LIVING THEOLOGICALLY – TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF CHRISTIAN PRACTICE IN TERMS OF THE THEOLOGICAL TRIAD OF ORTHODOXY, ORTHOPRAXY AND ORTHOPATHY AS PORTRAYED IN ISAIAH 6:1–8: A NARRATIVE APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the connection between life and theology. Today, many people do not understand the connection between theology and everyday life. In particular, many of today's theological students are leaving theological institutions and entering the ministry with a fragmented theology instead of an integrated theology. A brief historical and literature review indicates that there are three perspectives in contemporary theology, namely the theological triad of orthodoxy, orthopathy and orthopraxy. A brief analysis of the three perspectives indicates a close connection between theology and everyday life: theology and life are linked in praise (orthodoxy), action (orthopraxy) and passion (orthopathy). This article focuses on the paradigm of narrative theology and shows that, when used correctly, narrative theology also provides the building blocks for systematic theology and biblical theology. Narrative theology also provides helpful insights when it takes into account legitimate literary concerns, such as the historical background of the Bible passage and the author's theology and purpose. The close connection between theology and everyday life is clearly portrayed in a narrative approach to Isaiah 6:1–8, especially when it illustrates how the story (narrative) shapes each of the three perspectives of the theological triad.

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between theology and everyday life

'Living theologically' sounds like a contradiction in terms, rather like constructive criticism or servantleadership. The question arises: What has theology to do with everyday life? Stevens (1995:4) claims that, in general, people today do not have any idea of what theology has to do with everyday life.

Theology is often considered an abstract discipline. It is rational, reducible to propositions and capable of being categorised (liberal, conservative, evangelical, Reformed, liberation). It is not usually thought of as practical. People in business, law, the professions and the trades often regard the study of theology as a process of becoming progressively irrelevant.

In the context of contemporary theological education, many educators at universities and seminaries are concerned that today's theological students are leaving theological institutions and entering the ministry with a fragmented theology instead of an integrated theology. At these institutions there is a tendency to deal with theology in an abstract and fragmented manner, rather than in a way that integrates theology into everyday life.

Paver (2006:46) claims that, when theology students achieve theological integration, it will empower and transform their faith and ministry. However, the development of an integrated theology requires much effort. For theological reflection to be holistic and transportable there needs to be a connection between the various levels of influence in our lives. He elaborates: 'Integration from experience to the personal, the pastoral, the cultural, the theological and faith issues is often hard work and requires insight and an ability to make connections; it is also risk taking'.

It can therefore be argued that, nowadays, theology requires a different definition compared to what is commonly perceived – one that is closer to the Bible. For example, theology needs a definition that is related to everyday life, such as the following:

- The Puritan William Perkins, in Breward (1970:177), said 'Theology is the science of living blessedly forever'.
- J.I. Packer, in Stevens (1995:4), said in the same tradition that 'theology is for achieving God's glory ... and humankind's good ... through every life-activity'.
- Nouwen (1983:159) indicates that theology 'is not primarily a way of thinking, but a way of living'.
 Francis of Assisi once said that 'a man has only as much knowledge as he puts into action, and a
- religious (person) is only as good a preacher as he puts into action' (Conway 2006:11).

These definitions come close to capturing the biblical approach to theology. It can therefore be concluded that the only theology that is truly Christian is theology that is applied. This implies that what we really know in the fully biblical and Hebraic sense is what we live. This close relationship between theology and life is also reflected in the fact that the Bible always moves from the indicative to the imperative, from theology to ethics, from exposition to application.

The aim of this article is to explore the connection between life and theology by looking through three lenses (perspectives), each providing a way of looking at the rich connection designed by God, but



largely fragmented in contemporary theological education. This article will focus on the paradigm of narrative theology.

NARRATIVE THEOLOGY: A RESPONSIBLE APPROACH

According to Green (2005:531), *narrative theology* refers to a constellation of approaches to the theological task. These approaches are typically joined by (1) their antagonism toward all forms of theology dealing with the systematic organisation of propositions and grounded in a-historical principles and (2) their attempt to identify an overall aim and ongoing plot in God's ways, as these are revealed in Scripture and continually communicated in history.

Lucie-Smith (2007) defines narrative theology as

one that starts not with abstract first principles, but rather with a particular story; it is inductive rather than deductive. The story it examines is 'embodied' in a community's tradition.

