The Bible in the Fourth Industrial Revolution: ‘What’s in it for me?’

The society in which we currently live and operate is globally the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) and locally our (unique) environment or community. Although we are still in a lag period between the 3IR and 4IR, the 4IR already has a global disruptive effect, with artificial intelligence being gradually implemented, with fluid contexts, and where nobody agrees on anything. Deep learning, unlearning and relearning must take place on a daily basis. The question could well be asked if there is any place for the Bible and Christianity in this new vibrant global community.

All theology is contextual. Although theology deals with what is most absolute in reality, citing Mellert, it is also relative in that there is never a final or last answer to most religious questions. The handbook and norm for our theology and religion is still the Bible – a compendium of books written approximately 2000 years ago with no new information added to it ever since. The challenge of the church is to make that information contextual in this ‘disruptive’ era and to bring the gospel in a new and fresh way to everybody without compromising the basic truths and normativity of the Bible.

This article argues that the Bible should still take centre stage in the academic training of our theological students, in our preaching of the gospel on a daily basis, in our engagement with people in need and in the transformation of our societies in general. As the centre of Jesus’ preaching on earth was the (coming of the) kingdom of God, he also acted as the perfect example of how to establish the kingdom of God and the flourishing life on earth.

**Introduction – The Fourth Industrial Revolution**

The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) is dawning – but has not yet completely dawned – on the third decade of the 21st-century post-postmodern global community, being susceptible to any disruptive object or action coming its way. Penprase (2018:210) calls this transition time between the 3IR and 4IR a ‘lag period’, in which people experiment with and are trained in the new technologies that are disseminated throughout the world. In this lag period, the line between the digital and physical worlds is becoming more and more invisible, with digital technologies being used more frequently, like artificial intelligence (AI), the Internet of things (IoT) and Big Data that are blended with our daily lives (cf. Mohapi 2017).

Although many members of the previous generations are very sceptical or totally ignorant about this imminent era, the youth and young adults are very susceptible to it and embracing it, literally with both hands. Smartphones and tablets are visible everywhere, with the adolescents...
(and even younger) and (young) adults being mostly on social media and/or constantly playing games. Because of the fluidity of everything, especially information, around them, people find it easier to accomplish deep learning, coupled with constant unlearning and relearning (Veldsman 2019). If knowledge is not recent, it is often regarded as outdated or redundant. On one technology, entertainment and design (TED) talk, the presenter apologised that the information he was sharing with his audience was already two weeks old! (Van den Berg 2015). Old information or knowledge should be unlearned, new information should be learned and relearned and deep learning should take place. However, how can this be applied to the rather old information of the Bible and its theology? Before we answer this question, let us first look at the current situation of both academia and the Christian congregations.

The current (‘theological’) situation in academia and the church

**Academia**

According to Volf and Croasmun (2019, cf. 11), (the presentation of) theology has gone astray because it has deserted its purpose, the purpose being, very practically, to:

> critically discern, articulate, and commend visions of the true life in light of the person, life, and teachings of Jesus Christ, [and] to help human beings identify God’s home as their home and to help us journey towards it. (p. 45, 71)

They add that the purpose of Christian theology is the flourishing of all life because it stands in service of the flourishing of all life. They believe that the purpose of Christian theology is to help human beings identify God’s home as their home and to help us journey towards it. This way of doing theology has the tendency to relativise the normativity of the Bible, mostly ending up either in a ‘nostalgia and attempts at repristination (the conservative side) [or] suspicion and unending critique (on the liberal side)’ (Volf & Croasmun 2019:52).

**Life in the church – The narrative of the congregation**

At this stage, we experience a church of great diversity, which may be described as a unity in diversity, but definitely not a universality (cf. Bevans 2011:3, 4). Currently, the majority of Christians are from the so-called **Two-Thirds World** (non-Western, therefore outside North America and Europe), more specifically from Latin America, China and Africa (Bevans 2011:4).

In most churches, we commonly find two extreme groups of congregants; a (mostly) small group of conservatives and a bigger group of liberals. The conservatives want to keep religion in the same way as their ancestors have performed it, and that they have gained new knowledge, and, on the other hand, that the church needs to unlearn and relearn the ancient creeds and the content of the Bible within a new world (cf. Volf & Croasmun 2019:52). These conservatives believe that the creeds’ formulations still apply without any reformulation, and that the dogmas of yesteryear are currently still just as applicable (cf. Volf & Croasmun 2019:52). They also live with the prevalent warning of the church to stay away from the world ‘out there’ (Green 2009:4).

