belief system and culture and the use of oral methods of reading, remembering, and discussing were the norm.\(^{310}\)

Kanyoro recognizes that culture and religion are so highly intertwined together in African life they can be viewed as one and the same rather than separate and distinct categories. This makes it difficult for an African feminist to use African traditional culture as a source for liberation as many traditional practices including, “female genital mutilation, early betrothals and marriages, and the stigmatization of single women, barren women and widows are not liberating to women.”\(^{311}\) Adding to the problem of attempting to use traditional culture as a source for liberation, these practices are often defended and maintained by African women in their role as the “custodians of cultural practices.”\(^{312}\) Therefore, African women often find themselves faced with situations that make them very vulnerable to mistreatment but socially unable to address these situations. With an awareness of women’s vulnerability in Africa, Kanyoro proposes a process of cultural hermeneutics as a first step toward an African women’s liberation theology and a first step toward a Biblical hermeneutic that addresses this vulnerability.

Kanyoro understands that how African women understand and interpret their local culture will exert much more influence on their understanding and use of scripture than

\(^{310}\) Kanyoro, 9-10.

\(^{311}\) Kanyoro, 15.

\(^{312}\) Kanyoro, 15.
any understanding of the historical culture of the text itself.\textsuperscript{313} In reading scriptures through the eyes of their local culture, African women can also find their local culture being read through the eyes of scripture. Envisioning hermeneutics as a two-way process of correlation not only affords African women an opportunity to better understand the meaning and use of scripture, but also an opportunity to reinterpret their culture.\textsuperscript{314} Kanyoro’s cultural hermeneutics then allow for a critical analysis of the intertwined cultural and religious influences that shape the lives of the rural African women with whom she reads the Bible.

Kanyoro begins with a descriptive sketch of the background of the African women in Bware. She notes their deep religiosity as a factor that causes these women to describe themselves as not poor despite the conditions that define them as such by global economic standards.\textsuperscript{315} She also recognizes that how these women question the meaning of misfortune goes beyond asking for an explanation of how something happened. Any explanation of how a child may have died from malaria must also address questions such as, “How could malaria pick out my own child out of all the children in this world?”\textsuperscript{316} In recognizing such complexity in questioning misfortune, Kanyoro seeks to offer these women the opportunity to frame problems in their own terms rather than imposing socio-

\textsuperscript{313} Kanyoro, 19.

\textsuperscript{314} Kanyoro, 20.

\textsuperscript{315} Kanyoro, 21.

\textsuperscript{316} Kanyoro, 21.
cultural or economic interpretations of their troubles using the categories and explanations of social sciences arising from outside of their way of thinking.

Kanyoro employs storytelling as her primary methodology for presenting and understanding the content of her theological study. Her selection of storytelling as a methodology connects with the cultural patterns of the women of Bware who often employ storytelling as a way of expressing what is felt, experienced, and deemed important to know. Kanyoro seeks to use African women’s storytelling of their day-to-day lives as a means of confronting the church with these stories as a reminder of the origins of scripture as an account of God’s actions in the lives of people. Introducing such stories into a theological process challenges local theologies in Africa to recognize that before a process of inculturation can be called liberating, it must examine the culture to ensure that the traditional cultural content being used as a theological source is truly liberating to everyone—including women. Kanyoro is also sensitive to who is doing the storytelling and in what context. She insists that there must be a safe place for women to share their day-to-day stories with one another. Creating such safe spaces allows for women to confront things that might otherwise be considered taboo or dangerous. Kanyoro’s selection of women’s storytelling offers this sort communal theological process among women. Within these circles of storytelling, women can share

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317 Kanyoro, 23.
318 Kanyoro, 26.
319 Kanyoro, 27-29.
and listen to one another providing a forum to orally test and try out the things they hear. This process of testing not only occurs among the scholarly peers of Kanyoro as they read her work together and offer critique, but also between Kanyoro and the rural women of Bware as they speak, sing, and dance their interpretations of what is transmitted to them orally from written scholarship.\footnote{Kanyoro, 30.}

Kanyoro’s actual reading of the book of Ruth with the rural women of Bware was conducted in the context of a three day ecumenical women’s retreat attended by 150 women.\footnote{Kanyoro, 38.} The book of Ruth was selected by a majority vote from a number of stories suggested by women attending the retreat. Ruth was a book familiar to most of the women in attendance and well loved by participants.\footnote{Kanyoro, 39.} Women were organized into groups, sometimes comprised of mostly older or mostly younger women, and each group was assigned a different task. Some groups were charged with reading the entire story and retelling it in their own words. Others were charged with focusing on particular characters in the story. Some groups were responsible for imagining and retelling what happened in specific moments of the story.\footnote{Kanyoro, 40.}

Kanyoro reports the various retellings these groups produced and then summarizes a facilitated debriefing which allowed these women to discuss the meaning

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of their experience in studying and retelling the story of Ruth. She reports a variety of answers which reflect a wide range of conclusions and opinions among the women of Bware. Many women were inspired and enjoyed studying the Bible in this way. They came to an awareness of how they read the Bible and create meaning together by supplying information from their own cultures or imaginations when the text of a scripture does not. Kanyoro was also keen to record dissent among the group and opinions which differed from her own. Some women felt this approach was entirely inappropriate and likened it to playing children’s games. “It is dangerous to do this kind of Bible study because it is not spiritual. What did we learn? Nothing, we just played like silly little children. We need to get a pastor to teach us the Bible.”

In her own reflections on this process, Kanyoro noted a process of give and take among the women of Bware as they discussed the meaning and use of Ruth in understanding their lives. This process followed the cultural rhythms of their day-to-day lives together as younger women sought the wisdom of their elders but also challenged it in subtle ways as they used scripture to critique the traditions being maintained by older women. Kanyoro also noticed the ways in which certain boundaries of the discussion were drawn by older women to exclude topics such those around economics and land ownership. She had anticipated that tension over women’s land ownership within the

324 Kanyoro, 48.
325 Kanyoro, 48.
326 Kanyoro, 49-50.
community of Bware might be a topic of discussion based on the theme of land ownership in Ruth. However, when the elder women of this community proscribed such topics as in appropriate, she set aside her scholarly interest and deferred to the interests of the group. Yet Kanyoro also recorded the body language that communicated the responses of younger women who acknowledged that the reality of women’s land ownership in their traditional culture was already changing and the strict interpretation of culture used by older women to curtail discussion deemed inappropriate was not entirely valid.³²⁷ Kanyoro’s careful observations and recording of the many levels of the group process in her methodology provide a rich picture of how this process furthered these rural African women’s ability to become aware of how they read scripture and create theological meaning for their lives from the story of Ruth.

From this description, Kanyoro then builds a theology of African women’s liberation by identifying the themes arising in this retreat from her observations of how these women interacted with one another in studying the book of Ruth. She identifies and discusses issues including the tension over how to restore what is viewed as a golden past in a postcolonial reality, balancing the needs of individuals with the customs of a communal society, and dealing with issues raised by analyzing the meaning of gender in relation to culture and church.³²⁸ Kanyoro also explores the various ways in which traditional culture is sifted for usability in the current context through a communal

³²⁷ Kanyoro, 49.

³²⁸ Kanyoro, 58-65.
theological process of partaking in practices of celebration, critiquing these practices individually and in groups, and communicating. These sections of Kanyoro’s book are where she does a great deal of critical correlative speculation of parallels between what she observed among the rural women of Bware in their study of Ruth and the theological ideas and constructions found in academic texts. She also notes several places where what the rural women of Bware do in reading scripture challenges the assumptions or conclusions of academic theologies. Kanyoro uses this correlative moment to close her theological process not with firm conclusions about theology based on rural African women, but rather with suggestions as to how what she learned by being among these women challenges preconceived notions about what theology is and how the knowledge these women express is formed and legitimated. Her methodology points toward an ongoing project to hold the church accountable for recognizing the contributions of African women and draw African women into an ecumenical relationship with churches.

**Interlude: Cooking Sadza with Dube and Kanyoro**

As with the section on Deaf studies and theology, the benefits of these two theological methodologies in discussion with Deaf Zimbabwean women are immediately obvious. These theologies share a relevance to the lives of Deaf Zimbabwean women that is most likely even stronger than the connection with the Deaf theologies of the previous chapter simply because they resonate so deeply with the day-to-day realities of

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329 Kanyoro, 66-78.
how they live their lives. Yet considering the use of these methodologies in partnership with the community of Deaf Zimbabwean women still raises some questions in regard to their direct applicability. This section seeks to problematize the theological methods of Dube and Kanyoro in relation to Deaf Zimbabwean women in order to identify what further steps might be needed to ensure that a practical theological methodology with these women engenders self-theologizing agency.

Musa Dube presents a sophisticated approach to biblical hermeneutics arising from both postcolonial and feminist methodologies. Her approach seeks to balance these two methodologies in order to provide African women with a hermeneutical lens that considers the impact of colonial imperialism and patriarchy together rather than emphasizing one at the expense of the other. Dube insists on this balance in order to avoid exacerbating the tensions already placed on African women to give priority to only one aspect of identity as Africans or women. Such pressure to split various factors of their identity into competing categories denies the reality of how the hegemonies of imperialism and patriarchy have become intertwined in limiting African women’s lives and shaping their experiences. The addition of Deafness to this mix of identity factors and the hegemony of a medical model of deafness rather than a social or cultural model makes Dube’s methodology even more complex. The more complex this type of analysis becomes, the more overwhelming it is—particularly for those with limited educational opportunity and nascent awareness of the forces that shape their lives and identity.

Dube’s methodology seems to rely heavily on an awareness of postcolonial and feminist categories of critique among those who will be engaging in a decolonizing
reading of scripture and experience. Her use of the *semoya* principle however raises the question of whether a sophisticated reliance on such awareness is truly necessary. Her presentation of women leaders of AICs shows them as quite assured of their own authority to lead as called and empowered by the Spirit of God. When challenged by traditional interpretations of scripture that limit women’s roles in Christianity, they do not engage in a sophisticated deconstruction of these interpretations. Rather, they simply dismiss them with the saying that captured Dube’s attention, “God never opened the Bible to me.”

Dube’s attraction to and inclusion of this hermeneutical move by AIC women indicates she values such alternative grounds for women’s leadership. However, she doesn’t seem to integrate this sort of move into her overall methodology for a doubly colonized decolonizing reading which involves more critical awareness of identity, oppression, and resistance. Much of the synthesis and articulation of the various aspects of Dube’s methodology arise from her own thinking and it remains unclear how the African women of AICs might express their own awareness of the meaning of their actions. Such concerns appear when imagining how this doubly (or triply) colonized decolonizing reading methodology might be employed among Deaf Zimbabwean women. Would such a process entail their needing to become critically aware and expressive of what makes them African, women, and Deaf prior to engaging in reading scripture? If so, the potential for researcher led interests to interfere with engendering self-theologizing agency in reading the scripture becomes large. However, if we were to

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330 Dube, 42.
assume that no intentional education toward understanding identity factors should occur, are these women able to begin the process of a hermeneutical reading that would be able to address the struggles they wish to resolve?

Similar concerns arise with Kanyoro’s methodology. However, by starting with the actual practice of reading scripture with rural African women, she employs already existing practices and privileges their contributions. This structuring of the theological process seems to honor Tanya Lyons’ requirement that fieldwork with subaltern groups of women must privilege the voice of the subaltern in order to make a re-presentation of these women’s ideas and expressions rather than to attempt to represent them in a substitutional manner. Kanyoro refrains from correlating the lives of the rural women of Bware with existing academic interpretations of their context until after she has presented their process of reading the book of Ruth together and their reflection upon both the reading and the process. In ordering her methodological stages in this manner, Kanyoro makes a clear distinction between what the rural women of Bware are doing and saying and what she herself thinks and does as a Western style educated theologian from Bware. These boundaries seem to aid in providing a clearer picture of how her methodology develops these women’s self-theologizing agency by bringing them to a moment of reflection upon what they do as they read scripture than Dube’s methodology. Also, Kanyoro’s noting and analysis of intergroup dynamics of dissent is equally helpful in recording areas where what she brought to this study as a researcher was challenged

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331 Lyons, 6.
and reshaped. The group’s reluctance to address the book of Ruth as a means to analyze economic factors in regard to land ownership that impacted women’s lives appears to represent a shift from what Kanyoro expected going into the retreat. Her willingness to set that discussion aside and let the rural women of Bware set the agenda of topics is of course a very helpful stance in engendering self-theologizing agency.