(Lucie-Smith 2007:1)

Wright (1992) gives high priority to the *role of story* in articulating human perception and experience. He describes how human beings tell stories because that is how they perceive and relate to the world:

[A] story, with its pattern of problem and conflict, of aborted attempts at resolution, and final result ... is ... universally perceived as the best way of talking about the way the world actually is.

(Wright 1992:40)

Stassen and Gushee (2003), in their acclaimed textbook, *Kingdom ethics*, highlight *imagination* and story in moral reasoning. Noting Nathan's use of a parable to convict David of sin, they observe that we 'imaginatively enter the particular story, place ourselves in the narrative in one or another role and then find ourselves drawn or driven to particular courses of action' (Stassen & Gushee 2003:101–102).

Unfortunately, being influenced by postmodern subjectivity, some theologians have failed to ground imagination in the historical background and the author's intent. For them, a text becomes an independent entity into which a reader pours meaning. However, it is irresponsible to interpret a Biblical text by casting it off from its historical moorings. This is called *eisegesis*, not *exegesis*.

It is important to bear in mind that sound biblical interpretation is a complex process, which consists of the creative interaction between the following *three elements* (1) the world of the author, (2) the world of the text and (3) the reader's perception of them (Green 2005:531). Each of these elements requires special attention. Hence, when interpreting Scripture, theologians need to hold all three elements (parts) in appropriate balance.

No doubt biblical criticism would benefit greatly from an approach that could – if not simultaneously, then at least sequentially – keep in view all parts of the communication process: author, text and reader (Malbon 1992:35–36).

What is narrative theology? Where does this discipline fit within the scheme of other theological disciplines (i.e. biblical, historical, systematic theologies)? Is narrative theology valid? McLaughlin (2009) provides the following answers to these questions:

- Narrative theology is a fairly broad term. It encompasses a variety of specific approaches to theology, interpretation and application.
- Generally speaking, narrative theology is an approach to theology that finds meaning in story. Sometimes this approach is linked to a rejection of meaning derived from propositional truths (e.g. systematic theology). At other times, it is coupled with

the idea that we are not primarily required to learn ethics from Scripture, but rather to learn how to relate to God and how to play our role in the great meta-narrative of salvation.

- The idea that we learn theology from narrative portions of Scripture is not only sound but biblical (Lk 24:27). The Bible stories are there to teach us truth. Christians are supposed to learn from these truths and apply these lessons to their lives (e.g. Mk 2:23–28). They are meant to interpret and apply these stories in accordance with the original intentions of the authors of Scripture. It is for this reason that the stories have been preserved for us (Rm 15:4).
- When used rightly, narrative theology provides the building blocks for systematic theology and biblical theology. It can be argued that systematic theology tends to draw theology from more propositional literature, such as the New Testament letters. On the other hand, Old Testament biblical theology tends to depend mainly on Bible stories (narrative) for its theological building blocks.
- Narrative theology has frequently become problematic, when used irresponsibly. For example, when interpreters are not concerned about the Bible's original meaning and are driven by their own intuitions and their own responses to the literature, they frequently use the narrative approach in harmful ways.
- Narrative theology has also been misused when people wrongfully imagine that a narrative does not have an underlying systematic theology, or that its underlying theology cannot be known. In such cases, it is implied that the lessons derived from a narrative can be understood apart from the worldview of the author.
- In summary, when used wrongly, narrative theology causes as many problems as any other misused approach to theology. However, when used correctly, it provides helpful insights and true understanding, as long as one does not use narrative theology independently of systematic theology and other approaches to theology and as long as one does not ignore legitimate literary concerns, such as the author's theology and purpose.

A BRIEF HISTORICAL AND LITERATURE REVIEW OF THE THREE PERSPECTIVES OF LIVING THEOLOGICALLY

The views of Wesleyan and Pentecostal theologians

According to Knight (2009), when Wesleyan and Pentecostal theologians introduced the term *orthopathy* in the 1970s, they had more in mind than simply insisting that experience should be considered along with belief (orthodoxy) and practice (orthopraxy) in the doing of theology. They were actually suggesting that there is a 'right' experience of God, just as there is 'right' doctrine and 'right' practice. Knight (2007) elaborates:

We need not only right beliefs and practices, we need a right heart; we need not only to think and do what is faithful, we need to be faithful persons. To put it differently, orthopathy does not primarily refer to a warm heart, but to a heart formed, governed and motivated by love.

