


PART 1

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND


Chapter 1

Mission and development: Experiences from South Africa and Norway

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1. Introduction

In 2018, a delegation from the University of the Western Cape (UWC) visited VID Specialized University (VID) to explore the possibility of sustainable cooperation. The group of academics from UWC represented various disciplines and participated in discussions regarding potential collaborations, academic projects, staff and student mobility, and knowledge exchange across all faculties at VID. This marked the beginning of a long and extensive collaboration involving individual colleagues, departments, postgraduate students, and the two institutions. In March 2024, the institutional partnership was renewed, with senior management, academics, and support staff visiting UWC to sign a memorandum of understanding

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(MoU) between the rector of VID and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Research at UWC.²

It was during the conceptual stage of the MoU that diverse ideas, perceptions, approaches, and viewpoints emerged. The notion of collaborating in an intercontinental and cross-cultural context was appealing, especially given the growing emphasis on decolonisation within the scholarly and academic landscape. Awareness of differences and diversities has proven to be a significant source of tension throughout this stage of cooperation. It was only during face-to-face meetings between researchers that deliberate and direct attention needed to be given to the disparities, interconnected and problematic histories, and the uneven power relations between those from the Global South and the Global North. These engagements have been valuable for the sustainability of the agreement, although they were robust and at times conflictual.

Furthermore, these differences, disparities, and power relations characterised many gatherings and interactions between staff members from the different institutions. On the one hand, there was the problematic colonial history, with its missionary focus on Christian expansion; on the other hand, there was an emphasis on justice, restitution, and reconciliation. These two perspectives can be compared to the two missionary approaches that dominated the World Council of Churches (WCC) during the late 1960s and early 1970s. One approach emphasised the conversion of those who were different, with the church as the sole bearer of salvation, while the other focused on the restoration of humanity, viewing the church as a marker or pointer towards the missionary activity of God (Bosch, 1991:381).

These decades were preceded by a focus on the destruction wrought by the two World Wars in the West and the rising tensions between the West and the Socialist East. The first Church and Society Conference in Stockholm in 1925 was almost exclusively concerned with the difficulties between socialism and the free market.

2 <https://www.uwc.ac.za/news-and-announcements/news/uwc-and-vid-university-of-norway-forge-transformative-partnership>

The mid-fifties witnessed a change of direction and ultimately a different kind of mission. The affairs of the church became embedded in the relations between the North and the South. This redirection, or new way of mission, gave rise to the development agenda of the WCC. Development became the concept that would describe this new approach to mission (Bosch, 1991:432).

However, this new way of mission was not without serious shortcomings. The classical approach of partnership between the donors in the North and the recipients in the South, as well as how material aid and religion served as an “added value” or juxtaposed with “reverse mission”, shed new light on the relationship between centres and margins in mission (Drønen, 2022). Recent studies on how globalisation has affected economic development, religious practice, and cultural exchange (Drønen, 2013) further open up a multitude of new approaches for a more equal, collaborative, and mutually enriching partnership for mission and development.

The main question of this contribution concerns the markers for internationalisation that arise from the interconnection, intersection, and interaction of development and mission. By examining select assemblies and working groups of the WCC, as well as the cooperation between VID and UWC in the context of development and mission, an attempt is made to identify markers or signs of an equitable international relationship between institutions of higher learning, with special reference to North-South cooperation.

The interaction - and at times, overlap - of mission and development is a central aspect of the WCC's response to global crises, including wars, conflicts, economic hardship, health challenges, hunger, and extreme poverty. Specific gatherings of the WCC will be analysed to identify the paradigms, approaches, and models that shape development within the context of mission.

A descriptive analysis of the cooperation, exchange, and mobility of the two institutions and the scholars will provide a backdrop for critically engaging with the theoretical framework of mission and development within the scope of the WCC. Through this analysis, markers indicating a more balanced internationalisation relationship will be identified and outlined,

forming the principles for future exploration of a paradigm or model for mission and development in the form of an interactionist, narrative-missionary model.

2. World Council of Churches

Within the WCC, development forms part of missiology. At the 1970 Montreux gathering, economic activity was emphasised under three interrelated sections: economic growth, self-reliance, and social justice. The second gathering in 1975 expanded on the 1970 discussions, featuring Indian economist Samuel Parmar as the main protagonist. A moral perspective transcended the economic, technological, and material notions of progress. People, particularly the marginalised and impoverished, became central agents of change as the dominant economic model of development faced significant criticism (Klaasen, 2021). This shift marks two key, or *Kairos*, moments in the history of the ecumenical church. These gatherings, with their focus on development, align with major international initiatives such as Bretton Woods, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank. Despite the strong emphasis on development within these ecumenical forums - and to some extent within secular approaches - a distinct movement emerged from an exclusively economic focus to a more people-centred perspective. Development has since diversified, encompassing gender, social, human, and community dimensions (Alkire, 2010).

These shifts, often driven by globalisation, are influenced by factors such as technological advancements, geographical and environmental changes, neoliberalism, and varying political and religious ideologies, all of which shape the mission and field of mission studies.