Despite these obvious strengths, the application of this methodology with Deaf Zimbabwean women is not as simple as it might appear. Kanyoro’s own experience as a woman coming from Bware provides an organic and natural connection with them. She is right to recognize her own status as an insider/outsider given the influence of her education and shifts in her points of view borne of living outside of Bware. The recognition of this difference helps her maintain a boundary to avoid over-reading her own experience into the lives of these women or seeing her own path to theological agency as the most appropriate for these women. Despite this distance, her origins in Bware do give her more insider status than someone of another gender, socio-economic class, and geo-political nationality such as myself in my encounter with Deaf Zimbabwean women. This concern gives rise to questions as to the limits of what type of researcher can utilize Kanyoro’s cultural hermeneutics and how far the boundaries of insider/outsider status can stretch before they create a need for fundamental changes in a researcher’s approach to forming a “reading with” project that engenders self-theologizing agency.

Also, Kanyoro was able to gather a multi-generational group of women who had varying degrees of social power and agency. She notes the cultural respect given to older
women by younger women and how the elders of this group had the authority to curtail certain topics and allow others to be discussed. Kanyoro identifies these women as the bearers and custodians of traditional culture. This indicates that within the group of women, there were those who were able to effect social change in the village of Bware as they identified issues related to gender relations and marriage customs in their analysis of the story of Ruth. Such authority to effect social change would seem to be lacking among a group of Deaf Zimbabwean women. In following a critical study of scripture that employed cultural hermeneutics as outlined by Kanyoro, Deaf Zimbabwean women might come to a deeper awareness of their own understanding of scripture and their own self-theologizing agency, but they might leave such a retreat feeling that no progress had been made to actually changing the circumstances that leave them feeling marginalized as mothers. While the development of self-theologizing agency in order to articulate Deaf Zimbabwean women’s concerns and beliefs more eloquently might be a first step in a larger process of social change, Kanyoro’s process doesn’t guarantee that the articulation of these women will be ‘heard’ by those who need to ‘hear’ it. This concern echoes that of Spivak regarding the silencing of the subaltern being less a matter of the subaltern not speaking and more a matter of those in power not listening. Widening the circle of this retreat to include participants such as hearing women and men who do have the social agency and authority to effect change would significantly alter the dynamic of the retreat. Such inclusion would introduce group pressure to defer to their authority and knowledge

\[332\] Lyons, 5.
in the process of scriptural and cultural hermeneutics that would interfere with the development of self-theologizing agency among Deaf Zimbabwean women. Therefore, as much as Kanyoro’s approach and method brings to this study, a simple application of it to the community of Deaf Zimbabwean women guiding this study raises significant concerns.

Assessing the Ingredients on Hand

This section has highlighted a variety of existing theological methods that either exemplify the field of practical theology or have an apparent relevance to my search for a methodology to engage in practical theological work with a community of Deaf Zimbabwean women. Each chapter sought to add more ingredients to this theological sadza pot in a manner that would explore what resulted from a dialogue between these approaches in relation to Deaf Zimbabwean women. Each methodology has been evaluated presenting the approach taken to doing theological research and then questioned by raising critical observations in regard to its potential effectiveness in engendering self-theologizing agency among subaltern people in general and Deaf Zimbabwean women in particular. Critical correlational methods presented by Browning, Poling and Miller, and Miller-McLemore offer approaches that consider the need to employ social scientific understanding in the practical theological task. The thick description brought forth by these methods offers a rich source of information about a community allowing for deep critical correlational reflection with church traditions and
producing fresh understandings or revision of existing practices. However, these methodologies are also limited by their reliance on largely academic and Western intellectual critical correlational skills and styles. This limitation presents issues when considering who actually does the critical correlation that expresses new theological understandings. This is particularly troublesome when the community being studied may have very different ways of engaging in reflection that do not rely on Western methodologies found in the social sciences. Great potential exists for Western trained researchers to overwrite the self-expression of subaltern people by adopting methodologies that favor their own way of thinking over that emerging among subaltern people themselves. Miller-McLemore’s inclusion of Nicaraguan and African-American approaches to parenting arrives late in her own analysis and they seem to serve as examples that validate her own critical correlative work. If practical theology is to address the need for self-theologizing agency among such subaltern groups, then these voices need to be a part of the critical correlative effort itself and have equal or privileged status in shaping what Christian parenting looks like.

Theological approaches from missiological sources presented by Schreiter and Hastings offer more sensitivity to the cross-cultural dynamics of empowering local communities to produce their own theological expressions and responses. However, both Schreiter and Hastings present their methodologies with a general assumption that those in a community already possess a well developed awareness of the forces that shape their lives and the ability to engage in a critical analysis of their lives that has the potential to effect real change. As such awareness and agency is lacking or only beginning to emerge
in many subaltern communities, these methodologies may also be open to the dangers of a researcher overwriting the self-expression of a subaltern community with their own assumptions of what they observe in interaction and dialogue. A practical theological methodology designed to engage with subaltern communities such as Deaf Zimbabwean women must go beyond bridging between cultures to consider the complexities wrought by disparities in the power relationships between cultures.

The methodological approaches of Lewis and Morris directly engage Deaf studies in dialogue with theological methodology. While Lewis’ approach comes from Deaf authorship and Morris’ approach is that of an outsider engaged in participant observation, both approaches seek to present frameworks by which Deaf people can come to self-theologizing agency. Lewis’ adoption of the methods of Latin American liberation theology puts a focus on developing a Deaf Christology. This Christology would enable Deaf people to see Christianity as a religion of Deaf culture rather than the historically experienced reality of Christianity as a belief system of hearing people that creates practices that exclude Deaf people. While the construction of a Deaf Christology is certainly a helpful theological move, the adoption of Latin American liberation theological perspectives on the nature and shape of oppression remains problematic. Such adoption may occlude different ways that Deaf people perceive how oppression and marginalization impact our lives and focus theological construction on what is lost by being Deaf rather than what new insights and contributions to society are gained from Deaf experience. Morris’ approach seeks to release theological construction from reliance on written textual hermeneutics and allow for a “theology without words”
grounded in the changing nature of Deaf performance and storytelling of scriptural stories. By envisioning theology in such a manner, Morris does open new avenues for self-theologizing expression among Deaf people. However, despite his careful framing of his position as an outsider engaged in participant observation, Morris’s presentation of his observations on Deaf theological discourse seems to lack a feedback mechanism that reports how Deaf people view his observations. Thus while the potential for a theology without words to create avenues for self-theologizing agency among Deaf people cannot be ignored, it is uncertain if his vision for such a theology is welcomed by Deaf people or merely a conjecture on his part as an outsider.

The theological contributions of Dube and Kanyoro inject the thought of African women theologians into this dialogue and review of methodologies. Both approaches seek to wrestle with how African women read scripture and develop theological ideas as to how these scriptures relate to their daily struggles. Dube presents a carefully constructed hermeneutical approach that seeks to balance the impact of both imperial colonial interference and patriarchal control on women’s lives. While adding a third layer of complexity to this methodology that considers how a predominantly hearing society marginalizes Deaf people is certainly possible, such complexity rapidly approaches a level of sophistication that can easily overwhelm someone unfamiliar with such consideration of identity factors and influences. In contrast, Kanyoro begins with the observation of a retreat held for women in her rural home village of Bware before presenting theological and social scientific perspectives on her observations. This retreat with the women of Bware engages them in a reading of the story of Ruth and discussion
of its relevance to their lives as rural African women. Kanyoro’s care to respect the agency of these women to choose the story they wanted to read together and direct the conversation of its relevance to their lives offers an encouraging model for the engendering of self-theologizing agency among subaltern communities. However, complexities arise when considering how her process might be disrupted when the disparity in social location between a researcher and subject community is wider than her own social location and the women of Bware. Also, her engagement with these women presumes that the community being researched has sufficient agency not only to come to a self-expression of their theological thinking but also enact some degree of actual change of the circumstances in their lives.

Despite the limitations of the methodologies reviewed in this section, each of these theological methodologies offers a glimpse into what already exists in theological methodology that is helpful for engaging in theological research with subaltern communities. Some consideration of how critical correlation between lived experience and church tradition takes place and who should lead that critical correlative process is necessary. Sensitivity to cross-cultural awareness in theological construction and careful consideration of the power dynamics in such relationships is also a crucial component. A deep engagement with how a subaltern culture expresses its own experience and views the world around them is needed. The complexity of a theological methodology needs to be appropriately gauged to match the style and preparedness of subaltern participants in practical theological exercises. Lastly, the effectiveness of any agency that results from the participation of subaltern people in a practical theological methodology needs to be
considered. While all the ingredients seem to be in place, perhaps this theological sadza has turned out “pimply” due to a missing ingredient or the lack of techniques that enable us to smooth out my theological sadza into a delicious and wholesome meal.
PART III
ADDING NEW INGREDIENTS

This section seeks to examine what then might be missing from this theological sadza that has prevented it from becoming all that it can be as a wholesome and helpful addition to practical theological methodology. Where the previous section sought to examine nine existing theological methodologies that use the lived experience of faith communities as their starting points, this section proposes specific techniques or attitudes required by the practical theologian that aim to redress what is missing in existing methodologies. The examination of existing methodologies considered both contributions and complexities in relation to developing self-theologizing agency among subaltern communities in general and my own search for a methodology to engage with Deaf Zimbabwean women. The resulting theological sadza contains many helpful ingredients, yet remains pimply with lumps that need smoothing out. As my own experience of cooking sadza with Zimbabwean women taught me, one can achieve a smoother and more complete pot of sadza either by adding more water or corn meal ingredients to the mix. One can also correct their lumpy sadza by varying one’s stirring technique to isolate and mix in the lumps. This section seeks to continue the cooking of this theological sadza and propose some elements and strategies that address the shortcomings that remain.
CHAPTER SEVEN

NEW PROPOSALS FOR GUIDING PRACTICAL THEOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY

Having examined existing methodologies to identify what is lacking among them, three areas of discussion and construction of new strategies to address the remaining concerns with the nine methodologies will be presented here. These proposals do not seek to be comprehensive methods offering practical “how to” steps to take in replacing existing methodologies. Rather I propose these elements and strategies as possible guideposts that can be used in supplementing existing methodologies to reorient them toward engendering self-theologizing agency among subaltern communities. While these proposals are developed with the community of Deaf Zimbabwean women in mind, they also present strategies that may assist with the research of many subaltern communities. In some regard, these three discussions propose general techniques coupled with attitudes a practical theologian should seek to employ when working with subaltern communities. These attitudes of creativity, humility, and grace are characteristics that should be cultivated in practical theological researchers and infuse whatever methodological steps they wish to employ.

The three discussions that follow identify three techniques for developing self-theologizing agency among subaltern people. The first discussion centers on the creative use of enacted theology in critical correlational methods of practical theology. Daneel’s missiological understanding of enacted theology will be brought into dialogue with
Engelke’s examination of African Independent Churches of the Friday Masowe Church and Morris’ *Theology Without Words* to examine what they suggest for new ways of understanding how subaltern people engage in critical correlation. The second discussion proposes the strategy of using checks and balances in methodologies that seek to read and interpret scripture with subaltern communities. This discussion will engage with Isasi-Diaz’s *Mujerista Theology* developed with grassroots Latin American women and Kanyoro’s approach with the rural women of Bware to see how checks and balances can be built into practical theological methodology to guard against the overwriting of contributions from subaltern communities in practical theology. The third discussion envisions practical theological research as a missiological relationship enabling multidirectional transmission and influence among involved cultures and contexts. This discussion will engage with the translational nature of Christianity as presented by both Walls and Sanneh, Ladd’s concept of Deafhood, and Murray’s understanding of Deafhood as a transnational characteristic to examine parallels that may offer a way forward for reorienting practical theological methodology. In addition, this strategy of building bridges of commonality engages with Hastings’s envisioning of practical theology as a participation in Christ.