(Knight 2007:31)

The point for Wesleyan theologians was not simply to add a third term to the list. Rather, it was to point to the intrinsic and organic interrelation of all three. Each of these concepts has a transformative impact on the other and they combine to form a holistic spirituality.

Knight (2007) argues that John Wesley was aware of the dangers of each of these concepts apart from the others. For example, orthodoxy alone could be a 'dead orthodoxy', orthopraxy alone could be a 'dead formalism', orthopathy alone could lead to an 'enthusiasm' that confuses being a Christian with having specified religious experiences. But, taken together, they are more than the sum of their parts. Knight (2007) explains:

The heart and life is shaped by our beliefs about God; our beliefs and hearts are shaped by our experience of serving God and our neighbor, and our motivation for loving the God in whom we believe and in loving the neighbor we serve comes out of the heart. (Knight 2007:33)

Land's theological triad of *orthodoxy-orthopathyorthopraxy*

In his book *Pentecostal spirituality: a passion for the Kingdom*, Land (1994) asserts the crucial importance of the Wesleyan, Holiness and nineteenth-century revivalist-restorationist roots. He defines spirituality in terms of the integration of beliefs and practices in the affections that are themselves expressed by those beliefs and practices.

Land (1994) first deals with the relationship between spirituality and theology. He argues that Pentecostal spirituality is a distinct, lived experience in the Spirit of God and should be the starting point and ongoing contributing aspect of Pentecostal theology. His book consists of an analysis and revision of Pentecostal spirituality.

On the basis of his analysis, Land argues that there are three perspectives in the relationship between spirituality and theology. He claims that, when *theologia* is restored to its ancient meaning, the dichotomisation that so often occurs between theology and spirituality can be overcome. To state this claim in a more formal way, he describes the relationship between theology and spirituality in terms of the triad of *orthodoxy-orthopathy-orthopraxy*:

[O]rthodoxy (right praise-confession), orthopathy (right affections) and orthopraxy (right praxis) are related in a way analogous to the interrelations of the Holy Trinity. God who is Spirit creates in humanity a spirituality which is at once cognitive, affective and behavioral, thus driving toward a unified epistemology, metaphysics and ethics.

(Land 1994:41)

Hirsch's Venn diagram: discipleship as the nexus between *orthodoxy*, *orthopraxy* and *orthopathy*

Frost and Hirsch (2009:156) assert that *orthodoxy* – right belief – is an indispensable element of any Christian discipleship. However, the church frequently sees *orthodoxy* in the narrow sense, as a commitment to propositional truth, assuming that the knowledge of God is only received cognitively, purely through mental processes; that is, to come to a full appreciation of God, our thinking about Him must be right. However, the cognitive knowledge of God needs to be complemented by *orthopraxy* and *orthopathy* in order for the believer to come to a full-orbed, biblical engagement with (and knowledge of) God.

The process of discipleship (based on Hebraic epistemology) can be illustrated in the following way (see Figure 1) (Frost & Hirsch 2009:156).

Using the Venn diagram, Frost and Hirsch (2009:157) indicate that it is only in discipleship, as 'the nexus between orthopraxy, orthopathy and orthodoxy that a true and full appreciation of God is to be found'. He argues that, in the place where all three circles intersect, one is less likely to find that mistakes occur when one element (of discipleship) is favoured above the others. Hirsch (2007) provides the following examples to support his argument:

• If the primary interest of a church is in *orthodoxy* (as is the case in many churches today), at worst one would find

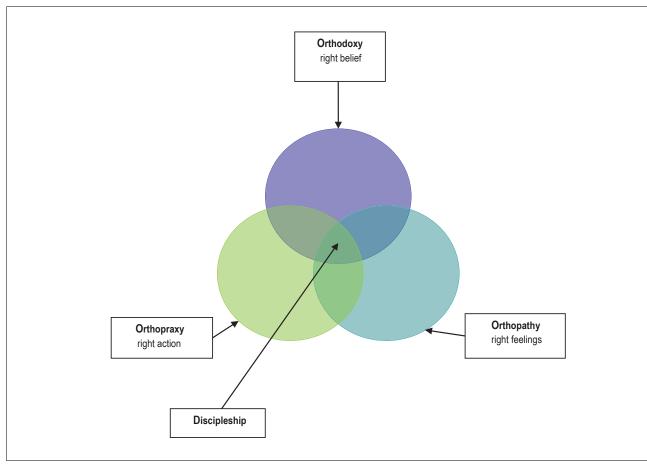


FIGURE 1 Discipleship in Hebraic epistemology

many 'arrogant Pharisees' who worship their doctrine and theological formulations over an authentic encounter with the Christ as revealed in Scripture.