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5 Deep learning ‘takes place through interaction and participation’ (Brown 2013:15), resulting in deep knowledge. One of the conditions is that something must be interesting enough to interact with (cf. Brown-Martin 2017:11).
The liberals or ‘progressive camp’ mostly find pleasure in criticising everyone and everything (Volf & Croasmun 2019:54): ‘They interrogate and unmask; they trouble and problematize; they demystify and destabilise’. Their critique just never ends. They apply it to everything in the church, be it the content and context of the Bible, the church’s view of the Bible through history, or the presence and application of God within the 4IR, mostly not giving a positive alternative.6 According to Volf and Croasmun (2019:57–58), ‘[t]heology reduced to this mode of critique is fundamentally atheological [where] theology isn’t concerned with questions of truth and goodness but serves merely as a tool’, mostly to destroy or falsify other views.

A logical point of criticism on both these stances is that the liberals are focussing more on Christianity than on theology, whereas the conservatives are against innovation and transformation. However, both these groups are still in and part of the church – and sometimes fighting each other. Crowds of people (especially in the West) have already left the church as they ‘seem to believe that the Church is out of touch. It does not touch their everyday lives, it does not touch their concerns, their routines, or their struggles’ (Green 2009:3). They find it very hard, even impossible, to integrate their Christian belief and their daily life with each other (Green 2009:3). Here, the church and the theologians are guilty, as they do not teach and supply their preachers and congregants with sufficient knowledge and tools to deeply understanding the meaning of their faith.

Fortunately, there is a third (non-extreme not-so-large) group in the church, which we may call a new Christian community or generation. This group, still mostly being part of established churches, is scattered all over the world, trying to get the church in line with a new society, also trying not to compromise the normativity of the Bible (too much). They are not to be identified with ‘new church’ movements who are filling the world at an astonishing pace (cf. Oliver 2019).7 These are the people who will take the church into the 4IR, whereas the other two groups will (optimistically) get smaller and inaudible till they vanish with time.

**The role of the Bible and the Christian tradition in contextual theologies**

**Jesus’ preaching on earth**

The focal point of Jesus’ preaching on earth (according to the Gospels) was the coming of the kingdom of God, referring to God’s rule and realm on earth (present and future). Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God as a reality with reference to the dynamic and interactive relationship between God and his people, based on the words of the covenant, found in, *inter alia*, Leviticus 26:12: *I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people*. This covenant refers to two actions: (1) the action of God to look after his people in a divine way and (2) the act of his people to worship him and take care of his kingdom in a responsible way. This accords with and is a result of God’s words in Genesis 1:28 where he appointed human race as his representatives and guardians on earth. Volf and Croasmun (2019) elaborate on this:

> ‘[f]ormal human beings and the world come to fulfillment when they become in actuality what they have always been in intention: when God rules the world in such a way that God and the world are ‘at home’ with each other – more precisely, when God comes to dwell in the world and when the world has become and experiences itself as being God’s home.’ (pp. 68–69)

This also finds expression in the Great Commandment of God (cf. Mt 22:37–40) in which Jesus states that we should love God above all things and love our neighbours as we love ourselves. This implies that God stands (and wants to stand) in a relationship with his children, while he wants his children to be in relationships with each other. After all, that was the reason for his coming to earth as Jesus – to again put human race in the right relationship with God (cf., e.g. Jn 3:16), which will result in the right relationship with each other.

**Different angles and different interpretations**

In contrast to the scenario depicted under the previous heading, Volf and Croasmun (2019) refer to the current situation in churches:

> ‘[D]epending on the setting and guiding interests, Christians – including theologians – push some motifs into the background, play up others, and orchestrate them with various degrees of consonance or dissonance with each other and with the setting, all the while striving to be faithful to the New Testament and primitive traditions.’ (p. 103)

Theologians and congregants alike interpret God’s word according to the tradition that they have and respect, according to the context in which they live, generally through the eyes of their church and specifically through the interpretation of their congregation as a hermeneutical community (cf. Smit 2015:188). In this way, people create different contextual theologies, which are, in fact, different ways in which they interpret the Bible from the context that they are living in, ‘in the absolute belief that their [perspective is] the right one’ (Smit 2015:176).

