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Marginalised millennials: Conversation or conversion towards a Christian lifestyle in South Africa?

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The World Council of Churches' statement prepared by the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, *Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes*, states that mission from the margins calls for an understanding of the complexities of power dynamics. These power dynamics include global systems and structures, as well as local and contextual realities. One of the local contextual realities of South Africa is 'a culture of violence' against the vulnerable. Many millennials in South Africa – which constitute the majority of the current South African population – form part of the marginalised, not only in the global systems and structures but also in the local context. TLL acknowledges that Christian mission, and by implication the Christian church, largely failed to challenge economic, cultural and political systems that have marginalised many in the South African context, including the millennials. However, this article wants to study the millennials in South Africa from a missional church perspective regarding their views on culture, gender and violence and will attend to the following two issues: firstly, the role of culture in marginalisation, and secondly, the question about a proper response by the church, namely conversation or conversion?

Introduction

The World Council of Churches (WCC) central committee, on 05 September 2012, unanimously approved the ecumenical document on mission and evangelism, *Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes* (TTL), as the official statement of the WCC. The *Together Towards Life* (TTL) document describes the mission of the Triune God as life-giving mission and that when life is denied it is a rejection of God (Keum 2013:5). 'Life' in this document is understood as described in John 10:10 as 'life in its fullness'. TTL further states that mission from the margins calls for an understanding of the complexities of power dynamics. This article will discuss the gender and violence as it occurs in South Africa from the missional perspectives found in TTL and described by Bevans (2013):

> Mission is rooted in the mission of the Triune God who is the God of Life. Mission is carried out in the power of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit moves the church to protect the entire creation. The main co-operators in mission are Christians from the Global South and on the margins of society. Mission is integrally connected with justice, and the church engages in a 'confident and humble' sharing in the faith which includes both engagement in interreligious dialogue and sensitivity to particular contexts. (p. 2)

Working from the mentioned missional perspectives, this article focuses on the millennial generation, also described as the 'emerging adults'. Millennials in this article refer to South African young people between the ages of 15 and 35 years. Although there are many differences between the millennials in South Africa like different cultures, different social statuses, geographical differences – urban and rural – as well as other differences, there are also enough similar characteristics amongst South African millennials to address them as a homogenous group for the specific purposes of this article. Where some of the differences are applicable, it will be indicated.

The TTL document describes mission as to bring new life and announces God's loving presence in this world (Keum 2013:7). Within the context of gender and violence issues in South Africa, this is a crucial announcement for Christian mission, especially amongst the millennials. This article will attend to the issue of gender and violence as the disparities between male and female counterparts within the millennial age group and the negative impact of gender inequalities on children. In 2015 it was reported in the Afrikaans newspaper *Beeld* that 61% of birth registrations in South Africa had no information about the father. The average ages of the mothers were 27 years. Of those mothers between 20 and 24 years of age, 70% were unemployed and 46% of the mothers between 30 and 34 years of age were unemployed. One of the reasons for the high

unemployment rate amongst these mothers could be their education level, as only 34% of these mothers had passed grade 12 and only 6% obtained some tertiary education (October 2015:1). Possible explanations for the low education level of these young mothers could be their economic situation or cultural background (Nurnberger 2007:38). A member of the 'emerging women' may choose to drop out of school or be forced by her parents to have a child to get hold of the child support grants, which are given to unmarried women with newborn children, to put food on the table for her family (Modisaotsile 2013). Or her parents might have taken her out of the education system following the traditional African view that boys are more important than girls for the African family and therefore boys get more opportunities from families to go to school, whilst girls must work or marry to provide for the family (Modisaotsile 2013).