**The Creativity of Enacted Theologizing as a Method of Critical Correlation**

Enacted theology is a term used by Marthinus Daneel to describe the type of theology he observes among African Independent Churches (AICs) in Zimbabwe. In
African Earthkeepers: Wholistic Interfaith Mission, Daneel recalls the natural splendor of Masvingo Province of Zimbabwe where he was raised and the environmental degradation that resulted from over harvesting of trees for fuel wood and poor planning of resettlement villages after the war for independence.\(^{333}\) It was his own response to this environmental change that caused him to initiate dialogue with both African traditional religious leaders and African Independent Church leaders as to discover what action these groups might take to protect the environment. This strategy was motivated in part by his own outrage over the destruction of lush lands he remembered from his childhood but was also rooted in his knowledge of traditional Shona religious prohibitions of felling groves of particular types of trees.\(^{334}\) It was with this knowledge and motivation he began his dialogue with religious leaders and found his concern for the environment shared along with a concern for the people this land was losing its ability to support. These dialogues gave birth to a theological shift among both African traditionalists and AIC communities which centered on taking action to preserve and restore the environment around them as a wholistic effort to care for God’s people and creation.\(^{335}\)

As part of his missiological research, he placed himself as a participant/observer with both African traditionalists and AICs in their efforts to theologize, educate, and practice good earthkeeping. In his published account, he identifies the theological


\(^{334}\) Daneel, African Earthkeepers, 9.

\(^{335}\) Daneel, African Earthkeepers, 11-15.
processes of AICs as something very different from theological processes developed in the West.

AIC theology by definition is *spontaneously enacted theology*. It is not an academically systemized theology, the preserve of ‘professional’ theologians who retreat Western-style to reflect on their research and then record their reflections in writing. Quite the opposite. AIC reflection and response to life-situations in a given context are first of all in the form of community events and find expression in emotionally uninhibited dance, song, vivid proclamation and social action, all based on predominately literal interpretations and applications of Scripture.\(^{336}\)

Daneel views enacted theology as an avenue for interreligious dialogue and education as well. In *Fambidzano: Ecumenical Movement of Zimbabwean Independent Churches*, he recounts his efforts to assist African Independent Churches to reach their goal of developing leadership with more theological training. The Theological Education by Extension (TEE) model was adapted from a program already in place in Guatemala.\(^{337}\) This program sought to take theological education to people in their community settings through correspondence classes and regular seminar meetings rather than require people to remove themselves from their community for a period of time to attend a centralized theological training school.\(^{338}\) Although this early effort at theological education among African Independents adopted a curriculum following many of the categories found in Western theological education, Daneel’s review and assessment of the program reveals that he envisioned some additional features in future course development that would take


\(^{337}\) Daneel, *Fambidzano*, 229.

on distinct features of AIC practices. In relation to courses on missiology and mission praxis, he writes,

It should include a thorough investigation of the dialogue between Christian and non-Christian religions with a special emphasis on traditional African religion, as this is an area of the currently enacted theology of the Independents (their rain rituals, consolation ceremonies and prophetic faith-healing practices – all of which involve some form of encounter with the traditional world of ancestral spirits and magic) which requires critical reflection and written articulation.339

In viewing enacted theology as an avenue for dialogue between religious viewpoints, it appears that the actual practices of AIC churches and African traditional religions can serve as a medium for critical correlation among diverse groups.

In *African Earthkeepers*, Daneel reviews Schreiter’s three types of missiological theologizing and sees what AICs have done with earthkeeping rituals as an example of contextualized theology *par excellence*.340 He is quite aware of the risks taken as a participant/observer that may skew and distort the theological process away from that of the grassroots communities with which he works. However, he agrees with Schreiter that along with these risks, there is a potential for “bonds of accountability between local and world church.”341 Such accountability can strengthen the place of indigenous self-theologizing in relation to traditional written theologizing in ecumenical and academic dialogue.

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Daneel identifies some aspects of his approach in *African Earthkeepers* that guard against the influence of his presence as an outsider. First, he positions himself as a “theological freelancer, seeking to interpret and participate in their theological development as a kind of adopted insider rather than working as a missionary of a Western church.”\(^{342}\) Such a stance allows him to divest himself of any particular agenda as a guide for church planting or doctrinal teaching and act more as a resource for the community in their own theological process. Secondly, Daneel notes that leadership in these communities conferred his prominent position as “Bishop Moses” upon him in a manner reflecting their own theological categories and roles.\(^{343}\) Rather than establishing himself as an expert within the community or retaining a strict outsider stance, he allowed local leadership in AICs to discern and design a place for him in the movement. Daneel recognizes that being a leader in the movement makes it difficult for him to judge whether or not his influences are overly dominant in how the movement has taken shape, but his third point is that he seems reasonably sure that safeguards exist to prevent the movement from becoming an expression of only his own thought and interests. These safeguards include the nature of AIC church organization that precludes any outsider from doing their theologizing for them.\(^{344}\) As AICs formed themselves largely in response against the impact of outsider control of their religious life and thought, they


retain a critical view of outsider proposals that maintains their agency in accepting or denying such proposals. Lastly, Daneel notes that the communal nature of AIC leadership and enacted theology creates a relationship where critique and feedback are built into the process. AIC leaders kept a close eye on the drafts of his published work and offered a number of criticisms and corrections as these drafts were read out to them.  

While Daneel notes that AICs enacted theology does at times bypass theological reflection in jumping from people’s interpretation of scripture to spontaneous action, the “ongoing dialectic between a strong prophetic tradition and local culture results in confrontation and transformation of those traditional practices for the sake of cultural continuity and identity.” Capturing a snapshot of this dialectical process of enacted theology for analysis required a variety of techniques. Daneel employed a team of insider fieldworkers to conduct interviews and gather recordings of sermons, songs and rituals. This allowed for both a means of collecting information that did not rely on the presence of an outsider and a group of collaborative thinkers to offer various viewpoints on what was being observed. Therefore, it appears that what Daneel observes in the enacted theology of preaching, singing, dancing, and ritual is a lively and communal way of doing critical correlation between sources of religious tradition and contemporary

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experience to arrive at revised or reaffirmed practices. Although the means to arrive at this end are quite different than Western style practical theological methodologies, the aim of enacted theology remains commensurate with the critical correlative aims of practical theology in a manner that ensures that these non-literate communities find self-theologizing agency.

These aspects of enacted theology as outlined by Daneel are also present in Matthew Engelke’s study of the Friday Masowe Church in Zimbabwe. As the Friday Masowe church is an example of the type of AIC Daneel engaged with in establishing enacted earthkeeping theologies, this similarity is to be expected. As previously mentioned, Engelke’s study goes deep into the practices of the Friday Masowe church as a church that holds a strong suspicion of the written scripture in favor of a “live and direct” faith. This stance distinguishes them from other AICs who often retain the authority of the written scriptures in their Biblical interpretations no matter how enacted they become. What guides the Friday Masowe process of enacted theologizing is their notion of *mutemo*, a Shona word usually translated as law or rule but to the Friday Masowe, also implies a type of religious knowledge. Engelke provides three portraits of how *mutemo* functions as a guiding principle of enacted theology while resisting any attempts to create it as a fixed concept based on written scriptures. One portrait recounts how a man suffering from stomach ailments and unable to find a satisfactory cure either

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348 Engelke, 3-8.

349 Engelke, 139.
through traditional African medicine or Western medicine comes to the Friday Masowe church as a patient of their religious healing practices. Having followed the rituals and practices of the Friday Masowe, he finds relief and understanding of the circumstances of his life that caused him discomfort and illness. He continued to attend the services of the Friday Masowe church after his healing, “convinced that the healing was a result not only of the mutemo but also of a change in his perspective on the world. The sermons, lessons and songs—everything he had learned—took on an intriguing outline that he wanted to fill in.”

Through following the laws or rules of God according to this church’s teachings, this man not only found physical and spiritual healing but access to a type of knowledge about how to perceive the world that attracted him. The sermons, lessons and songs referred to as the content of his learning are the enacted rituals of Friday Masowe worship. In gathering for their worship services, a premium is placed on the function of the Holy Spirit to guide the services both in word and deed.

The practice of congregational singing manifests itself as a particular way in which mutemo is gained. During a speaker’s testimony or preaching, the congregation will often interrupt with congregational singing inspired by a congregant’s desire to emphasize or critique a certain point in the speaker’s message. Engelke points out that,

> Interruptions like this are understood in two main ways. First, and most often, they are taken as pedagogical points. Singing teaches. A spoken lesson will sometimes make the same point over and over again. This is not necessarily a problem, but my friends could find that the repetition made it “difficult to hear”

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350 Engelke, 139-145.

351 Engelke, 145.
what was being said. A verse can inject new life into a lesson providing a fresh perspective on the same concern. … Interruptions are also understood as political maneuvers and metacommentaries on what others say. One-off verses raise the question of intention. Why did so and so introduce that verse at that moment? In most cases the question is easily answered; almost all one-off verses are taken as musical compliments to a lesson, as in the case just described. But sometimes a verse is motivated by other concerns or at least is perceived to be motivated by other concerns.352

Engelke spends a fair amount of time analyzing how the singing of short repeating verses itself serves both as a means of educating members about the expectations of mutemo and a medium for both affirmation and critique of sermons and lessons being shared. The dialogical nature of singing in the Friday Masowe church creates the mechanism for members to interrupt the proceedings of a service at the urging of the Holy Spirit with a song that allows for them to express their opinion about what is being said. Whether the singing of this verse is picked up and amplified by others or dies out quickly is seen as a communal way of testing the inspiration of the interrupter and whomever is interrupted will respond by adapting their message accordingly.353 Engelke’s observations of how singing functions in the Friday Masowe church offers a fine example of how the practices of a faith community in worship may well be a manner of doing critical correlation in an enacted theology. Such conceptions of enacted theology found in African contexts identified by Daneel and Engelke run counter to assertions such as Poling and Miller’s

352 Engelke, 219.

353 Engelke, 218-222.
view that critical thinking in practical theology is reasoned reflection upon what a
community of faith does rather than the doing of things that make one faithful.\footnote{Poling and Miller, 33.}

Enacted theology also resonates with Wayne Morris’ \textit{Theology Without Words} as
he notes that the characteristics of a largely non-literate population among AICs and Deaf
people’s limited access to the written English of the Bible result in similar strategies of
bringing scripture to life through storytelling, preaching, ritual, and drama.\footnote{Morris, 104-110.} Morris
observes a technique among Deaf people akin to Evans’s “reading the gaps”
methodology. “Reading the gaps” refers to a reading of scripture that constructs the
meaning of the text as it is read rather than simply discovering the meaning of the words
as presented.\footnote{Morris, 109-110.} Dramatized storytelling of various scriptural stories such as the Exodus
may re-tell the content of the written text of Exodus through the eyes of hypothetical
Deaf Israelites taking the journey out of Egypt.\footnote{Morris, 110.} Such a re-telling makes the reading of
scripture in a communal setting an act of critical correlation between Deaf experience and
traditional scriptural sources of theology. Morris’ discussion of Deaf worship which
exhibits the utilization of a theology without words involves this sort of adaption in the
use of written texts as they are read in signed language, the creation of sermons which are
informal and dialogical in nature, the inspiration of conversation as a part of the ritual of

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{Poling and Miller} Poling and Miller, 33.
\bibitem{Morris} Morris, 104-110.
\bibitem{Morris} Morris, 109-110.
\bibitem{Morris} Morris, 110.
\end{thebibliography}
the gathered community, and the emphasizing of the passing of the peace as an essential practice in Deaf worship services.\textsuperscript{358} Thus Morris’ observations indicate that a form of enacted theology also takes place within Deaf worship. Offering avenues for Deaf communities of faith to develop an awareness of how this process works can engender conscious enhancement of its critical correlative character in developing the expression of Deaf self-theologizing agency.

Including enacted theology as a strategy to engage in practical theological studies with subaltern communities requires a great deal of flexibility and creativity on the part of a practical theological researcher. In the case of my own desire to engage in a practical theological process with Deaf Zimbabwean women, the employment of enacted theology offers a number of avenues for the development of their self-theologizing agency. Daneel’s strategy of acting as a theological freelancer provides a potential model for my own interaction with Deaf Zimbabwean women. His overall methodology is rooted in long term immersion in a context as a participant-observer and therefore the depth of his action as a theological freelancer is extensive. My own work has been much more short term in nature but being a theological freelancer can be envisioned as a general attitude to one’s engagement with subaltern communities in short term situations as well. Whether my own engagement with Deaf Zimbabwean women is short term or long term, the attitude of being a theological freelancer requires me to remain open to the many reminders that the Christian faith is already present and being enacted in these

\textsuperscript{358} Morris, 125-128.
women’s lives rather than seeing myself as an agent for the transmission of faith from my own context into their cultural idioms.