One would love to refer to the interpretation – in fact, the contextualisation – of the Bible as a unanimous decision and fact, where everybody agrees on the perfect and exact judgement of the Bible in every situation and context. This would consequently end up in one general Christian church with a clear vision of the Scriptures, leading to congruent contextual theologies emanating from local congregations. However, from the earliest Christian times, people interpreted and communicated the gospel of God in different ways, emanating from and leading to different interpretations. Firstly, there were those who did not know much about
Jesus and his gospel but were so passionate about the gospel that they could not be silenced. A good example is Apollos who preached the gospel in Alexandria and elsewhere. However, *Iudhen Priscilla and Aquila* [a couple who were co-workers of Paul – cf. Rm 16:3] heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately (Ac 18:26). Secondly, we observe that people who knew the gospel well had different angles in their presentations. The earliest examples are Jesus himself and Paul. In his preaching, Jesus, who was the main determinant for the founding of Christianity, focussed, according to the Gospels, on the kingdom of heaven (cf. Mt 8, 10, 11 & 13), as well as eternal life (cf. Jn 3–6, 10, 12, 17). Paul, who regarded himself as an apostle by the will of God (2 Cor 1:1) and the will of Jesus (1 Cor 1:1), laid more emphasis on justification by faith (cf. Rm 1:16–17). These two examples cannot be regarded as different interpretations of the gospel, but merely as presenting the gospel in different ways or from different perspectives within different contexts. A last example concerns different (diverging) interpretations of the word of God, resulting in what the church called ‘heresies’, which were doctrinal views in ‘variance with the recognised, established and official doctrine’ of the church (Deist 1984:73).

Three examples will suffice: Gnosticism (mainly between the 1st and the 6th centuries), having a pre-Christian origin, emphasised special (esoteric) knowledge and did not regard Jesus as the Mediator between God and human race (cf. Deist 1984:68); Marcionism (initiated by Marcion in 165 CE) regarded the Old Testament as a barbarous book and only a few books of the New Testament as canonical (Deist 1984:100); in the 2nd century, Montanus started a Christian group (existing between the 2nd and 4th centuries), which was an ‘explosion of prophetism’ (Sundkler & Steed 2000:22), practising a strict asceticism and believing in the imminent second advent of Jesus (Deist 1984:107). It is very important to emphasise that most of these ‘heretics’ could be regarded as committed Christians, although their interpretation of the Scriptures differed from that of the church (cf. Oliver & Oliver 2018:3 of 12).

Currently, we still have Christians all around the world who identify with the three groups being discussed above. We still have people or preachers who passionately proclaim the word of God, but with very little knowledge thereof, ending up in naive explanations and interpretations of the Bible. When these ‘lay’ preachers are asked something that they do not have an answer for, they mostly regard it as a mystery, or they give a twisted answer. However, it is a challenge to convince people living in the 4IR, to believe in a ‘mystery’.9

People who nowadays identify with the second group of people mostly emphasise certain parts of the Bible more than others in proclaiming the gospel. With the dawn of the 4IR, these people are indispensable in and for the church, as long as they do not overemphasise one part of the Bible above the rest or make a dogma of it. Unfortunately, there are still many people (‘churches’) who can currently be identified with the third group. For these people, their dogma – their personal interpretation of the Scriptures – comes firstly, sometimes to such an extent that, if one does not comply with it, one is destined to go to hell (according to them).

**Contextual theology**10

Time, place, culture and tradition mark the life of the church and the way in which the gospel is interpreted. Jesus, for one, lived in a certain time, in a specific place and country, with a definite culture and tradition, which obviously differs from ours. This also applies to the contexts within which all the books of the Bible were written. If we look at the theologians and Christians who operated through the centuries, we realise that they lived in different circumstances – time, space, culture and tradition – and to live life to its fullest, they had to live according to this ‘old’ theology, reinterpret and applied to their current circumstances (cf. Volf & Croasmun 2019:63).