Whatever the reasons for the above statistics, they indicate the impact of pregnancies on the lives of young women, which might lead to some of the gender inequalities amongst the millennials. The newspaper *Youth Today* (2015:3) reported South Africa has a 40% youth population and that 36% of them are unemployed. From these statistics, it is concluded that many of the millennials in South Africa are socially, economically and educationally marginalised in some way or other. This article attends to the following two issues: Firstly, the role of culture in marginalisation, and secondly, the question, what would be a proper response for the church towards the marginalisation of millennials regarding gender inequalities and violence? May the Christian church in all her brokenness only engage in a conversation or may she propose a conversion on gender and violent issues amongst millennials in South Africa? Thus, the questions this article wants to answer are: Does the current culture amongst millennials contribute to their social, economic and educational marginalisation? Or does marginalisation contribute to the current culture amongst millennials? Furthermore, can the church in South Africa still call for conversion of the millennials or only for a conversation with them? Or does the church need a conversion herself before having a conversation with the millennials?

Culture

In South Africa with its different cultures amongst the millennials and within the church community, the reader needs to be sensitised for the fact that culture is more than just traditions or biological heritage. When culture is not defined by traditions or biological heritage, it is a social construct that is in a continuous flux. Culture may then be described as a design for living accepted by a group of people, in reaction or adaption to their physical, social, spiritual or religious and ideational environment. This view is supported by the following characteristics of culture as described by Hesselgrave (1991:100); culture is *learned* as a *shared system* within a society, culture forms an *integrated whole* within the society and certain aspects constantly change as a result of different relations and influences, and culture is

thus not biologically determined or restricted by race. A legitimate question would be: Do the South African millennials have a culture of their own?

No one can look at the reality of life and life issues in a neutral or unprejudiced way. Discussing gender violence from a missional perspective implies a Trinitarian perspective with a Christ-centred view, where the 'new life in Christ' is taken seriously. From the mission history in South Africa, it is clear that many Western Christians, also some missionaries, carried forward feelings of religious superiority especially towards Africans and this led to a belief of cultural superiority which influenced the growth and experience of the mainline missionary churches in a negative way and led to the development of the African Independent Churches (AICs). Religious and/or cultural superiority are already indications of a general marginalisation of African culture. In a sense, this is not new; from the earliest times we found different cultures as well as one culture viewed as dominant over other cultures. For example, the ancient Greeks viewed people who belong to the other cultures as *barbaroi*. The difference between the ancient Greek world and the South African context is within the ancient Greek world all cultures were more or less equal regarding opportunities and power. However, in the South African context, modern culture has created an inequality between people living according to traditional cultures and people living according to modernistic cultures.

According to Hesselgrave's (1991:100) characteristics of culture as mentioned above, it is accepted that within South Africa with its different cultures and views of gender and violence, it is possible to establish a 'new' or a generally accepted gender-sensitive and non-violent culture. However, everyone knows that this is easier said than done because different cultural groups within South African society are still struggling to form an integrated moral understanding. Different cultural groups must in relation to gender and violence still unlearn previously accepted views and attitudes and integrate these views within a broader society with different cultural views to learn a new shared system of values and views. There is thus a clear need for conversation about culture, and in many instances also conversion from specific cultures or cultural views.

Although South Africa is a land of many cultures, this article focuses on the two traditional cultures, namely Christian culture and the African culture[1]. Dealing with a Christian world view – or a Christian culture – needs some clarity on how it is used here. One of the main questions to Christianity is how it relates to other world religions and this also clarifies the understanding of Christianity. Within Christianity, there are mainly three positions towards other faiths, each with different varieties. The three positions are: exclusivism – there is no salvation outside Jesus; inclusivism – a willingness to include all other faiths with the understanding that Jesus

1. It is recognised that there are different African cultures within South Africa, but for the purpose of this article there are enough similarities amongst them regarding gender and violence issues to treat them as a homogenous group in this regard.