- If a church adopts a commitment to *orthopraxy* alone, at worst its members would become tireless (and tired) activists, burning out themselves and others and relying solely on their own efforts to please God.
- If a church fosters *orthopathy* to the exclusion of the other elements, its members would end up as impractical mystics, so focused on contemplation and personal spiritual experience that they would become of no use in the kingdom of God.
- True discipleship where seekers find their way to Jesus and follow Him can only be found in the place (the nexus) where the head, the heart and the hand overlap. This nexus is evident in the Scriptures, where Christians are instructed to love God with all their heart, mind, will and strength. This is the main aim of the *Shema* (Dt 6:4–9) and precisely what Jesus claims to be at the heart of discipleship and a true knowledge of God (Mk 12:28–34).

The next section will focus on these three perspectives in contemporary theology, namely the theological triad of *orthodoxy, orthopathy* and *orthopraxy*. Each perspective will be defined and described in terms of the connection between theology and everyday life.

DEFINING THE THREE PERSPECTIVES: SOME IMPLICATIONS FOR THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LIFE AND THEOLOGY

Orthodoxy

Today the term *orthodoxy* is used to focus on right beliefs. In terms of the narrative approach to *orthodoxy*, the story focuses on a description of how the story shapes our beliefs (Boa & Turner 2008:6).

On the other hand, the word *orthodox* (Gr. *orthodoxos*) consists of two Greek words – *ortho* (meaning 'true' or 'right') and *doxa* (meaning 'belief' or 'worship'). Hence, *orthodoxy* either refers to 'right belief' or 'right worship' (Hierotheos 2002:1). This definition of *orthodoxy* implies the following:

- Belief and worship are closely connected. The true teaching about God incorporates the true worship of God.
- Doctrine that lines itself up (*ortho*) with Scripture is designed to be a blessing to everyday life and, at the same time, to bless God (*doxa*).

The close connection between theology (right belief) and life (right action) can be illustrated as follows (Stevens 1995:4):

- To believe in God as Creator is to accept stewardship of the earth.
- The atonement encourages us to live mercifully.
- Ecclesiology stimulates a sense of community amongst believers rather than a sense of individualism.

In his book, *Redeeming the routine*, Banks (1993) indicates how the whole of our life has the glorious prospect of living out the great doctrines of the faith. He writes:

In the world of family, work and civic life outside church gatherings, it is ordinary believers who play the primary role in bringing a Christian perspective and way of life to bear upon its largely different world view and values.

(Banks 1993:51)

Looking at the connection between theology and everyday life through the first lens of *orthodoxy*, one needs to consider the following (Steven 1995:4–5):

- The great doctrines of the faith beg for application.
- The great doctrines of the faith *point us to the adoration of God.*The great doctrines of the faith *point us to the possibility of living a genuinely human existence*, that is, *truthful living for God's glory.*

Orthopraxy

Orthopraxy literally means 'right action'. In terms of the narrative approach, the *orthopraxy* of the story focuses on an explanation of how the story should shape our actions (Boa & Turner 2008:6). In theological circles it is now widely recognised that theology needs to be liberated from the dichotomy that exists between practical skills and theoretical knowledge. However, in the process of integrating these two aspects of theology, it is would be wise to retain a certain amount of fruitful tension between them. The question arises: What is theological about praxis and what is practical about theology?

Dykstra (1991) notes the ever-present tension between the so-called academic fields of theology – Bible, history, ethics (disciplines in which practice is thought to have no intrinsic place) and 'applied theology', which is often relegated to 'how to' techniques for clergy. The question arises: Should the subjects, such as evangelism, preaching, pastoral care and counselling, loosely be called 'applied theology' or 'ministry division courses'? In this regard, Dykstra provides the following good analysis of right practice. He defines a Christian practice (as distinct from activities) as inherently cooperative (not a solo action), inherently good (generates value) and inherently revelatory (bears epistemological weight) (Dykstra 1991:35–36).