This makes all theology contextual. Bevans (2010:1) is adamant about it: ‘One can even say that there is no such thing as “theory,” because there is only contextual theology’. For him, contextual theology is a theology performed in a critical dialogue with two realities: the experience of the past (recorded in Scripture and the church’s tradition[s]) and the experience of the present, within a specific context, consisting of four elements: a personal or communal experience, a ‘secular’ or ‘religious’ culture, a social location and social change (cf. Bevans 2010:1; Bevans 2011:9). Key is the centrality of experience, as it is the (Bevans 2011):

> [H]onouring or testing or critiquing of experience that makes theology contextual … [C]ontextual theology is a theology of rich and challenging dialogue that tries to articulate my context, my experience, and dialogue of this experience with the experience of Christians down through the ages that we find in Scripture and Christian tradition. (p. 9, 10)11

Theology in the 21st century is therefore a contextual dialogue with the Bible as the word of God, being the foundation of our belief systems, and between the children of God within their circumstances and the people around them, with the practices and dialogues of the church through the centuries as guidelines. It is very important to understand the Bible as a compilation of books originating mostly from the ancient Near East, and not presenting it, as many preachers do, through a Western lens (cf. Bevans 2011:11).

The church should therefore constitute a dialogue between the ‘ways, themes and methods of theology’ in the Bible, and our ‘culture, ethnic identities and social locations’.

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9. This excludes the gullible groups all over the world who still believe ‘everything’ their preachers tell them, which needs discussion in a separate article.

10. Though space does not allow to elaborate on it, it is very important to take note that the contextualisation of the Bible is done based on its fourfold weight, that is, its historical, cultural, canonical and theological (cf. Welker 2013).

11. This correlates with the perspective of practical theology, as explicated by Swinton and Mowat (2016:24): ‘Practical Theology is a critical, theological reflection on the practices of the Church as they interact with the practices of the world, with a view to ensuring faithful participation in the continuing mission of the triune God’.
The Bible should be regarded as the norm of our Christian living and our outreach to ‘the others’. However, is this word of God normative in itself, and therefore ‘independent of its actual relevance’ or does this ‘actual relevance’ regulate its normativity? (Kaufmann 1999:281). If we look through history, we discover that the Christian gospel was always inculcated within every changed context (cf. Dreyer 2004:5; Kaufmann 1999:281), mostly without losing its unique identity. This should also be applicable for today (cf. Dreyer 2004:5) as we need to innovate our interpretation of the Bible within our new contexts, still listening to and applying the Bible to our contexts. If we do not innovate our interpretation and application of the Bible, we run the risk of creating an ideology, ending up in distorting the message of the Bible (Dreyer 2004:7). However, when we adapt our biblical interpretations to our current circumstances and situation, we must take care not to do eisegesis, but still do exegesis. Our aim is therefore to ‘renew our religious or Christian traditions’ and to relate the Bible’s normativity to our context (Dreyer 2004:11). When looking at our central theological task, it should be executed with a critical hermeneutic framework within our empirical research, keeping both critical and empirical perspectives in a balance (Dreyer 2004:11; cf. Ziebertz 1993:229).

In the South African context, we need to get back to these fundamentals, to have a balanced view on the normativity of the Bible. However, currently, the ‘normativity’ of the Bible is mostly captured within the stern dogma of most of the mainstream churches; most Reformed churches are very strictly on keeping the old Sabbath and to avoid eating meat, holding it as a norm for Christian living. The Seventh-Day Adventists are strict on adult baptism and glossolalia, according to their interpretation of the Bible. The charismatic and Pentecostal churches are strict on the confessing of sins and avoiding hypocrisy, presenting the people with all its truths, soaked with the will of God and with Jesus who came to earth; also including the so-called grey areas where people differ on the understanding thereof, presenting the people on earth with what God intends them to have. It should therefore be presented in such a way that the people will accept it. However, currently, some preachers ‘discover’ more and more ‘grey areas’ in the Bible and present it to their congregations and the masses in a ‘world-friendly’ way – a way that is more acceptable to the world, interpreting the content of the Bible to give the people what they want, thereby adjusting it to make the people feel at ease.