'fulfils or completes' all faiths; and pluralism – an acceptance of all religions on equal terms (Turaki 2001:24). However, with all the varieties within the above-mentioned 'classifications', they are inadequate to order the different attitudes and can be complemented by the following more recent terms that may be more helpful in understanding how Christianity relates to other faiths: Ecclesiocentricism,[2] Christocentricism and Theocentricism[3] (Turaki 2001:25). In this article we work with the understanding of Christocentricism which:

> has a wider coverage of both exclusivists and inclusivists attempting to define salvation in terms of the centrality of Jesus Christ, ranging from a cosmic Christ to the historical Jesus. (p. 25)

Some remarks about black African culture relevant to this topic also need to be made. In the traditional African context, ethical questions always include restoring the presence of the ancestors. Any person who is taking the remembrance of the ancestors (*anamnesis*) seriously is confronted by the ethical rules of the ancestors who called the clan fellowship into life (Bujo 2015:35). A good example is marriage. In Africa marriage 'not only concerns the survival of the individual but also embraces the entire fellowship: the living, the dead, and the unborn' (Bujo 2015:35). It is thus clear that marriage within the African culture has deep religious and spiritual connotations, just as in Christianity.

Millennials

The reason this article is focusing on the South African millennials is because the millennial generation has in many instances already learned a new 'glocally[4]' shared system and culture. Most South African millennials grew up in a predominantly 'Christian society' where education was and still is informed strongly by Christian principles; for example, the Bible may still be read in public schools. They are also informed by global views on Christianity and African culture through the electronic media. However, most of them also grew up within an original African culture lived out in keeping different rituals and customs. Even today many of these customs and rituals are determined biologically and restricted by race. The question needs to be asked, are the millennials engaging in a new culture, or are they living in more than one culture? Have they unlearnt some of the previous cultures, or is it just a transformed culture? Nonetheless, there is no doubt they are living in a secularised culture and TTL asks the important missional question: 'How can we proclaim God's love and justice to a generation living in an individualised, secularised, and materialised world?' (Keum 2013:6).

As indicated above, the millennials in South Africa are a diverse group of 'emerging adults' between the ages of 15 and 35 years of age. Although they are a diverse group of

people, they are also the generation who has overcome most of the previous sociopolitical barriers amongst the different population groups in South Africa. Many of them had, for example, participated in multiracial schools depending on the geography and demography of their location. However, most of the South African millennials are part of a 'new' global culture, which is closely linked to electronic communication, a cyber world and in practice a secularistic world view. Many of the African millennials in South Africa are also closely linked and connected to traditional African rituals and customs related to life stages, for example birth, marriage and death. The South African millennials are viewed, or rather labelled (for different reasons, mostly economical), as the first so-called 'free-born' generation after the apartheid regime in South Africa. Vincent Maphai, the former Executive Director of Corporate Affairs at South African Breweries (SAB), says:

> … the notion of 'born frees' is a commercial and commercialized term we use in the marketing departments … At South African Breweries (SAB), we used this all the time as part of our key marketing demographic … The 'born free' concept is a muddy concept. It doesn't catch a reality, it *creates* a reality. (Norgaard 2015:237)

However, many South African millennials do not view themselves as 'free born' because they are daily confronted with the consequences of apartheid which still influence their lives (Knoetze 2017a:6). Norgaard (2015:233) remarks that 'it seems as if the born-free label is more aspirational than real'. This may contribute to the fact that many South African millennials view themselves as 'entitled' to certain things in life. Although the 'things' millennials feel themselves entitled to differ, the focus for this article is rather on the characteristic of entitlement amongst the millennials. For example, many of them believe they are entitled to life in its fullness; may it be understood as a good job, free education, wealth or anything else? As members of the 'free-born' generation influenced by a secular world view, they have a great 'quest for enjoyment' that exploits all boundaries. May it be argued that this 'free-born generation' tag and globalisation have contributed to such 'entitlement'? Creating dream profiles on electronic media, many South African millennials believe they can become and get whatever they want, immediately (Sinek 2016) . This belief is supported by populist political views like free education and land redistribution without compensation. Some politicians and student leaders encourage millennials to negative violent acts, like destroying university infrastructure during the fees must fall campaign, instead of encouraging them to participate in a positive democratic society. This behaviour may be closely linked to marginalisation and will be discussed later.