Looking at the connection between theology and everyday life through the second lens of *orthopraxy*, one needs to reflect upon the following (Stevens 1995:5–7):

- The New Testament presupposes a community in which every person lives for the praise of God's glory. It is about *humanising theological living*.
- Orthopraxy is action in harmony with God's purposes in which we can discover God and his truth.
- The Bible promotes *knowing through doing*. Especially in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus teaches that obedient action is the organ of further revelation.
- Orthopraxy is not measured by excellence, by efficiency, or by its religious character, but by faith, hope and love. We must cultivate the heart (inside Christian practice); whether washing dishes or preaching, all should be done to please God.

Orthopathy

Orthopathy literally means 'right passion' or 'right values'. In terms of the narrative approach, the *orthopathy* of the story focuses on a discussion of how the story shapes our feelings and values (Boa & Turner 2008:6).

Forsyth (1954:78) once said, 'Prayer is to the religious life what original research is for science – by it we get direct contact with reality'. Job is an excellent example of *orthopathy*. In his prayer life, Job was not a half-hearted researcher. As Job went through one test after the other, he was persistent in prayer and used his experience of adversity in order to know God better. Like Jacob, he refused to let God go until He had blessed him.

Looking at the connection between theology and everyday life through the third lens of *orthopathy*, one should consider the following (Stevens 1995:6–7):

- For the *education of the heart*, a person needs the seminary, the home, the congregation and the marketplace all four are linked by God in a daily life system for learning. Ministering to the poor simultaneously heals the hearts of the rich and nourishes the Church of Christ.
- *Our neighbour is our educator.* We cannot simply deal with the poor, the stranger and the outsider in principle. It is in the context of actual neighbour-relationships that we are invited to live the life of faith.
- Orthopathy is a passion for God. Job is a stunning example of orthopathy. His school was his life. As he went through test after test, sometimes with obvious weariness, Job began to

want God more than he wanted health. Job never asked for healing. What he wanted was the friendship of God (Job 29:4).

 Orthopathy is caring for God – caring for what concerns God, caring for God's concerns in daily life and caring for God above all. Job used his experience of the absence of God in order to know God better. Job was not a half-hearted researcher. He took God on – withstanding God, wrestling with God, extracting revelation from God and, in the end, knowing God.

A NARRATIVE APPROACH TO ISAIAH 6:1–8: UTILISING THE THEOLOGICAL TRIAD

Narrative – The story behind the passage: Isaiah's background circumstances (Context)

King Uzziah ruled the Southern kingdom for more than 50 years and was a godly and powerful king. His reign was a time of tremendous security and prosperity. He had restored God's people to a place of prominence again. However, when Uzziah died, no one knew what the next leader would be like. Like the people, Isaiah was confused and afraid. During Uzziah's reign, many sins came along with the increased wealth – there was greed, injustice, oppression and corruption in all areas of life. Many people were exploited by the strong and wealthy. Worship became a mere formality (Boa & Turner 2008:155, 156; Graves 2000).

In the face of impending judgment against His own people, God called the prophet Isaiah and appeared to him in 740 BC, the year that King Uzziah died. Isaiah was taken into the very throne room of God, where, in an awesome vision, he was confronted by the thrice holy God. He was purified and commissioned to speak God's words of judgment and salvation (Sailhamer 1994:363).

Orthodoxy – The theology of the passage: the holiness of God (Communication)

In contrast to the method of using systematic theology to inform the holiness of God, narrative theology is an approach to theology that finds meaning in story. In the section on Narrative Theology it was indicated that Old Testament biblical theology tends to depend mainly on Bible stories (narrative) for its theological building blocks. The Bible narrative recorded in Isaiah 6:1–8 clearly communicates the theological building blocks for a biblical theology of holiness, in particular the holiness of God.

Through this experience, Isaiah comes to understand the importance of God's holiness. This realisation is demonstrated throughout his writings, as his favourite title for God is 'the Holy One of Israel'. Sproul (1985:40) elaborates: 'Holiness is the attribute with which God wants to be primarily identified. It is the characteristic shouted in the throne room of God.'

This is precisely what God gave to Isaiah – a dramatic revelation of His holiness. Isaiah saw the Lord sitting enthroned, lofty and exalted. The angels who stood above Him were magnificent. They called out to one another, 'Holy, Holy, Holy is the LORD of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory' (Is 6:3). The earth quaked and the temple was filled with smoke. It was as dramatic a vision of God and His holiness as one could ever wish to see (Deffinbaugh 2009).