With reference to the relativity of the Bible – already in the 5th century CE, Augustine has detected the relativity of the Scriptures when he made the following remarks in his De Utilitate Credenda 13 (free translation) (cf. ed. Schaff 1885):

[Believe me, whatever there is in these Scriptures, it is lofty and divine: One will only find truth in it, and a system of teaching which is most suited to refresh and renew minds, and clearly, if someone is looking for something in it, they will find what is enough for themselves, with the condition that they approach it with devotion and piety, as true religion demands. (p. 745)

It is impossible to read Scripture without interpreting it from one’s ‘own frame of reference’ (Garrison 1953:426) – as the proverb states, ‘so many people, so many minds’. However, this does not imply that one can interpret the Bible randomly. Augustine gave a condition for ‘finding enough for oneself’ inside the Bible, and that is that the interpreter must approach the Bible with ‘devotion and piety’ – invariably also very subjective terms.

The relativity of the Scriptures is a given, which should be addressed with much caution. In the back of our mind, we must remember that every book in the Bible was written...
by men of God who interpreted God’s word into their own words. Our interpretation of any given text in the Bible is therefore an interpretation of their interpretation of the ‘real’ or ‘true’ word of God. There is, however, a difference between our interpretation of a specific verse or section of the Bible and the interpretation of the authors of the Bible. The text in the Bible was ‘God-breathed’ (2 Tm 3:16), giving it authority, whereas our lack of authority to a great extent.

The relativity of the Scriptures does not take away what God intended to convey to his children through specific people who wrote the books of the Bible. The relativity of the Scriptures also does not permit us to delete pieces of the Bible which we think are outdated, like the offerings being recorded in the Old Testament, especially in Leviticus. It also does not mean to question or criticize the Bible because of discrepancies that we have detected in, for example, the four Gospels. The answer is also not found in a mix of the Gospels, wishing away the discrepancies. The relativity of the Bible wants to teach us that we have not arrived at the final answer relating to a specific text; it wants to teach us to make room for other interpretations that differ from ours but can still be derived from the Bible. It means that we as different churches should start to take hands and work together, despite our ‘little’ differences. This action will prevent us from doing eisegesis or exalting our dogmas to normativity.

Despite its authority and normativity, no one on earth can ever discover the final or ‘whole truth’ in the Bible (cf. Garrison 1953:426). Despite its relativity, the word of God will always be the norm of life for his children.

**An epistemology of the dialectical aesthetics of a flourishing life**

As a church, we need to admit that we must apply both a kataphatic theology (using positive terminology to describe or refer to God, i.e. terminology that describes or refers to what God is believed to be) and an apophatic theology (more negative terminology), as both these approaches are (Volf & Croasmun 2019):

> [Indispensable elements in a carefully and systematically curated dialectical strategy whose purpose is both to articulate the nature of God and to acknowledge through language God’s infinite transcendence of all articulations... As the dialectics of apophasis and kataphasis implies, there is ‘unknowing’ in all our knowing of God, and there is ‘untruth’ in all our legitimate truth claims about God. (p. 94)]

As we do not know God in full, and therefore we speculate about him in some way, also because he is much more and greater than we are (cf. Is 55:8–9, ‘For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways’, declares the Lord. ‘As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts’). Within this scenario, God creates the context for a flourishing life for his children on earth.

This heading has in mind to curiously investigate some ideas and opinions about the viability, as well as the nature and appreciation of the flourishing life in Christ. The flourishing life is the ‘kingdom of God in its fullness, the realized hope of Israel’s prophets’ (Volf & Croasmun 2019:76; cf., e.g. Is 40:9–11). This involves the ‘tripartite question of how the true life is led well, goes well, and feels as it should’ (Volf & Croasmun 2019:153). Paul summarises this in Romans 14:17 with righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Volf and Croasmun (2019:153) interpret it as follows: ‘Righteousness (or justice) is the substance of life led well. Peace is the substance of life going well. Joy is the substance of life feeling as it should’. Revelation 21:3 refers to it in the following words (with the words of the covenant [although in a reversed order as referred to above] being part of it): Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

When looking at texts like Revelation 21:3, as well as those already mentioned, it can be suggested that the ‘home of God’ is the ‘overarching metaphor for developing a theology of flourishing life’ (Volf & Croasmun 2019:149). Having had the eternal life in mind, Jesus, while on earth, referred to the ‘Kingdom of God’ (cf., e.g. Mk 1:5; 14:25; Lk 4:43), which constituted a dwelling place of God – here on earth and also in heaven (cf. Oliver & Van Aarde 1991:379–400).