In some of the South African cultures, many millennials are raised with the concept that everyone is a winner, you do not need to win the race or work hard to be recognised, you just need to participate, and everyone will be equally rewarded (Sinek 2016). Combined with a secular world

2.Defines salvation in relation to the church.

3.Accepting a God-centred understanding where different understandings of God from different faiths are viewed as equal or the same.

4.'Glocal' is a new term referring both to the global and the local context.

view, the focus is not on the community or what is best for society but on the self and the 'quest for enjoyment'. Beliefs such as these may have influenced the millennials' views on gender and violence issues. This may possibly contribute to some men thinking they are entitled to have sex with whom they like and when they want and some girls thinking they are entitled to have a child without taking any responsibility for their deeds. Deeds of 'corrective rape' against gay and lesbian people, and sex with a virgin (in many instances babies) as a cure for HIV are some examples of the acts related to gender and violence. Looking at the statistics discussed previously about absent fathers on birth certificates, it surely reflects a moral decline but also a decline in traditional beliefs in Christian and African cultures. Because some of the South African millennial generation's parents were involved in the fight for political freedom in South Africa, many millennials lived and grew up in a violent era. This in many instances includes domestic violence and many of the millennials are bearing the scars of this context; for example, absent fathers.

A second characteristic of South African millennials related to gender and violence is new behaviour patterns, which are strange to traditional (African and Christian) cultural views such as gay and lesbian relations, single mothers and stay-at-home dads (Knoetze 2017b:16). In the lives of many African millennials, it is assumed that Christianity cannot be true because of their cultural experience of the Western cultures. Christianity according to them is directly related to apartheid, as it was defended from the Bible; therefore, Christianity must be unjust and corrupt. However, they also know and some experienced how churches have fought against apartheid from their Biblical convictions. As a result, South African millennials are not indifferent to Christianity or African traditions, although there are clear shifts in these traditions. In South Africa, many millennials are leaving the mainline missionary churches to join independent and mostly Pentecostal churches. In this regard, Oduro et al. (2008) make the following observation about the fast-growing AICs, 'the AICs represent a wide spectrum of religious understanding and practice, ranging from groups only one step removed from traditional African religious reality to Christ-centred, Spirit-led, biblically oriented communities of faith' (Oduro et al. 2008:10). On the other hand, many African millennials find themselves caught up in traditional beliefs through rites of passage that older generations expect them to perform, especially in sickness, childbirth, initiation, marriage and death. Many South African millennial parents leave their children to be raised by grandparents who might still be very traditional, living in the rural areas (cf. Knoetze 2017b:15–18).

The South African millennials have unique circumstances and characteristics that may contribute to a new culture of gender sensitiveness and non-violence. The unique characteristics described above which refer to the political landscape were the first labelled 'free-born' generation. It was also indicated by Norgaard (2015:233) that the born-free label is more aspirational than real, as well as a commercialised term used for marketing purposes. The Christian church has the opportunity to help the millennials to not only aspire to freedom but also to experience freedom in Christ and to live to the fullest. A second characteristic related to the first, is the 'glocal' environment. The Christian church must help the millennials to live in the reality of their local environment whilst understanding and critically engaging with the global influences. Experiencing and noticing local and global disturbed relations, the church might help with false expectations of entitlement and enjoyment by teaching a Christian anthropology. Such a Christian anthropology may either be enhanced or blurred by the understandings of Christianity and African traditions and the religions' (or denominational) movements as discussed by Oduru et al. (2008:10).

The article has up to here dealt with the context – South African millennials, the position or identity of the Christian church, Christocentrism and the calling of the church, identifying contact points. The following sections of the article will focus on how the Christian church reacts to its calling, describing the concepts of conversation and conversion.