The faith Deaf Zimbabwean women exhibit is largely guided by their own desire to first connect with one another, then connect with other faith communities around them. As mentioned earlier in this study, one of the first desires articulated by the Deaf community as they formed a club was for regular worship services in signed language they could understand. This required a local hearing Zimbabwean pastor to learn their signed language in order to serve as a worship leader and pastor for this congregation. This pastor took his cues from his own theological training in the United Methodist Church supported seminary at Africa University and his own experience as a Zimbabwean Christian to see his role as primarily one of empowerment to a people who had been denied basic agency in their own lives. After the establishment of regular signed worship services which followed many of the patterns of enacted theology described by Morris, these Deaf people also wanted to establish access to the worship services at nearby Hilltop United Methodist Church. This desire to connect with a hearing congregation seems to reflect their awareness that being a worshipping community of their own, while helpful as it is, was not sufficient for their participation in the larger family of God. The resultant relationship between the Deaf community and Hilltop UMC has been a fruitful one where they not only welcome Deaf people into worship, but also have elected Deaf members to represent them at the Annual Conference meeting of their denomination where theology and policy are reviewed and shaped. Hearing people have become eager to learn the signed language of Deaf congregants,
which fosters the opportunity for Deaf people to find an audience for the articulation of their faith, life, and struggles developed in worship conducted in signed language on their own.

The recognition of such enacted theological practices as a legitimate contextualized form of critical correlation in practical theological methodology creates a means by which an outsider participant-observer can foster self-theologizing agency among subaltern people. In a long term relationship, the outsider participant-observer can develop a close relationship of mutual trust and accountability through an awareness and participation in these processes. In short term relationships, an awareness of these processes can provide a hedge against desires to take unnecessary action in order to feel involved that might disrupt helpful processes already in place. Instead, a short term participant-observer can work to bring awareness of the benefits of these types of processes to those already engaged in them and allow subaltern people to claim ownership and guidance of how it will continue.

The creativity such an approach demands will require the practical theological researcher to be willing to enter a process of theological participant-observation without a predetermined roadmap beyond the initial steps of observational learning about what is already taking place. Beyond initial observations, a researcher’s role then is to reflect back what a community might be doing in terms that allow them to become aware of how their actions correlate their lived experience and faith traditions in relation to the dilemmas they face. In turn, such reflective efforts allow a faith community to critique
the observations of a researcher and in doing so, take control of the direction of the practical theological process.

**Interlude: Stirring the Sadza Pot with Enacted Theology**

How does enacted theology help smooth this pot of theological sadza? As discussed in the previous chapter, one of the issues with the methodologies proposed by Browning, Poling and Miller, and Miller-McLemore was their adherence to Western notions of what comprises critical correlation. The critical correlative stage in each methodology seems to be the task of the professional practical theologian assessing and weighing the impact of various interpretations of data gathered to comprise the descriptive stages of their methodologies. As noted, Daneel, Engelke, and Morris have identified different practices among African and Deaf communities for communicating, exploring, and creating meaning from various ideas and practices. If a critical correlative practical theological approach employs a strategy of enacted theology for its critical correlation, it would likely have the effect of de-centering the professional practical theologian from a position of authority in interpretation and place this authority in the hands of subaltern communities of faith. The results of such a shift of authority in the critical correlative process would undoubtedly alter what new understandings develop from a practical theological process. These new understandings may be in enacted forms that require professional practical theologians to learn new ways of reading practices and thinking of them as theological. However, the benefit of this reorientation of practical
theological methodology to include enacted theology is that the resulting understandings are truly a product and expression of subaltern people and suitable for responding to their context.

Another concern raised with several of the nine methodologies analyzed in the previous chapter was that they presumed that a community of faith had adequate insight and skill in expressing and understanding their own situations in a critical light in order to engage in critical correlation. As mentioned earlier, the Deaf community in Mutare is only recently formed and many of them struggle to find ways to explain how they view the world, act in the world, and their beliefs about what the world should be like. The negative impact of poor quality education and lack of social connection with other sign language users are contributing factors in this situation. As a result, the self-expression of many Deaf Zimbabweans is awkward and preliminary in nature as they struggle to find the vocabulary to say what they think. Enacted theology allows an opportunity for Deaf Zimbabweans to gather and practice how they tell stories and share information in ways that are familiar and comfortable. Conversation, worship, shared preaching, praying, dramatizations of scripture, and social interaction all provide a place for them to develop a vocabulary together that can begin to express and explore what they believe. A theological methodology that employs enacted theology then also provides a way for the descriptive portions of a practical theological process to be built by subalterns themselves. Such use of enacted theology to create a thick description may involve a longer time frame or a different type of engagement than the active interview method employed by Browning but the result may be more meaningful to the community than a
collection of individual stories crafted into a general narrative by a practical theological researcher.

**Building Checks and Balances into “Reading With” Methodologies: Cultivating Humility in Practical Theology**

Practical theological methodologies that aim to discover and develop theological thinking among communities of faith through retreats or programs focused around communal reading and discussion of scriptural stories are a type of approach often termed as “reading with” methodologies. In these methodologies, professional theologians may wish to be intimately involved in the design of the experience through selection of texts and topics to be discussed or a provider of academic viewpoints and analysis tools. Conversely, they may seek to limit their role to functioning as a participant observer to the hermeneutical process as it unfolds within a group of readers. Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz uses a “reading with” methodology to develop her articulation of the theology of Latin American women she terms mujerista theology. As already examined earlier in this study, Musimbi Kanyoro also uses this approach in her work with the rural African women of Bware, Kenya. In some regard, the methodology of Musa Dube discussed in the previous chapter reflects similar sensibilities as her doubly colonized decolonizing method seeks to address the experiences of African women in relation to both feminism and imperialism in how they read scripture. The strength of the “reading with” methods lies in their dialogical nature, bringing communities together to
wrestle with the variety of viewpoints and resources present among them for confronting the issues of day-to-day life as people of faith. However, these examples of “reading with” methodology are designed and led by researcher theologians coming from within subaltern communities. As noted in the previous chapter, despite the influence of a Western style education on their thought, they retain an organic connection to the communities they are working with that affords them more of an insider status than someone coming from a significantly different context. This discussion seeks to examine how Isasi-Diaz and Kanyoro seek to mitigate the impact of how their Western style education shapes their view of subaltern life to see if there are strategies or guideposts that can be employed by more obvious outsiders in their work with subaltern communities. By employing strategies to mitigate their influence, outsider researchers can operate within a system of checks and balances that serve as a mechanism to prevent the overwriting of subaltern self-theologizing and agency. Such insights and techniques are needed in a methodology that seeks to develop self-theologizing agency among subaltern communities who have yet to produce a scholar who could engage in this type of “reading with” methodology from an insider/scholar position.

*Mujerista Theology* is Isasi-Diaz’s collection of theological essays that gather her thoughts and writings related to Latin American women’s theology. Many of her essays are deeply influenced by her work with grassroots Latina women in “reading with” style workshops. In these workshops, Latinas gather to discuss the circumstances of the struggles and celebrate the achievements of their lives in the context of developing liturgies and rituals of their own. These liturgies sought to embody the values of
teamwork and cooperation and incorporate the symbols and stories of their faith with their day-to-day experiences.\textsuperscript{359} This style of workshop recalls the description of enacted theology as presented by Daneel. Isasi-Diaz seeks to bridge her own experiences as a daughter of Cuban exiles living in the U.S. with those of grassroots Latinas through understanding that Latinas have particular shared experiences that cut across some of the geo-political boundaries that separate them. She expresses these commonalities through the Spanish idiom \textit{lo cotidiano} which translates for her as the shared way of thinking, analyzing, and acting upon things borne of a common manner of responding to the struggles of life as Latinas.\textsuperscript{360} For Isasi-Diaz, mujerista theology is theological thinking that uses the religion of grassroots Latinas as its source material as a form of liberation theology’s preferential option for the oppressed. “It insists that liberation is not something one person can give another but that it is a process in which the oppressed are protagonists, participants in creating a reality different from the present oppressive one.”\textsuperscript{361} Thus she does take a generally liberationist approach which seems heavily influenced by her own attraction to Latin American liberation theology. What remains uncertain at times in her presentation of mujerista theology is if her own critical framework of liberation theology is equally shared among workshop participants. This uncertainty could be the result of workshops attracting only Latinas of a similar

\textsuperscript{359} Isasi-Diaz, 172-179.

\textsuperscript{360} Isasi-Diaz, 66-67.

\textsuperscript{361} Isasi-Diaz, 1.
theological orientation. Alternatively, this uncertainty could be a result of dissent or alternate theological backgrounds being subsumed in her framework for understanding the struggles faced by Latina women.

Whatever voices and perspectives are included, Isasi-Diaz does aim to create theology from the perspective of grassroots Latinas rather than providing a theology for Latinas. In framing mujerista theology in this manner, she seems to promote the liberation of Latinas as a process of self-theologizing agency. She eschews academic objectivity out of mistrust that it erases her own experience as a Latina and instead seeks to establish her own subjectivity as a Latina theologian as an insider. In one of her autobiographical theological sketches, she likens her experience in the US as a foreigner in a strange land seeking to plant the native clippings of her mother’s Cuban garden into a different soil. Similar to Dube’s concern about competing frameworks of interpretation between imperialism and feminism in the hermeneutics of African women, Isasi-Diaz seeks to find ways of doing theology that address both the concerns of how gender and culture intersect in the struggles faced by Latinas without pressuring them to favor one aspect of their identity over another. She cautions herself against romanticizing how her mother’s experience in Cuba as a grassroots Latina woman influences her own work when she writes,

362 Isasi-Diaz, 1.
363 Isasi-Diaz, 3.
364 Isasi-Diaz, 14-15.
I plow ahead, aware that I must not idealize what I have inherited from my mother—especially because we have been transplanted and in that process have lost some of our roots and have not always correctly reinvented them. I must be careful because as transplants we often have to defend ourselves, and that can easily distort the truth.365

Isasi-Diaz is also keenly aware of how her own experience as a transplant does not necessarily equate with those of grassroots Latinas. She seeks to make a commitment of faithfulness to the information shared with her by grassroots Latina women as she integrates their stories into her theological writing. Whether it be the translation choices she makes between Spanish and English or the themes she chooses to highlight, Isasi-Diaz wants to create clarity between her own subjective experiences and views and the contribution of grassroots Latinas.366 This clarity is her attempt to avoid abusing the relationship of trust afforded her by these grassroots Latinas and instead to make use of their contributions in a manner that brings their thought into dialogue with a wider audience.367

Isasi-Diaz’s safeguards against overwriting the contributions of grassroots Latina women then include several techniques in how she understands her relationship with them as a theologian. First, she engages in critical examination of her own social location and commitments in working with subaltern Latinas. Second, she strives for fidelity in incorporating information shared by grassroots Latinas even as she recognizes

365 Isasi-Diaz, 26.

366 Isasi-Diaz, 5.

367 Isasi-Diaz, 5.
her own experience in the shared experiences of *lo cotidiano*. Third, she holds to a continued metaphorical reminder that as a transplant she must be on guard not only to defend herself, but also to be aware of how that defensive effort can distort the truth about grassroots expressions by idealizing them.

As noted in the previous section, Kanyoro’s methodology is also a “reading with” style workshop. She intentionally identifies ways of gathering and expressing one’s thoughts that originate from within the daily practices of these women’s social and religious life. Through women’s storytelling, she is able to engage these women in a process of reading, examining, and retelling the story of Ruth from the perspectives they have as rural African women. She finds the process to be one that has “demystified the study of theology by using storytelling by bringing to the center of theological debate the perspective of the disadvantaged communities.”

Kanyoro also seeks to replicate a pattern of communal theologizing among women that she helped establish with the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians. By framing the process of developing theology as a communal practice, whether among academically trained theologians in the Circle or among rural African women, Kanyoro is consciously relinquishing some control over the direction of the theological process.

In reporting on the women’s “reading with” retreat that guides her study, Kanyoro makes liberal use of quotations from participants. In using a writing format that presents

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368 Kanyoro, 23.