As Christians, we should seek to have a life to the full (Jn 10:10) and a life that is truly life (1 Tim 6:19), although there may be a variety of interpretations within it. Many Christians believe that this flourishing life excludes a life that does not always ‘go well’ or does not always ‘feel as it should’. However, a thorough reading and interpretation of Psalm 23:2–4 indicates that the poet refers to both the good times (He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters) and the bad or sad times (Even though I walk through the darkest valley) of being a child of God – the one does not exclude the other. Even Paul, the apostle of the Lord, had many bad times in his life as is quite clear from 2 Corinthians 11:23–28 (horrible times) and 12:7 (thorn in his flesh). In a sense, this suffering is necessary because it makes us look forward to one day be in the physical presence of God.

According to Volf and Croasmun (2019:81), a theology of the flourishing life should satisfy three requirements to experience it in its fullest. Firstly, it cannot be separated from the world and specific contexts in which we are living. It must therefore always be contextual – connected to reality. Secondly, it must be presented as a viable or plausible way of living, notwithstanding, but also in cooperation with the non-theological sciences. The last requirement concerns the adaptability of the vision of a flourishing life, in that it should...
perfectly fit the lifestyle of all the generations of people in the congregation.

The answer to the question about the viability of the flourishing life is a very subjective one. Once a Christian, someone will immediately have a positive answer to it, having experienced it in their religious life. However, the non-Christian, atheist or agnostic will frown at it and have a myriad of excuses and counter-arguments, based on, *inter alia*, the relativity of the Bible, the ‘suffering’ that goes along with Christianity, the multiplicity of churches together with different interpretations of the Bible in the world and the inhabitants or citizens of the 4IR who do not need the Divine anymore – referring back to Nietzsche’s ‘God is dead’ (cf., e.g. Nkomo 2015).

In line with Bevans (2011), to contextualise the Bible and for that matter, theology, the church needs a ‘new agenda for its theologising’ (Bevans 2011:12), an agenda that will address the current circumstances of people in a specific locale. It will also have to investigate the burning questions that the people in that location have. It implies that the content of the Bible should be conveyed in an enthusiastic and understandable language within the culture, tradition and circumstances of a given group of people (cf. Bevans 2011:13). This ‘new dialogue’ (Bevans 2011:15) must not be confined to the borders of the church but must reach out and be applicable to other religions as well. In this way, (contextual) theology will become a transformative theology (Green 2009:i-x) – changing people and situations, ‘making the transformation connections between our real-life issues and the fundamentals of our Christian heritage’ (Green 2009:x). By doing this, contextual theology will offer ‘the church a new look at itself’ (Bevans 2011:17; original emphasis) and at the flourishing life in which it finds itself.

What we need is a (Volf & Croasmun 2019):

[B]iblically rooted, patristically guided, ecclesiastically located, and publicly engaged theology, done in critical conversation with the sciences and the various disciplines of the humanities, at the center of which is the question of the flourishing life. (p. 82)

It should be descriptive like a science, instrumental like a technology and normative as mere advocacy (public support for a cause or policy) (cf. Volf & Croasmun 2019:83).

**What’s in it for me?**

Every individual can be understood and defined by her or his dialogical character (Taylor 2003:37). One acquires true humanity, a real capability of understanding (oneself and others) through an ‘acquisition of rich human languages of expression’, which is made possible in one’s dialogues with ‘significant others’ (Taylor 2003:37). These dialogues cause one to adopt a specific set of ideas or knowledge for a specific time, based on the (her or his) ‘complexity of contemporary hermeneutical issues’ (Smit 2015:176). Therefore, a question that people ask most of the times when being presented with something is: How will it benefit me to have it? How can I gain from having it? Especially within the wake of the 4IR, these can be regarded as existential questions to a certain extent.