Conversation

The understanding in this article is that conversation, conversion and mission are interrelated, not only in relation to each other but also in relation to culture, gender and violence. This relatedness is characterised by a creative tension to come to life in its fullness. Humans are created to live in different relationships – with God, with the neighbour (and the family), with the self, with the cosmos – but they are not created to live for themselves or by themselves. 'Humanity is created in relationship, for relationship and for a task that requires relational cooperation …' (Wright 2006:428). Heyns (1970:102–104) describes these relationships as dialogical, whilst Bosch (1991:483–489) also follows suit by describing 'dialogue as mission'. It is in this regard that Bosch (1991:483) 'believes we are in need of a theology of religions characterised by creative tension, which reaches beyond the sterile alternative between comfortable claim to absoluteness and arbitrary pluralism'.

The author of this article believes we are also in a need of a theological anthropology characterised by a creative tension between the four relations of humans, with God, with the neighbour (the family), with the self and with the cosmos. Because a dialogue only implies a two-way communication and it excludes others, it is the take of this article that as all these relationships are interrelated, the relationships must be more conversational than dialogical. Just as the different relations are not exclusive, the conversations are inclusive and interrelated, influencing and determining each other. From a church point of view, this then implies

a Christological conversation, focusing on the centrality of Christ in the cosmos as well as in soteriology.

TTL states, 'God created the whole *oikoumene* in God's image and constantly works in the world to affirm and safeguard life' (Keum 2013:4). From a Trinitarian perspective – and not a Theocentricism – Psalm 24:1 and John 3:16 are acknowledged in this article. From the perspective of Psalm 24 that everything and everybody belong to God, it is acknowledged that the Trinitarian God is present and active in every square millimetre and in every person on earth (Wright 2006:423). Thus, the departure point of any conversation must be to acknowledge the coexistence of people and world views that differ from one's own. It is impossible to have meaningful conversations with people if we resent the presence of the (world) views they hold. With any conversation there is no void, God is not absent from any situation. Entering into any conversation, we must expect to meet God who preceded us in preparing the conversation. It is not we who bring God 'into' the conversation. He is ever-present in all conversations, whether they are spiritual or not. This preceding and presence of God is characterised, for example, in John 3:16 and Phil 2:1–11 when God committed himself to give his only begotten Son to become a servant because of his love for the cosmos. These characteristics of commitment and servanthood or humanness must be part of any conversation.

Any (spiritual) conversation is a witness to our deepest convictions and commitment to Christ, whilst we are at the same time genuinely listening to the convictions of the other. It is not true that mere conversation has nothing to do with a confessional position (Bosch 1991:484). 'Evangelism is a confident but humble sharing of our faith and conviction with other people' (Keum 2013:6). Exactly because of the confessional position of the church, any conversation must be characterised by an attitude of humanness or servanthood for two reasons: Christianity is characterised by grace and it is centred on the cross; therefore, everybody (including Christians) is living from grace and is judged by the cross. Bosch (1991:185) describes this attitude best when he comments: 'We cannot approach people when we are confident and at ease, but only when we are contradicted and at a loss.' A position of vulnerability and acknowledgement of grace is also confirmed in the words of Wright: 'Anything that denies other human beings their dignity or fails to show respect, interest and informed understanding for all they hold precious is actually a failure of love' (2006:423).

It must be stated clearly that although conversation is interrelated with conversion and mission, it is neither a substitute nor a deception of either. The purpose of conversation is not to convert or evangelise, but it is to make the millennial a better person, a better African, a better Hindu, a better Buddhist or a better Christian. In this venture, conversation differs from conversion and mission, although they are interrelated. The article confirms that witness does not exclude conversation but encourages it, and that conversation does not exclude witness but enriches and develops it (Bosch 1991:487).