To say that God is *holy* means that He is unique, with no rivals or competition. As Sproul (1985:55) puts it: 'When the Bible calls God holy it means primarily that God is transcendentally separate ... To be holy is to be "other", to be different in a special way.' This aspect of God's holiness is portrayed in Exodus 16:11 (NIV): 'Who among the gods is like you, O LORD? Who is like you – majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?'

But God's holiness is more than just being unique and without comparison. It also encompasses the idea of purity. When the angels sing, 'Holy, Holy, Holy', they mean that God is pure and that all righteousness is defined by who God is. God's purity is depicted in Habakkuk 1:13 (NKJV): 'You are of purer eyes than to behold evil and cannot look on wickedness.'

Holiness is therefore closely associated with ethical purity. It is a characteristic of God that He requires of His people (Lv 11:45; 1 Pt 1:15–16). It involves setting one's life apart for God instead of conforming to the standards of the world (1 Pt 2:9–12) (Selman & Manser 1998:86).

Orthopathy – Isaiah's response to God's holiness: An acknowledgement of his sinfulness (Confession)

Instead of using systematic theology to inform man's appropriate emotional response to the holiness of God, narrative theology finds meaning in the story of Isaiah's response to God's holiness – a humble confession of sinfulness (Is 6:5).

While he was in the temple, Isaiah came face to face with the King of Kings, 'sitting on a throne, high and lifted up' (Is 6:1). He was overwhelmed with an awareness of his unholiness in the presence of the Holy: 'Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts' (Is 6:5, NKJV).

The sight of a holy God and the sound of the holy worship brought such great conviction to Isaiah's heart that he confessed that he was a sinner (Wiersbe 2007:1160). 'If God was holy, Isaiah saw he was not' (Deffinbauch 2009:§7). Peter came to the same realisation about himself when confronted by the presence of Jesus: 'Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man' (Lk 5:8, NIV).

When Isaiah's lips were touched with a live burning coal, he was told that his sins were forgiven. The hot coal, taken from the altar of incense in heaven, is symbolic of God's purifying work. It symbolises the complete significance of the altar from which it comes – that the penalty of sin was paid by a substitute offered in the sinner's place. By being applied to Isaiah's lips, it assures him of personal forgiveness (Kidner 2004:638). Isaiah needed to be purified so that he could truly represent God, who is pure and holy.

Isaiah's humble confession of sin constitutes a prayer for personal cleansing. Humility is the foundational character trait of the Christian. When confronted by the holiness of God, the believer should respond to Him in humility (Carson 2008:33).

Orthopraxy – Isaiah's active response to God's forgiveness: a willingness to serve God as His messenger (Commitment)

Finally, narrative theology demonstrates the close connection between theology and practice. The narrative of Isaiah 6:1–8 clearly informs systematic theology of the most appropriate practical response to God's holiness, cleansing and commission – a willingness to serve God.

Although profoundly aware of his sin, Isaiah is available for service. When the Lord asks, 'Whom shall I send?' Isaiah's immediate response is, 'Here am I! Send me' (Is 6:8) (Nsiku 2006:814).

Authentic worship culminates in our readiness to take God's message to others, after submitting our lives fully to Him. Worship necessarily leads us to God and to say, Here am I! Send me (Boa & Turner 2008:159–160).



The close connection between theology and

everyday life

Because narrative theology focuses on story – a universal mode of human communication – it is a powerful tool of interpretation that both theologians and congregants can enjoy and use. When biblical interpretation is properly based on history and theology, it is an especially suitable methodology for the post-modern era.

A brief historical and literature review indicates that there are three perspectives in contemporary theology, namely the theological triad of *orthodoxy*, *orthopathy* and *orthopraxy*. A brief analysis of the three perspectives indicates a close connection between theology and everyday life: theology and life are linked in praise (*orthodoxy*), action (*orthopraxy*) and passion (*orthopathy*).

This close connection between theology and everyday life is clearly portrayed in a narrative approach to Isaiah 6:1–8, especially when it illustrates how the story (narrative) shapes each of the three perspectives of the theological triad:

- Narrative: Isaiah's background circumstances (context) (right interpretation).
- Orthodoxy: The holiness of God (communication) (right belief and praise).
- Orthopathy: An acknowledgement of sinfulness (confession) (right passion).
- Orthopraxy: A willingness to serve God (commitment) (right action).

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