369 Kanyoro, 28.
both the questions being discussed and a variety of answers given, she presents readers with a rich diversity of viewpoints rather than synthesizing them into a composite story or weaving them into prose of her own. Although she still has editorial control over which responses are reported, Kanyoro is careful to include viewpoints that challenge the “reading with” methodology she employs in her study or contradict the prevailing conclusions of the group discussion. By honoring the voices of dissent and giving them due consideration and analysis, Kanyoro sets aside her own voice to provide a glimpse into the views of these rural African women. Lastly, Kanyoro remains willing to set aside her own agenda of topics and insights to allow the group to identify what aspects of the story need to be discussed. As mentioned in the previous section, Kanyoro had identified a particular economic issue related to women’s ownership of land among the culture of these rural African women that the story of Ruth could provide some scriptural hermeneutical material for critical correlation. However, the elder women of the village asserted their authority to redirect conversation on this topic as they felt it inappropriate to discuss.\footnote{Kanyoro, 49.}

Kanyoro’s safeguards against overwriting the stories of rural African women as she engages with them in a “reading with” methodology then involve a number of techniques. First she employs a style of dialogue that arises naturally from the community of subaltern women. Second, she maintains a stance that sees theology as a communal task rather than hers alone. Third, Kanyoro reports a variety of responses,
including those of dissent and challenge, in her theological writing and reflects on how these challenges teach her about these women’s theologizing. Fourth, she is willing to set aside her own interests and agenda and let these women explore or reject topics as they see fit. By employing these safeguards, Kanyoro presents a methodology that allows these women to develop their self-theologizing agency and brings that agency into dialogue with academic theology through her writing.

**Interlude: Stirring the Pot with a System of Checks and Balances**

As the previous chapter noted, the problem with my employing such “reading with” methodologies with Deaf Zimbabwean women lies with my more removed position as a group outsider to their lived experiences. How then can the checks and balances that Isasi-Diaz and Kanyoro employ provide strategies for group outsiders to mitigate the influence of their presence in working with subaltern communities? Where creativity was the watchword for employing strategies of enacted theology, humility is the watchword for employing checks and balances. A group outsider must be intentional in their use of strategies to de-center themselves from guiding group discussion during a reading with project. This may mean stepping back and allowing a conversation to take its own course as Kanyoro does in abandoning questions about what the book of Ruth might say about land ownership issues among the women of Bware. However, a group outsider, particularly one from a social location identified with colonizing cultures, may need to be more active in their humility rather than simply stepping back to observe.
Asking questions such as, “What do you think?” and “Can you explain that to me in your own words?” challenge the hegemony that a researcher arrives with solutions to provide a community and instead actively invites subaltern participants to contribute and lead. Hastings also raised the importance of humility in cross-cultural practical theological process from his experience in Japan. As a student submits to a master, the group outsider participant must humbly submit their ignorance and inexperience before subalterns in order to remain de-centered in the process and create a space for subaltern self-expression to emerge and flourish.

Another check that Isasi-Diaz and Kanyoro employ in their “reading with” methodologies is a vision of the theological process as a collaborative and collective task. Intentional efforts to build a collaborative leadership team of diverse people with a variety of strengths for a “reading with” event shares the burden and widens the viewpoints that guide such an event. Including subalterns in the design and leadership of the event allows group outsiders to continue to humble themselves and allow subalterns to gain valuable self-theologizing agency. The collaborative view of theology employed by Isasi-Diaz and Kanyoro is a helpful strategy for researcher theologians from outside of subaltern communities. In particular, expanding the vision of theological methodology as a communal process can assist outsider theologians in developing a team of insiders and outsiders as co-researchers who collaborate in a manner that provides checks and balances by ensuring that a variety of perspectives and interpretations of what is happening and developing is paramount.
A third strategy addresses a concern raised the previous chapter that Kanyoro’s method may not be as effective among Deaf Zimbabwean women as it was among the rural women of Bware due to a lack of social agency. Because communities of Deaf Zimbabwean women lack the social agency to effect change in the situations that confront them in regard to child rearing practices, the degree to which a “reading with” retreat addresses their concerns may face limitations. While such a retreat can lead to a wealth of self-expression of their theological critical correlation of scriptural text and their lived experience, if such self-expression is not recognized by those in society who have the agency to create change, these women will still be effectively silenced. As stated earlier this is the concern raised by Spivak when she notes that the problem in some postcolonial research is not that the subaltern cannot ‘speak’ but that no one is ‘listening.’

Furthermore, my own reservations regarding the metaphorical language of ‘speaking’ lead me to expand this concern in noting that while coming to self-expression is a laudable goal for subaltern communities, coming to self-agency to participate in the discourse needed to effect change in the beliefs and practices that limit subaltern people is a crucial step that must follow. However, these concerns need not negate the value of “reading with” methodologies. What these concerns do require is for researchers employing “reading with” methodologies to envision a serial nature to their engagement with subaltern communities. Rather than designing a single retreat or even multiple retreats among the same group, the practical theological research can begin with a retreat

\[371\] Spivak, 271.
that aims at developing self-awareness and end that retreat by inviting the community ahead to look at the next step of self-expression. Following a project aimed at developing self-expression, the researcher can then ask this community, “Who would you like to learn what you’ve come to express?” At this point, a subaltern community can begin to take action and a researcher can assist in developing a wider circle including those willing to listen and work together to effect change.

The use of “reading with” style activities has much to offer anyone working with subaltern communities of faith such as the community of Deaf Zimbabwean women. However, as mentioned above, since this community has yet to produce a scholar in the mold of those developing and employing these methods discussed in this study, any “reading with” workshop will necessarily require the involvement of someone who remains an outsider in more than merely their academic training and way of thinking. One further strategy that may apply here to assist such group outsiders in maintaining humility is Nancy Eiesland’s autoethnographic approach employed in her practical theological study of disabled mothers.\(^{372}\)

As a mother with a disability, she situates herself within the subject field as she researches the practices, pressures, and struggles that disabled women in the United States face in being disempowered as mothers. While she employs a general ethnographic methodology, she also takes field notes on her own actions, responses, and thoughts both as a disabled mother and as a researcher of disabled

\(^{372}\) Nancy L. Eiesland, "Pedagogies in Practical Theology: An Examination of Ethnography" (paper presented at the American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, Washington, D.C., November 18, 2006). Unfortunately Nancy Eieland passed away before her research presented at the AAR meeting reached publication.
mothers as she participates in interview groups and study activities. This approach allows her to retain a solid ethnographic methodology but also carefully consider the impact of her own social location and personal shared experiences with those being studied. A group outsider involved in a “reading with” methodology could employ the same techniques to ensure they maintain a self-critical view of their own actions that fosters the humility necessary to step aside and allow subaltern people to shape their own process. Checks and balances in a “reading with” methodology that include humility, collaboration, serialization, and autoethnography can reshape such methodologies to be more effective for group outsider participation while encouraging self-theologizing agency among subaltern people.

**Building Bridges of Commonality and Community: Encountering Grace in the Cross-Cultural Processes of Practical Theology**

A common thread woven throughout the nine methodologies explored in the previous section is the notion that practical theology is a task involving more than a singular theologian developing hypotheses and arguments. Instead, these theologies necessarily involve an examination of the lived experience of people of faith. In this manner, they all can be classed as practical theologies in that their theological methodologies involve some critical correlation that engages in an academic discourse between the observations of social scientific descriptions of lived experience and church tradition. Some of these methodologies extend this discursive aspect to frame practical
theology as a communal task where people come together to in a dialogical fashion to consider circumstances of their lives in light of their beliefs and practices. As mentioned above, the concept of enacted theology opens up a variety of ways in which this discursive aspect of practical theology can take place. This discussion seeks to examine various approaches that look at how commonality and community can bridge the gaps between insider and outsider in a way that allows for ideas to traverse boundaries between cultures yet privilege the subaltern in order to retain their agency in this process.

The retention of agency for subaltern participants in practical theological research methodology is paramount for two reasons. First, subaltern people must be afforded the right to correct, critique, and retell the depictions of their lives and practices as they enter into a wider global and academic discourse. Without such ownership, academic discourse risks falling into the trap identified by Spivak whereby we employ our own notions of what subaltern people’s lives and experiences mean at the expense of the ‘voice’ of the subaltern. Second, subaltern agency must be retained to ensure that such communities can own the ideas being transmitted into their cultures. This ownership necessarily entails the ability to amend ideas to their own needs and points of views or even outright reject them as irrelevant. Without such ownership, subaltern people remain at risk of having an external hegemony inscribe their lives and experiences and hamper the development of their ability to view the world on their own terms. This section will examine the work of Andrew Walls and Lamin Sanneh as they discuss the transcultural nature of Christianity in missional settings. It will also examine Joseph Murray’s observations on the transnational character of Deaf identities in relation to Paddy Ladd’s
conception of Deafhood. In bringing these ideas into dialogue with one another, this
discussion will propose a vision of practical theological methodology as not only a
critical correlation of lived experience with the traditions of a faith community, but also a
mutually critical exchange of beliefs and practices between cultures.

Paddy Ladd uses the term *Deafhood* to,

begin the process of defining the existential state of Deaf ‘being-in-the-world’. …
Deafhood is not seen as a finite state but a process by which Deaf individuals
come to actualise their Deaf identity, positing that those individuals construct that
identity around several differently ordered sets of priorities and principles, which
are affected by various factors such as nation, era and class.\(^{373}\)

This definition casts Deafhood as something one discovers and grows into awareness of
rather than a given essentialist criteria of cultural attributes. The mutable nature of this
definition of Deafhood also imagines this process of discovery and growth of the
definition itself as Deaf people come to self-expression of how we view ourselves in
existential terms. By allowing for a variety of “differently ordered sets of priorities and
principles, which are affected by various factors such as nation, era and class”\(^{374}\) to shape
and influence the understanding of Deafhood, Ladd implies that while Deafhood is a
shared process among all Deaf people, the exact nature of Deaf identity will take on
various forms and aspects from contextual and historical circumstances. Despite this
flexibility in his general definition, Ladd does build his analysis of Deafhood and Deaf
identity on a historical narrative largely influenced by British and North American

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\(^{373}\) Ladd, xviii.

\(^{374}\) Ladd, xviii.
examples of Deaf history. Undoubtedly there are certain aspects of marginalization and isolation based on unmet communication which are shared by all people who’s ability to hear differs from societal norms and hegemonic constructions of this difference as a medical condition that prevail on a global scale among hearing people. However, I remain concerned that by developing Deafhood using the experiences of Western Deaf people as a primary resource may overwrite the potential for different ideas of what it means to be Deaf and what “Deaf gain” might be developed from non-Western points of view. Thus there seems to be a danger for the development of a nearly essentialist criteria to determine the parameters of Deafhood that could impose artificial constraints on non-Western Deaf people in the same manner critiqued by African feminists in regard to early Western conceptions of the category of woman in feminist scholarship. Ladd is not unaware of the dangers of essentialism as he argues for what Spivak calls a ‘strategic essentialism’ as a polemic center for the organization of counter-hegemonic narrative.\footnote{Ladd, 81.} Ladd asserts that until such narratives can be established as normative in some nature, the problematization of Deaf counter-narratives should be resisted to avoid the trivialization of these narratives.\footnote{Ladd, 133 (footnote 2).} In my view, such problematization must always be in our minds as the “next step” in order to prevent any potential imposition of Western derived concepts of Deafhood onto non-Western Deaf peoples.
In relation to the development of Deafhood as counter-narrative to hegemonic discourse of a larger hearing society about the meaning of our existence, Ladd also suggests that there may be a Deaf spirituality of sorts that can be used as a foundation for inspiration and unity. This Deaf spirituality is akin to an *esprit du corps*, or spirit of the people, that expresses communal hopes and aspirations. These expressions often take on religious language and metaphors. Ladd notes that many Deaf communities throughout the world have also expressed a particular reverence for their signed languages. Nineteenth Century Deaf Parisians kept a practice of elaborately ritualized Deaf banquets where, “Signs were performed and celebrated. There was even a religious quality to these banquets; it was a religion centered on liberation and progress.” This “religious quality” is also reflected in the views of American Deaf leader, George Veditz, when he eloquently defended the use of signed language in education in the face of a growing movement of oralist education in a movie now preserved in the Library of Congress.

"A new race of pharaohs that knew not Joseph" are [sic] taking over the land and many of our American schools. They do not understand signs for they cannot sign. They proclaim that signs are worthless and of not [sic] help to the deaf. Enemies of the sign language, they are enemies of the true welfare of the deaf. We must, with…various films protect and pass on our beautiful signs as we have them now.

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377 Ladd, 109.

As long as we have deaf people on earth, we will have signs…. It is my hope that we will love and guard our beautiful sign language as the noblest gift God has given to deaf people.  