Conversion

The Apostle Paul describes his conversion as an encounter with the risen Christ. When dealing with conversion we need to distinguish between *missio Dei* [mission of God] and *missio hominum* [mission of humans] (Bosch 1991:163). The church – *missio hominum* – cannot move people to faith but God alone – *missio Dei* – saves people (Knoetze 2015:7). In this regard, conversion differs from conversation. Conversion is not to make a better millennial, but to guide a person into a living relationship with the Trinitarian God. Conversion happens when the individual comes 'into the community of believers' (the body of Christ) discovering a new design for living accepted by a group of people. This involves a real and even radical change in the believer's life with moral responsibilities. Thus, personal conversion is not a goal in itself but enhances the quality of life in a community. Conversion is closely linked to salvation and genuine physical relations with real people (*koinonia*), not Facebook profiles. Paul uses the following language to describe salvation, which the author believes will relate to the needs and experiences of the millennials: 'adoption as sons (and daughters)', 'redemption of our bodies', 'being called to freedom', 'delivered from a deadly peril', 'knowing God' and 'justified' (cf. Bosch 1991:135).

Bosch (1991:126), when discussing conversion, makes use of the distinction of Gaventa (1986) between 'alteration', which is a very limited change developing from one's own past; transformation, which is a radical change of perspective but does not require rejection of previously held values which Kuhn calls a 'paradigm shift'; and conversion, or 'pendulum like change', in which there is a rupture between past and present, with the past betrayed in strongly negative terms.

Lienemann-Perrin (2017:7) describes conversion as a reorientation of the believer and his or her sins. This reorientation is an intrapersonal process that can happen without leaving one's religious community. This is what was previously described as transformation. She also refers to conversion as a 'pendulum like change' – for example, from one religion to another – as 'de-conversion and re-conversion'. She asks the critical question 'whether and how the broad spectrum of understandings of conversion can coexist in critical, constructive conversation, undertaken in the spirit of mutual accountability' (2017:6).

Lienemann-Perrin then describes different understandings of conversion as it played out in history.[5] A first interpretation of conversion was during the establishment of Early Christianity (1st and 2nd centuries) (2017:7–8). Characteristics

5. Because it is not in the scope of this article to discuss the different understandings of conversion, only those being viewed as important for the specific topic will be attended to in this article.

of this period were *metanoia* [repentance] and *epistrophe* (change one's beliefs), which were central to the self-understanding of the first Christian communities. *Metanoia* and *epistrophe* are closely linked with the idea of a break, described as, for example, from dark to light, old to new, etc. Accordingly, 'early Christianity avoided both comprehensive assimilation to the Jewish path and total adaptation to the religious ways of Hellenism' (2017:8) and formed a new community over time. The distinctive factor in the formation of this new community (*ecclesia*) was recognised by the Christian baptism. Within this article this understanding is important in specific relation to the millennials. If a new culture is to be created on gender sensitivity and non-violence, the formation of a new distinctive but inclusive community is needed. Robbins (2017:29–49) shows clearly that Christian conversion will always entail cultural adaptation in the sense of the continuous development of a new (religious) identity.

A second interpretation of conversion is 'conversion constrained by another monotheistic religion: Oriental Christianity in an Arab-Muslim Context (7th to 12th centuries)' (Lienemann-Perrin 2017:8–11). This interpretation has to do with the interrelationship between the three Abrahamic religions that are mostly paternalistically founded. From a Muslim point of view, conversion to Christianity was apostasy and treated with capital punishment. When a Christian converted to Islam, it was regarded as death before death and the lost was deplored in the liturgy through songs (2017:11). For Christians in this context the metaphors of 'the salt of the earth' and 'the light of the world' (Mt 5:13, 14) are important in the way they bring the gospel. This specific understanding is important to this article specifically regarding gender issues. Within Islam and the Jewish faith compared to Christianity, there is more and almost principal discrimination against women. In such a (South African) context, the church must act in society as salt and as light to come to a new culture of gender sensitivity and non-violence.