Within the 4IR, theologians (in the wide sense of the word – therefore not only academics) should think twice before just presenting the word of God to a post-postmodern society. In the 4IR, all knowledge is fluid, and people are not keen to agree with others without good reasoning. Nothing remains the same for too long. We must implement that into theology. Although the ‘facts’ of theology will never change, we must innovate constantly, without distorting the biblical truths. We will have to make sure that we present the word of God as normative, and as true to the Bible as possible (according to our interpretation of the Bible – cf. Smit 2015:176). By doing this, we must not try to be ‘more clever’ than the Bible. This may sound very orthodox, but it is true. For example, as Christians and academics at a theological faculty or seminary, we should not contradict the basic truths in the Bible (e.g. God as creator of everything and the Holy Trinity) to be more acceptable to the people, as this does not bring anything constructive to the presentation of the Bible.

In her or his dialogue with congregants – be it during a church service while preaching, or in a (Bible study) group, or face-to-face – the preacher must always take care to act as the ‘significant other’, making such an impression on the individual as to assure that the Holy Spirit will help this person to adopt a new or better set of ideas, leading to a flourishing life. Preachers must stop presenting theology as if it has nothing new to offer and nothing compared with the other sciences which discover new things almost on a daily basis. Before conveying the word of God to others, preachers should ask themselves: ‘What does theology [really] have to offer?’ (Volf & Croasmun 2019:45). What is it in for me, for the congregation, for a post-postmodern individual in the 4IR?

Theology should be put in the hands of ordinary (and well-informed) Christians to actively put our faith back ‘in touch’ with life (Green 2009:4). Theology should find itself in ‘stories, films, popular music, spirituals, poetry, handicrafts, computer-gaming, dress, etc’ (Green 2009:5) to break it out of its ‘verbal captivity’ (Green 2009:5). Added to this, we should learn to actively practise what we preach (Francis of Assisi Rule 17.1 – Robinson 1906:50; *contra* Green 2009)\(^{16}\):

[S]o we will not be espousing a more participatory and practical way of doing theology just because it is educationally more sound (although it is), nor simply because it will help people to grow personally in the faith (although it will), but because it will address today’s issues and allow the Kingdom of God to beckon us forward, so that we might participate in the transformation of society… Christianity … should be an agency for promoting an active commitment for justice and peace on earth, ‘as it is in heaven’. (p. 6)

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16. Many scholars wrongly assume that St. Francis told his followers, ‘Preach the gospel to all you meet. Use words only if necessary’, which he never did (cf. Milton n.d.; Stanton 2012).

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Presenting the word of God in this way, with enthusiasm and conviction, could touch the heart of the independent and self-serving 4IR individual to such an extent that it might lead to a change of heart.

Conclusion

People living in the dawn(ing) of the 4IR are very critical, regarding themselves as ‘masterminds’, knowing ‘everything’ as they have all the information they need at their disposal (mostly on the Internet) and being emancipated – free from the ‘shackles’ that bind them to a dependent life. With reference to religion, they are no more dependent on a preacher to tell them what the Bible says, dependent on faith per se, and for that matter, dependent on the Divine. People have become their own masters, living in a ‘post-religious era’ (McGregor 2016) and, for that matter, in a ‘post-Christian era’ (Williams 2014). When confronted with Christianity, the first thing these ‘masters’ want to know is how they can benefit from that. Talking to them about things that they do not (want to) believe in or ‘cannot’ believe in, like the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, Jesus’ resurrection and ascension, not to mention his virgin birth and life after death, sound so hollow when it echoes back from their economy-filled, egocentric and post-postmodern way of thinking and reasoning. For a moment, the theologian (be it an academic, preacher or layperson) may wonder if this is really worth the while anymore. Are these masters not right?

In this article, the aim was to show the dialectical as well as the dialogical way of reasoning about the normativity and relativity of the Bible, finding itself presented within a 21st-century contextual theology, offered to students (academia), congregants (the church) and the world ‘out there’. The Bible, being filled with ‘old knowledge’, should be presented in the present-day context of the congregants or people ‘out there’, in a fresh and innovative way – talking passionately about old knowledge and facts in a brand new and interesting way. Amidst a visible moral decline in society, we should keep a positive vision and attitude about God and Christianity in general.

With all that has been said here, we must admit that it is easy to criticise and to point out everything that is and that went wrong. However, to come up with a viable solution is less easy.

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W.H.O. is the sole author of this research article.

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