Similarly, Deaf communities in Canada turn to the quote of Deaf leader David Peikoff when he stated, “Sign language is the alpha and omega of my existence.” These are cherished quotes that find their way into modern Deaf discourse as evidence of the extreme value of signed language and its attendant socio-cultural identities. Ladd also gives attention to ritual in relation to his conception of Deaf spirituality as he references and records the text of a Blue Ribbon ceremony at the 1999 World Congress of the World Federation of the Deaf. In this ritual, various international participants shared in a liturgy of remembrance and celebration that captured various moments of oppression and accomplishment in Deaf history. The blue ribbon itself was chosen as a symbol of the persistence of Deaf existence and self-expression despite hegemonic forces that attempt to silence it with blue being the color given to Deaf and disabled people in Nazi concentration camps.

Some Christian theologians and religious scholars might hold that employing an _esprit du corps_ conception of what constitutes spirituality as suspect. The HarperCollins Dictionary of Religion speaks of Christian spirituality,

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381 Ladd, 469-471.
in Roman Catholic devotional writing, [as] the piety, the religious sensibility or insights of an individual, usually a saint. By extension it can refer to the traditional ambience of a particular Roman Catholic religious order. This ambience shapes the orders’ communal life, and is also a guide for members of those orders who preach, write, and counsel individuals on the spiritual life of prayer and devotion.  

This definition of spirituality points beyond an \textit{esprit du corps} and signals a more cohesive set of practices and interrelated beliefs as what constitutes spirituality. While Ladd’s conception of Deaf spirituality may not fit the criteria of a religious spirituality, he does offer the notion that this \textit{esprit du corps} can be a source of inspiration that drives the development of Deafhood forward. Ladd conceives of a relationship between spiritual questions and postcolonial struggles for self-actualization when he quotes African-American scholar bell hooks,

\begin{quote}
To be truly effective, contemporary black liberation struggle must envision a place for spirituality. This does not mean continued allegiance to patriarchial capitalist religions, or the institutionalized traditional black church…[but] to create new structures for the expression of spiritual and religious life and develop progressive strategies for transforming existing structures.  
\end{quote}

Ladd introduces this quote to make a case for the “regeneration of spiritual issues as a force not only for healing, but for asking advanced questions which can pull a community forward.” In using this quotation of bell hooks in his discussion of Deaf spirituality and Deafhood, Ladd seems to be seeking to establish a common thread of solidarity

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{383}] hooks in, Ladd, 448.
\item[\textsuperscript{384}] Ladd, 447-448.
\end{itemize}
among the diversity of Deaf people in a worldwide sense that adds an almost eschatological dimension to his aspirations. This quasi-eschatological dimension fuses the hopes and dreams of Deaf people with a sense of purpose to provide inspiration for action.

Joseph Murray also notes a degree of unity and diversity within Deaf identities when he examines the transnational nature of Deaf communities. As previously mentioned his essay, “Coequality and Transnational Studies: Understanding Deaf Lives,” chronicles the words of a Deaf American, Amos Draper, addressing a mostly working class British Deaf audience while en route to the First International Congress of the Deaf in Paris, France in 1889, “Draper surveyed the audience and quoting Shakespeare, declared, “One touch of nature makes the whole world kin.””\(^{385}\) This “one touch of nature” being a reference of a commonality felt among Deaf people when gathering with one another despite differences in culture and nationality. Murray argues that this commonality is a product of the fact that,

transnational spaces for articulating Deafhood exist/ed both in the nineteenth century and today. Transnational interaction among Deaf people does not ignore national boundaries or national identities. Rather I believe Deaf people in different locations share a common discursive field as Deaf people, a field existing alongside identities framed within the boundaries of specific nation-states and the cultures associated with those states. Living in a visual community stretching across national boundaries, while simultaneously participating in their auditory, national communities, Deaf people lead uniquely structures lives.\(^ {386}\)

\(^{385}\) Murray, 100.

\(^{386}\) Murray, 101.
Murray goes on to document several such observations from historical data of international Deaf conferences, youth events, and other moments of global contact. His last narrative illustration of this thread of connection that exists among Deaf people is his own experience of sitting on the shores of Lake Malawi and being approached by a thin Malawian man who, by appearances, had walked a long distance to come to the hut where he was staying. As this man approaches Murray’s hut, “Our eyes meet and he lifts his right hand to his face to ask, “Deaf?””  

Such moments are familiar to many Deaf readers who have traveled internationally. A common topic of discussion among Deaf people when planning our travels is the possibility of identifying and visiting Deaf schools, clubs, or community centers wherever our destination might be. Similarly, those of us traveling to what seems to us as remote locations, find word of our presence getting around as the curiosity of someone who uses their hands to communicate causes interest in the community. When such word reaches the eyes of a Deaf person, we often find ourselves approached in the manner Murray was approached in this story.  

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387 Murray, 108.  

388 My own experiences in Zimbabwe reflect this phenomenon as well. On my initial trip to Zimbabwe in 2000, our team had identified three classrooms of Deaf students in hearing schools and divided our team into three units to work with them for a week. On our last Saturday, we planned a community event to draw together all community stakeholders that impacted the lives of these Deaf children. We planned for a crowd of two hundred extended family, classmates, clergy, teachers, and school and government officials. However, as people started arriving that Saturday, we eventually stopped counting when we estimated that we had around three hundred participants. Then a bus pulled up carrying several Deaf adults with their families from Harare!
nature of Deafhood points to the power of the Deaf *esprit du corps* that Ladd raises as a source for “pulling a community forward.”\(^{389}\)

In my own thinking about Deafhood and the transnational character of Deaf identity, I often attempt to discern what is undeniably similar between Deaf peoples from various cultural contexts and yet balance these observations with what is undeniably different between us as well. I am helped by comparing Deafhood to the similar cross-cultural process in Christian history identified by Andrew Walls in his study of missionary transmission of Christian faith. Walls’ analysis of Christian expansion across the globe notes that Christianity appears to have a serial nature in how it moves from one culture to another. Walls posits that the tradition of translation into the vernacular languages of local cultures as a key feature of the missionary enterprise effects the faith itself in sometimes unpredictable ways.

Politics is the art of the possible; translation is the art of the impossible. Exact transmission of meaning from one linguistic medium to another is continually hampered not only by structural and cultural difference; the words of the receptor language are pre-loaded, and the old cargo drags the new into areas uncharted in the source language. In the end the translator has simply to do his best and take risks in a high risk business.\(^{390}\)

In noting the hermeneutical process that links linguistic translation of scripture and the conceptual frameworks through which scripture is understood, Walls recognizes the nature of Christianity as a translated and translatable set of ideas. That this translation is

\(^{389}\) Ladd, 447-448.

a product of the pre-existing definitions and meanings of a culture and language receiving the Christian faith puts local communities in control of this translational task. This control is not so much a scholarly process of linguistic translation but in a cultural hermeneutical process where the meanings of local language and culture guide the understanding of received scripture and church traditions. This conception reverses the assumption of the commonly held notion that the missionary from a sending culture controls the process of translation through his or her own lens of a receiving culture.

Lamin Sanneh concurs with this reversal in *Encountering the West: Christianity and the Global Cultural Process*. Sanneh is quick to recognize that the African encounter with the West was a complex and mixed message that included both the hegemony of Western superiority in colonialist cultural projects and missionary activity that uplifted local culture and language as having value for the transmission of the Christian faith. Sanneh does not deny the complicity of missionaries in colonialist imperialism but suggests that African nationalist writers placed far too much blame on the missionary enterprise as a whole in the degradation of native culture. By favoring the mother tongues of African peoples in scriptural translation and missionary preaching, early missionaries provided tools for undermining the hegemony of Western superiority. In the eyes of Africans, what matters could be more important than those of a spiritual and divine nature? If the White men preferred native languages to speak of such things,

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392 Sanneh, 153.
surely there must be value in our own language and culture. Thus the development of Christian beliefs and practices became the task of native speakers whose use of their mother tongue brought new hermeneutical insights to the Christian faith.\footnote{Sanneh, 101.}

That Deafhood and Christianity can both be viewed as transcultural and transnational presents possible avenues for theological development. The potential affinity between Christianity and Deafhood as mutually translatable qualities also offers an opportunity for theology and Deaf studies to enter into a mutual critical correlative relationship in developing Deaf theologies applicable to the analysis of contemporary issues involving Deaf communities. It should be noted that this conception of translation and translatability is significantly different than what Schreiter critiques in *Constructing Local Theologies*. Schreiter’s concern with translation models of local theologies is primarily a matter of translation efforts being made by missionaries employing a “husk and kernel” understanding of Christianity and a shallow understanding of indigenous culture to arrive at ineffectual expressions of local theology. By placing the agency of the translation process in the hands of receiving people rather than the missionary, Sanneh’s process reverses the power dynamics of translation and allows for a deeper inculturation of transmitted ideas of Christian faith akin to what Schreiter terms inculturation models of local theology.

The conception of Deafhood as a translatable quality allows for the potential for rich theological development among Deaf communities of many types. As Ladd has
stated, such collaboration between Deafhood and theological studies can develop questions that not only assist in the self-expression of Deaf cultures, but also allow Deaf communities to envision what they may become. In my view, the eschatological dimensions of Christianity are particularly suited for this sort of practical theological enterprise.

**Interlude: Stirring the Pot with Bridges of Commonality**

How then does an understanding of Christianity and Deafhood as translated and translatable concepts that construe bridges of commonality interact with my theological sadza? One of Hastings’s concerns in regard to North American practical theology was a general lack of space for divine agency within theological methodology. In response, one of his suggestions is to reformulate the traditional notion that knowledge of God illuminates knowledge of the self and vice versa by adoption a vision of the self as “participation in Christ.” In envisioning the self as a participation in Christ, Hastings’s approach carries the suggestion that practical theological methodology involves a relationship with others that finds its commonality in identifying as fellow followers of Christ. The implication here is that a bridge of commonality exists in Christianity even amid cultural differences among the ecumenical nature of the global church as the one

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394 Hastings, 8.

395 Hastings, 146-148.
body of Christ. Such bridges of commonality provide ways for group outsiders to establish relationships with subaltern groups that transcend cultural difference without trivializing its significance. Where the watchword for enacted theology was creativity, and the watchword for checks and balances in “reading with” methodologies was humility, the watchword for the strategy of finding bridges of commonality is grace. The grace of God allows for common bonds to occur where human difference divides.

Recognizing the presence of God’s grace in a theological process is a confessional moment akin to that which Poling and Miller include in their process when a community arrives at a point where they are aware they can’t explain everything, but need to make a statement of belief. This acknowledgement of God’s activity in the theological process keeps disparate people together in relationship and provides a space for divine agency in their midst.

In relation to my own search for a methodology that allows me to engage with a community of Deaf Zimbabwean women, a relational and dialogical process of practical theological engagement that employs bridges of commonality can be highly beneficial. Such an approach can present Deaf Zimbabwean women with an opportunity not only to acknowledge, understand, and articulate the commonality of the loss they feel in their experiences as mothers who lack social agency in the child rearing, but also give shape to the hope they have to define themselves as Deaf Zimbabwean mothers on their own terms. A cross-cultural translational approach not only creates avenues for these women

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396 Poling and Miller, 87.
to articulate their own self-theologizing agency, but also engages them in an act of translation of both Shona and Christian notions of motherhood as in their own terms. Furthermore, it offers an opportunity for them to further the process of Deafhood in ways that will be undoubtedly African in nature as they wrestle with what it means to be Deaf in the world in relation to the unique circumstances of their complex situations as mothers. Both of these opportunities present the potential for exciting new information that may challenge and enrich the theological imagination of the entire Christian faith.