A third interpretation of conversion is described as 'conversion, adherence and propagation in Colonial Africa (19th to 20th centuries)' (Lienemann-Perrin 2017:17–20). An important remark from Lienemann-Perrin is that whilst missionaries from Europe focused on differences between African Traditional Religions (ATRs) and Christianity, Africans focused more on the continuity between the two. 'In continuity with the ATRs' provision of space for women to live in their own religious universe, women discovered their own access to the Christian message and transformed Christianity into a dynamic religion for African women' (2017:19). What is described as a second conversion after the conversion to Western Christianity followed when African theologians said that monotheism was not new to Africa as God came to Africa before the missionaries. It is the author's interpretation that this is a Theocentric understanding. From a Theocentric understanding, making Africa the home of Christianity changed the concept of conversion along the lines of the Reformed, charismatic and Pentecostal traditions, all represented in the AICs. Questions still unanswered regarding ATRs and Christianity include topics like witchcraft, faith healing and syncretism, which in some instances still influence gender and violence issues amongst South African millennials.

Marginalisation

The most general understanding of marginalisation is when something or someone is pushed to the side and viewed as being of lesser importance. From the statistics mentioned in the background to this article, we indicated how 'emerging women' are marginalised through education and 'emerging adults' are marginalised through employment or rather unemployment. It is also true that within the traditional cultures (African and Christianity), millennials are not incorporated in decision-making. Some millennials may even marginalise themselves from the local community living more in the cyber world than in reality. When millennials are experiencing marginalisation through circumstances like these, it may lead to seemingly irrational decisions from millennials that may end in violence. Some of these violent acts have been seen with the #feesmustfall protests in 2015–2016 by the millennials in South Africa. Bruwer (2001:13) describes violent acts such as these as 'vetoing acts', where the marginalised force the world to take note of them.

This article claims that millennials (people) are marginalised when there is not enough recognition of and importance placed on the process of relations. The modern and secularised era resulted in fragmented, lonely and isolated people. This might even be more true of millennials because they are experiencing physical life changes and making life-changing decisions. They need all the relational support systems they can have, especially family. Unfortunately, in a fragmented society without good relations, many times it is the circumstances like loneliness, poverty or exclusiveness of the rich that determine the choices of the millennials because they are not in relations that contribute positively to the decisions they need to make. Perhaps the name, or is it a label, 'emerging adults' is also an indication of how they are viewed as not yet able to make decisions influencing society.

Millennials also marginalise themselves when they do not realise their goal or purpose in a fragmented, lonely and isolated society. As indicated earlier, humans are created as relational beings and to live in relationships; therefore, the goal of a person's life is found in his or her relationship to God, to the neighbour, to the self and to the cosmos. Unfortunately, all these relationships are under pressure and distorted in the modern and secular society especially amongst the millennials who have mentors who either do not fit into their world or are bad, or no mentors and no frame of reference to a different world view. It is in these regards that the church (can) play an important role either through conversation or conversion.

Conclusion

This article suggests a much more nuanced approach to the discussion of gender and violence amongst the millennial generation(s) within South Africa to create a new gender-sensitive and non-violent culture. With the complicities of both Christianity, Africanism and millennials (in South Africa) who are multilocal, multicultural and multicentric, it is clear that it is not only about conversion but also about conversation to adjust and transform also to accept each other. In dealing with millennials in South Africa, it is important for the Christian church to realise its own denominational culture and traditions, which are not essential to her Christological identity. In engaging and building relations with millennials through conversations, the church and millennials might be called on to change some of their traditions and their traditional views on cultures, but this must always happen without marginalising any of the four relations – with God, the neighbour, the self and the cosmos. The same principle is also true if the church expects millennials to change specific aspects of their culture, or to convert, or the millennials expect the church to convert. Conversion must always happen within the reality of these four relations – with God, the neighbour, the self and the cosmos. If these relations are not kept in balance, it might even further marginalise the church and the millennials from the gender and violence realities of South Africa.

When culture is understood as an *integrated whole* within a society and it is further accepted that it constantly changes as a result of different relations and influences, then it is essential for the church to engage with millennials in conversation. Accepting that God is present in each conversation, we need to be aware of his presence when the different parties discern, adapt, transform and ultimately convert to (re)discover the goal and purpose of their existence. This article concludes that culture and marginalisation do have a (direct or indirect) influence on each other.

Acknowledgements

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