In recognizing the two-way nature of cross-cultural mission, practical theological researchers working with subaltern communities can allow their work to be a conduit for the insights developed within specific contexts such as those of Deaf Zimbabwean women not only to impact the lives of subaltern people, but stand as contributions to the entire Christian family. A methodology that recognizes that the translational, transcultural, and transnational nature of Christianity and Deafhood place receiving cultures in control of the development of faith and identity suggests that the self-theologizing agency of subaltern people is ultimately a natural product of the mission process despite missteps and overwriting that outsider researchers can enact along the way. By coupling this approach with the previously discussed techniques for safeguarding against such overwriting, a way forward for reorienting practical theology toward developing self-theologizing expression and agency reveals itself in following the guideposts of creativity in the enacted theology of subalterns, checks and balances in “reading with” subalterns, and the translational nature of cross-cultural relationships.
CHAPTER EIGHT  
CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This study has concerned itself with the nature of practical theological methodology in relation to engendering self-theologizing agency among subaltern people. The traditional three-self conception of church development in mission fields that encourages churches to become autonomous and free standing social institutions independent from their parent organizations has been supplemented by a need for indigenous theological development in these churches as well. This self-theologizing agency is viewed not only as critical for the success of these churches in their own context but also as valuable for building wider ecumenical understanding among various churches worldwide. As practical theology concerns itself with a starting point of the problems and questions that face contemporary people and communities of faith, this study introduced my own dilemma in seeking a methodology that allows me to engage with a community of Deaf Zimbabwean women and their struggles as mothers of hearing children. Because this study is also highly informed by postcolonial theory, it presumes the most effective responses to these struggles will derive from within this community rather than proposals originating from outsider contexts and reflections. Unraveling the complicated knot of factors arising from communication gaps, cultural customs, and economic hardships that lead to these women experiencing distance and marginalization as mothers in the raising of their own children is beyond the scope of this study. However, the dilemma faced by myself as a practical theologian when these women
approached me with the question, “What can we do?” forms the catalyst for this study. Therefore, my research remains driven by the need for my methodological approach with these women to engender their self-theologizing agency.

As someone who shares some commonality with these women as a Deaf person and a Christian, I am able to identify certain aspects of how they tell their stories as a variety of Deaf experience in larger society. Yet, as a white North American male, much of their experience as Zimbabwean women comes to me as foreign and unfamiliar. The colonialist history of Zimbabwe’s past and the complicit involvement of some missionary efforts in creating a hegemony of cultural and racial superiority of the West over Africa create a particular dilemma for me. While the difficulties faced by these women are prime examples of the type of questions practical theological methodology seeks to address, it would take a careful methodological approach not to overwrite the experience, expression, and agency of Deaf Zimbabwean women with my own perceptions of what their stories contain and mean. Such an approach must reflect a commitment to postcolonial methodological concerns that seek to limit the impact of outsiders and allow subaltern people to chart their own ways forward in addressing the problems they confront.

This study has also employed extensive use of theological metaphorical modeling in order to communicate the analysis of and proposals for practical theological methodology. My own experience in learning to cook sadza while in Zimbabwe has been a key element in making this study more accessible to general audiences. Because cooking is a commonplace experience and sadza is a staple food of Zimbabwe that serves
as a symbol of home and hearth, framing practical theological methodology as “making theological sadza” allows the process of creating theological expression to be more familiar. In addition to the advantages this theological model presents for reaching an audience, this model also serves as a gentle reminder to myself as an outsider to the lives of Deaf Zimbabwean women that although my own expertise offers new ingredients that can catalyze the process of making theological sadza, the origin of the ingredients, cooking process, and ultimately the end product of the theological sadza remain in the context of Zimbabwe.

A selection of contemporary theological methods that either remain influential and formative of practical theology in general or have specific links to my own relationship with the community of Deaf Zimbabwean women were evaluated to examine how their approaches might assist in developing self-theologizing agency among these women. Methodologies proposed or employed by Browning, Poling and Miller, and Miller-McLemore offer a great deal to this study in how they frame mutual critical correlation between lived experience and faith traditions as the cooking pot where practices and beliefs were combined and reshaped. Schreiter and Hastings also offer helpful ingredients in considering the implications of cross-cultural dynamics that occur in transnational relationships of mission theology. Lewis and Morris’s approaches illustrate how theologies that engage with Deaf studies address the dilemmas faced by Deaf communities in regard to scriptural interpretation, liberation, and self-expression. Finally, Dube and Kanyoro’s theological works bring careful consideration as to how both categories of imperialism and feminism need to be considered in a balanced way to
reveal how they create interlocking hegemonies that proscribe the lives of African women and methodological techniques for engaging with grass-roots rural African women.

Despite these helpful insights, each of these methodologies on their own also contained gaps or weaknesses in relation to their applicability to my own dilemma of engaging in a practical theological project with Deaf Zimbabwean women. These limitations generally fell into two categories; either the methodology provided little specific guidance as to how to avoid the pitfalls of overwriting the expression of subalterns, or the methodology was built on a pre-existing commonality in identity and experience between the researcher and subaltern community that is not in play when the researcher is a true outsider in many vital ways. In either case, these limitations seemed to leave it up to the personality or commitment of a practical theological researcher to muddle through the issues of traversing cultural boundaries in a way that developed the self-theologizing agency of subalterns in a practical theological project. The ambiguities of these methodologies are akin to my own awkward attempts at making sadza with only a rudimentary understanding of how to proceed. While the women in Zimbabwe allowed me to begin making my sadza in such a manner, after some teasing of my resulting product, they quickly intervened to guide my troubled pot of pimply sadza on its way to becoming smooth and delicious.

What these methodologies need then, are intervention strategies that allow for subaltern people to employ their wisdom and practices to guide the theological methodology to meaningful content and self-expression. This study engaged in three
discussions that identified helpful strategies and frameworks that can serve as guideposts on the path when traversing these cultural boundaries. First, these strategies highlight the need for creativity in envisioning what critical correlation might look like in non-literate and non-Western communities. Daneel’s concept of enacted theology arising from his study and work with Shona communities to develop earthkeeping practices provides a lively and helpful model for seeing how critical correlation takes place in ways that Western eyes trained to see theology as reasoned reflection can easily overlook. In addition, enacted theology allows for the development of self-expression among subaltern people in ways that are already known and comfortable to them.

A second strategy examined the careful ways that Isasi-Diaz and Kanyoro understand their relationship with grassroots and rural women in their “reading with” methodologies. This discussion offers a glimpse into how to build checks and balances in to a practical theological project that allow for researcher interests to be set aside and the agency of subalterns to guide the hermeneutical process. While Isasi-Diaz and Kanyoro enjoy more of an insider researcher relationship, their strategies for mitigating the influences of their Western style education are reasonably well placed for outsider researchers to employ as well. Such outsider researchers must also exhibit an attitude of humility in employing such checks and balances in these projects in order to ensure the tacit influence their presence causes does not overwrite the necessary self-expression and agency of subaltern people.

A third discussion explores how bridges of commonality can be created allowing for solidarity and relationship between disparate people. An understanding of both
Christianity and Deafhood as translated and translatable qualities in terms of Walls and Sanneh’s analyses of cross-cultural dynamics in Christian history underlies this discussion. Translatability provides a framework for understanding that whatever concepts, information, or insights are being translated and transmitted, the ultimate shape of these elements will be determined by the receiving community. Therefore, the process of cross-cultural communication and theologizing can be understood as essentially and naturally in the hands of subaltern people. Such understanding allows for researchers to more easily adopt and adapt methodologies that seek to develop self-theologizing expression and agency in a “hands-off” manner rather than attempting to micromanage the development of such faculties. In relinquishing the need to control a process of self-theologizing, the outsider researcher then creates a space for the unexpected and unknown to occur. This space allows a place for divine agency in the theological process as both researcher and community encounter the grace of God in experiencing bonds of commonality and solidarity.

**Drafting a Recipe: A Possible Way Forward**

It remains important to note that these proposals for guideposts on the way to traversing cultural boundaries are provisional and untested in nature. The next natural step would be to develop a practical theological project that seeks to embody these principles in action. In returning to my original dilemma of how to engage in practical theological process with Deaf Zimbabwean women, this section attempts to provide a
preliminary picture of these three strategies in a practical theological project aimed at developing self-theologizing agency among Deaf Zimbabwean women to address their concerns about child rearing practices. Any project must necessarily begin with some consideration of my relationship to the community of Deaf Zimbabwean women as a practical theological researcher. The bridges of commonality between these women and myself as Deaf people and Christians offer a general framework for solidarity but needs a more nuanced consideration of the power dynamics in a research relationship.

Deaf scholar, Paddy Ladd names his position as subaltern-élite, to recognize both the influences of his own status as a member of a systemically marginalized, or subaltern, community as a Deaf person, and also his relative position within that community as someone who has attained the highest levels of education in the very institutions and methods that have perpetuated the hegemonic forces that continue to marginalize Deaf people. In positioning himself to his research in such a manner, Ladd is continually challenged to reconsider how his own status and place can both affirm his ability to do unique research as an “insider” of the communities he is studying without losing a critical awareness of how he is an “outsider” to those communities as well.

Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz situates herself as a “Latina studying Latinas” in a similar manner in developing her Mujerista Theology. In defining her place as an activist theologian she frames her insider/outsider status by stating, “The issue then is not whether in elaborating mujerista theology I speak for Latinas or not. Rather it is this: Do

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397 Isasi-Diaz, 5-6.
I speak so as to control these Latinas or to provide a platform for their voices, which are not totally separated from my own?” By adopting this question as her guiding principle for keeping in mind the influences of her social location as an educated Latina researcher when researching grassroots Latinas, Isasi-Díaz forges a careful subjectivity in her stance that refuses to clinically distance herself from the subjects of grassroots Latinas in recognizing that their experiences share some level of commonality with her own. While such objective distance might quell criticisms of her work as “speaking for Latinas” where Latinas may be articulating ideas much different from her own, this distance would also negate the organic social connection that makes her relationship and work with these women possible. Yet she is also charged with the knowledge that these Latina’s voices are distinct enough from her own to warrant their own platform in theological discourse. She cannot presume to speak for all Latina women and must craft her work in such a way that it allows for a plurality of theological expressions. Thus Isasi-Díaz articulates her activist theologian position as a researcher in a manner similar to Ladd’s subaltern-élite albeit in a theological framework.

Daneel also reflects on his theological insider/outsider status as a white Zimbabwean researching the theology and practices of African Independent Churches in responding to the use of his work by another author, Hubert Bucher. Daneel situates himself as, “an observer and participant in IC [independent church] life…attempting another kind of “contextualized theology” which addresses itself in the first place to the

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398 Isasi-Díaz, 7-8.
Shona IC leadership…and African Independent Churches in general, and which also attempts an interpretation for the sake of interested Western academics.” Daneel calls his approach an *open-ended* theological position that seeks to give full attention to the dynamics of African Independent Churches while withholding from making theological judgments on a wide and varied subject of study. Instead of making definitive and closed theological judgments, Daneel sees the purpose of his systematizing of indigenous enacted theology as an open process of exploring the strengths and weaknesses within African Independent Churches so as to document them for study and assist AICs in their own theological development. He remains aware that his own descriptions, documentation, and assumptions may ultimately be judged as missing the mark by Shona AIC leaders and participants in the same way he assesses the work of Bucher. Yet he seeks to carefully create a theological approach as a participant/observer that joins with the subject community being studied and presents their views of themselves to reveal the theological understandings and contributions they have to offer for a wider audience.

Finally Nancy Eiesland’s *autoethnographic* approach in her practical theological study of disabled mothers provides a helpful framework for me. As a mother with a disability, Eiesland balances her own experiences as a mother with a disability with her position as a researcher. In positioning herself as both a researcher and a subject of her

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own research, Eiesland seeks to maintain a practice of ethnographic field observation that not only records what she observes in others but how she herself responds as a mother with a disability who shares a close bond with the struggles and challenges her subject community encounters.

Ideally then, my own stance vis-à-vis Deaf Zimbabwean women in a practical theological project would be generally autoethnographic in those instances where I am observing the challenges Deaf Zimbabwean women face as a Deaf practical theologian. However, I am aware that my position will be that of a Ladd’s subaltern-élite inasmuch as my own educational and socio-cultural background separates me from these women. Thus in my efforts to be an activist theologian as Isasi-Diaz is among Latina women, albeit further removed from the subject community than she, I will need to give careful attention to my role in creating a space for the expression of Deaf Zimbabwean women to come forward with their own experiences and thought. In being a participant/observer I will need to maintain an open-ended theological stance as Daneel presents in his research so as to keep my theological analysis of methodologies from overwriting the expressions of these women with my own theological judgments on their contribution to practical theology or skewing the research toward my own particular interests.

In addition to consideration of how I will relate to Deaf Zimbabwean women as an outsider researcher, any such development of a project to address the concerns of Deaf Zimbabwean women must be done in concert with the women themselves. While a general vision of a serial program of structured workshops and interactive dialogues can be proposed, any such proposal must necessarily be open ended to allow for revisions and
guidance from Deaf Zimbabwean women. In working in concert with these women, I join with them around their cookpot as we learn from one another what needs to go in to make a theological sadza.

Similarly, my own reflections and project design considerations would benefit greatly from collaboration with African women theologians as well. Where Western views of cooking might see serious drawbacks to having too many cooks in the kitchen, my experience of learning to cook sadza in Zimbabwe suggests that a more collaborative and communal approach is not only beneficial for filling in the gaps of understanding that a single individual might have, but also is natural to how these women interact in their daily lives. The execution of such a practical theological project would provide helpful information in the complexification and deepening of my proposed guideposts for reorienting practical theological methodology. The additional depth arising from the insights gained by seeing these principles in action would be a welcome process of critique and correction of my own work by subaltern participants.

With such considerations in mind, a practical theological project can take shape in the form of a series of workshop events. Preliminary design for these workshops can be done in collaboration between African women theologians familiar with Zimbabwean culture, leaders of the community of Deaf Zimbabwean women, and myself. An initial workshop can employ the practices of engaged theology in acts of worship, study, socializing, storytelling, and drama among Deaf Zimbabwean women to build their self-expression of their situation as Deaf mothers in a manner in which they are already comfortable and employ in their religious life. In addition to fostering their self-
expression, this workshop would also ask them to explore the meaning of their stories in relation to their culture and faith. The aim of such a workshop then is to arrive at a self-described portrait of their dilemma as Deaf Zimbabwean women that they can comfortably articulate.

Deaf Zimbabwean women could then lead in the design of a follow up workshop that draws in other stakeholders in the lives of their children. These stakeholders could include their children and extended family members who are involved in traditional child rearing practices. The goal in this workshop is to create a time of listening to one another’s concerns and desires. Mucharera envisions this sort of listening as a way forward for Shona communities in addressing issues of pastoral care and likens it to the traditional practice of the palaver. In these meetings, a community gathers to address a particular issue and everyone is encouraged to be a part of the solution based on their mutual care and concern for one another as members of a community.

This workshop can also employ enacted theology as a means for telling ones story, responding to one another, and recognizing bonds of commonality. It may also employ “reading with” strategies that allow for Deaf Zimbabwean women and their hearing family and community members to engage in a common study of what their culture and faith traditions say about child rearing practices. The insights gained in this workshop would then shape whatever strategic and practical steps would need to take place in order to create a third phase that actively reshapes how their community as a

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whole addresses the dilemma of Deaf Zimbabwean women in relation to child rearing practices. Ideally, bonds of commonality and solidarity are built through this stage that reframe the concerns of Deaf Zimbabwean women as not only “their problem” but a problem for the entire community to come together and address for the benefit of everyone.

Furthering the Academic Discourse Between Practical Theology and Missiology

As noted in the introduction, an additional layer of study brings practical theology and missiology into a close academic discourse as it seeks to draw from both fields to reorient practical theology toward the task of engendering self-theologizing agency among subaltern communities. While a full examination of the relationship between practical theology and missiology is beyond the scope of this study, the strategies proposed in chapter seven engage with this dialogue by suggesting that by inserting missiological categories into practical theological methodology, I can achieve a more satisfactory methodology for engaging with Deaf Zimbabwean women. This move brings my own thoughts in regard to the nature of practical theology as a missiologically oriented task to the forefront. Hennie Pieterse and Jaco Dreyer provide a helpful framework for understanding various orientations of practical theology as they examine the nature of practical theology from their own context of South Africa. They outline three different ways practical theology has been oriented throughout its history. The prevailing concerns of practical theology for many centuries were the tasks of the
pastor. In orienting practical theology toward pastoral duties, the field was largely defined as a collection of “how-to” rules that would govern and guide the actions of a pastor. Pieterse and Dreyer see a continued role for this type of approach in offering valuable insights into how pastors can be more effective in their role as congregational leaders in specific contexts. However, they also recognize that the field of practical theology reoriented itself in the post World War II era to focus on the church rather than the pastor. They recognize that the seeds for this transformation were present in the Nineteenth Century, but that it did not take a prominent role in theological discourse until later years. Here, the focus of practical theology is the task of the whole church in examining their practices and applying the principles of critical theory as introduced by the Frankfurt School of philosophy to work toward a common good. In this framework, the practices of a community of faith remain the focus of practical theology but, “the practician constantly reflects critically on the underlying theories and ideologies which direct the praxis.” Lastly, they recognize the more recent emergence of a third orientation of practical theology. They cite Van der Ven in describing this orientation as, “no longer church-oriented, but located within the system of co-ordinates made up of

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403 Pieterse and Dreyer, 32.

404 Pieterse and Dreyer, 32.

405 Pieterse and Dreyer, 33.
Pieterse and Dreyer note that within the context of South African struggle against Apartheid rule and the resultant post-Apartheid rebuilding of society, this approach is particularly apt.

The outward focus of this third orientation makes it particularly receptive to the insertion of missiological categories such as those employed in chapter seven. Daneel’s technique of employing participant/observer strategies of enacted theology in a missional setting allow for a reorientation of practical theological to follows Pieterse and Dreyer’s third type by coupling existing cultural practices and patterns with theological content. The infusion of theology with missiological categories to create an outward oriented approach to theology is prominent in mission theology and is often noted in European practical theological circles. Jongoneel’s encyclopedic handbook on missiology provides a helpful look at the nature of this outward orientation of mission theology.

Friedrich A.E. Ehrenfeuchter (1859), being closely related to the Hermansburg mission in Germany, was right in placing mission studies at the very beginning of practical theology. Johannes C. Hoekendijk, however, went a step further: he proposed to suffuse all branches of systemic and practical theology with a missionary spirit (cf. Coffele 1976). This process of transforming systemic and practical theology into a missionary theology is especially important for Europe and the United States of America; because, since the reign of Constantine (325), Western theology has lost its missionary nature and has delegated mission issues and mission studies to missionaries and missiologists.

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406 Pieterse and Dreyer, 33.

Jongoneel suggests that this compartmentalization of mission issues to missiology and mission studies has deprived practical theology of its original place as an outward oriented approach seeking to make theological thinking a part of the Missio Dei, or greater mission of God to the world. He concurs with David Bosch’s assessment that rather than a theology of mission, which entails theological thought about what mission is and how it is to be done, we need a mission theology that reshapes theological tasks as missional efforts in their own right. Mission theology is a theology that considers its relationship to the world beyond the church as an expression of God’s mission to the world.\footnote{408} For Bosch, a missionary theology is one that involves, “means serving, healing, and reconciling a divided, wounded humanity.”\footnote{409} Jongoneel’s theology also shares this wider scope beyond the boundaries and concerns of the church as an institution by stating,

I treat 'missionary theology' as that form or type of Christian theology which, both theoretically and practically, reflects upon the relations of Christians and churches with, and their responsibilities toward, adherents and communities of other religions, world-views, and ideologies in all spheres of private and public life.\footnote{410}

Such a conception of mission theology alongside the impetus to see practical and systemic theology as needing to be ultimately missional in nature provides a cookpot for projects such as this one. In this theological cookpot, I can begin stirring missiological

\footnote{408} Bosch, 492-494.  
\footnote{409} Bosch, 494.  
\footnote{410} Jongoneel, 10.
categories into a practical theological sadza to see how methodologies can be reoriented to embody this shift toward a more outward facing stance.

Enacted theology as a means of critical correlation opens the door to a variety ways of doing critical correlation that, as Daneel notes, are themselves interreligious dialogues incorporating practices, symbols, and meaning from both indigenous understandings of life and the received meanings of Christian tradition. The dialogical nature of a “reading with” approach that includes checks and balances to mitigate the presence of outsider participants allows for an outward reorientation of practical theology by framing practical theology in more collaborative and collegial processes rather than the academic reflection of an individual or individuals. The insertion of a translation principle such as those proposed by Walls and Sanneh as a guiding principle for understanding the way practical theology engages in boundary crossings achieves a reorientation of practical theology by placing the process more firmly in the hands of a receiving community as it takes its final shape. These three examples of how practical theology and missiology can intersect in academic discourse are likely only the crust at the top of a sadza pot full of connections that can be made as practical theology and missiology explore their commonalities, particularly in non-Western contexts.

**Considering Wider Applications**

One might wonder if the insights of this study, developed in dialogue with a dilemma facing a specific subaltern community of Deaf Zimbabwean women can be
guideposts for wider application for practical theologians seeking to engage with communities in other contexts. My language in this study has alternated between specific and general at times in an attempt to provide not only a methodological reorientation of practical theology for my own dilemma but also to illustrate how they reflect wider applicability among non-literate and non-Western contexts.

In specific terms, a review of this study’s proposals for guideposts along the way to a practical theological methodology for a project with Deaf Zimbabwean women might employ some of the various aspects of Bauman and Murray’s concept of “Deaf gain.” Such a review asks the question, “What unique perspectives might be gained through the contribution of Deaf insights in a practical theological project with Zimbabwean women’s issues?” One preliminary observation appears on the horizon created by this study. First, the communal, collaborative, and transnational nature of Deafhood and Deaf experiences offers a way for those from radically different cultural contexts to find meaningful connection with subaltern communities as they engage in participant observer or “reading with” style projects. Such connections are necessarily of a translational nature as long as one maintains an understanding of the translation process in terms of Walls’ and Sanneh’s work that leaves the final shape of new knowledge in the hands of a receiving community. What does this insight lend to non-Deaf contexts? Such a stance on understanding the nature of commonalities across cultural boundaries can assist in unhitching other identity factors from the moorings and trappings of a transmitting culture. Dube employs a similar approach in her reshaping of the category of Woman in her analysis of patriarchy to recognize its relationship with imperialist hegemony in
African contexts. This framework for building bridges of commonality can provide a possible roadmap for researchers to discover and develop meaningful connections with subaltern people while maintaining an appropriate awareness of the limitations of their social location as outsiders.

A second aspect of this communal and collaborative nature of transnational Deafhood is its foundation on the need to connect and communicate. Murray identifies the desire for coequality as the root of transnational Deaf identity. Having referenced a well known historical study of Deaf and hearing people living in an audiologically mixed, but all-signing environment on Martha’s Vineyard Island, Murray reflects that,

While Martha’s Vineyard Island may or may not have once been a sign language mecca, most Deaf people do not live their lives in anticipation of its return. Rather, Deaf people aim for a state of coequality in which they participate in non-Deaf societies while simultaneously creating temporary, situational localities in which to express their Deafhood.411

If a practical theological project engaging with Deaf Zimbabwean women is envisioned as a this type of temporary and situational locality, then it becomes a place where Deafhood becomes the nexus of connection that allows participants to begin to transcend their differences while acknowledging such differences remain present. Stated in another way, the need to gather and be Deaf together forms a practice of creating such spaces without retreating into isolation from wider society. The aim is not to reinvent society on Deaf terms but to create those moments and places in life where meaningful connection based on commonality can be a powerful factor in our lives. This pattern of coequality in

411 Murray, 104.
Deaf identities might be a framework to explore the ways that other commonalities between a practical theological researcher and subaltern community can serve a similar purpose to allow for subalterns to benefit and develop self-theologizing agency.

In more general terms, my engagement with postcolonial theory, leads me to realize my employment of Spivak’s titular question, “Can the subaltern speak?” may provide a helpful key to analyze methodological approaches. Rather than seeing this as a question to be researched and answered with a yes or no, I read Spivak’s intent in raising this question as a request of those engaged in postcolonial discourse. If we envision academic discourse as a roundtable of sorts, Spivak’s question is an interruption in the flow of conversation to invite subalterns themselves to take the floor and for academia to stand aside and learn. The Biblical model here is that of John the Baptist.

As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, “See I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of the one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.’” John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

In employing the model of John the Baptist, it is of course not my intent to portray subaltern expression as a theological messiah—such a folly would fall into the trap of idealizing subaltern communities in a manner that occludes the reality of their contributions. The focus of this image’s applicability is the role envisioned for practical

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412 Spivak, 271-313.

413 Mark 1:2-5 (NRSV).
theological researchers as ones who clear the way for subalterns to contribute. In making the way clear for subaltern contributions to larger theological discourse, practical theologians build the ecumenical nature of Christianity across cultural boundaries and create space for subaltern self-expression and self-theologizing. The act of making the way clear must necessarily involve a confession of shortcomings to ensure that the crowd around the theological cook pots of practical theology allows ample opportunity for the subaltern to “speak” or contribute to theological discourse. Therefore, a reorientation of practical theological methodology to engender self-theologizing agency among subaltern communities can be derived from the creativity of enacted theology, the humility of employing checks and balances, and the grace of the translational nature of identities in cross-cultural relationships. These three elements provide vital ingredients and intentional markers and milestones along the paths of practical theological methodologies to guide researchers in traversing cultural boundaries.
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