Ideas about the worship community, architectural spaces as centres of worship, and various aspects of religions such as creeds, rituals, scriptures, and doctrines emphasise the practices and fundamentals of religions. A typical example of a shift towards the centrality of religious ideas for development can be seen in global financial institutions such as the World Bank. The World Bank has moved from its interaction with religious figures and practices to embracing religious ideas for its development mandate. This approach was influenced by the former president of the World Bank, James Wolfensohn (2011:xvii-xviii), who asserted that his aim was

always to go beyond formal contact with leaders in order to engage with the ways in which religious ideas influence development processes right across the society. Serving as President of the World Bank, I came to realize how far religious ideas and attitudes that are link to them underpin vital facets of society like social trust and cohesion.

This shift was undoubtedly a key moment in the development project of the West, considering that for decades religion had been declining and secularisation and liberalism were now firmly the moral compass of Western society and a major factor within North-South relations. This shift also influenced major religious bodies such as the WCC.

Within the theological landscape, ideas of humanity and the church have come into sharp focus within development discourse. Regarding the latter, the Roman Catholic friar Daniel P. Horan (2019) provides a thought-provoking alternative to the centuries-old doctrine of anthropocentrism by extending the image of God to include inclusivity and distinctiveness. This contrasts with the strictly anthropocentric view held by the influential South African and Princeton University theologian Van Huyssteen (1989), who posits that human beings are absolutely distinct from the rest of creation, as well as with the expansion and redefinition of *imago Dei*. While the former views humans alone as the image of God, the latter suggests that election, rather than a specific kind of human domination (Moritz), and revelation, rather than limited human understanding of God (Gilkey, 1989), reframe the image of God beyond an exclusively human context.

The late South African theologian Steve de Gruchy (2003) interprets the image of God as being both (essence) and doing (vocation). By extending the creation narrative to include actions, he posits that what we do in society, in community, and in the world is part of who we are created to be. Klaasen (2021) combines the (being) body with a specific moral value, that of responsibility, and relates who we are inextricably with what we ought to do. This is one illustration of how a core religious idea has come under scrutiny and has found its way into the corpus of the study of mission and development.

Another religious idea that underwent much differentiation is that of ecclesiology. Within the WCC, the shift from a church for the poor to a church of the poor brought about a diversion from the traditional and reasonably fixed ideas of institution, sacrament, or formal gathering of people. Development was viewed more traditionally as a mission towards the needy, the orphans, the deprived, the poor, and those on the margins. The church was the centre of power, with the people, more specifically the poor, on the margins. This position can be argued as representative of the WCC at Geneva in 1966 and Uppsala in 1968, where the church's mission became more directly associated with the development agenda (Sakupapa, 2018:2-3).

Gustavo Gutiérrez (1971), often regarded as the founder of Liberation Theology, redefined the church's relationship with the poor. Rather than separating the church from the people, Liberation Theology binds the church and the poor inseparably, defining the church as the poor. The contradictions between the concepts of "development" and "liberation" did not undermine this shift in ecclesiology, which some might view as irrational. Sakupapa traces this debate back to the 1969 consultation in Cartigny, organised by the Committee on Society, Development, and Peace (SODEPAX), where the notion of development faced intense scrutiny. This discourse continued with the Commission on the Churches' Participation in Development (CCPD), under the theme "The Church and the Poor", which led to a publication reframing the theological understanding of the church as a "church of the poor". Sakupapa further quotes from the joint statement of the CCPD and the WCC Commission on Inter-Church Aid, Refugee and World Service (CICARWS) in 1974,

...we need to ask the ecclesiological question whether the Church can be a Church if it is not identified with the poor. Some would go even further and insist the Church has to be poor in order to be identified with the poor (2018:4, quoted from CCPD/CICARWS 1975).

Sakupapa (2018:5) concludes that the church's concern for the poor within ecumenical circles extends beyond mere social responsibility; it is, in fact, central to the very essence of ecclesiology itself.

A similar theological development emerged in the 1990s alongside the rapid expansion of technology, economic liberalism, mass communication, and cultural diversity. Globalisation became the context for the church's mission, best described as interactionist. In this rapidly changing world, marked by increasing connectivity, the church and the broader world became two distinct yet interdependent phenomena, each influencing the other. This era prompted the church to confront fundamental questions about its essence and mission, a movement termed *Ecclesiology and Ethics*. According to Smit (2003), this interaction is evident in the two most emphasised areas of the World Council of Churches: Faith and Order, and Life and Work.

Faith and Order is primarily concerned with the church's identity and essence, viewing its mission as a token or symbol that reflects what the church represents, with a central focus on fostering ecclesiology. In contrast, Life and Work emphasises the church's active, embodied, and ongoing role in the pursuit of justice. While unity is a central concern for Faith and Order, it plays a more limited role within Life and Work.

Plaatjies van Huffel (2016) asserts that Life and Work has epitomised the church's role in society since its inception. She further argues that efforts towards unity were always centred on a shared commitment to addressing the suffering of those on the margins of society, in any form. The Geneva conference of 1920 laid the foundation for the subsequent two influential conferences in Stockholm and Oxford (both in 1925). These gatherings, particularly the Oxford conference, sought to mobilise not only churches but all people to deepen their commitment to a more just social order characterised by peace and justice (2016:5-6). Life and Work embodies ethics, while Faith and Order's main concern is ecclesiology. The two strands of ecumenical focus have adopted different and very fluid symbols or ideas of church. Faith and Order employs symbols such as the Body of Christ and the kingdom of God as mystery and prophetic sign, whereas Life and Work uses the Kingdom of God in society to emphasise the importance of the church's active involvement in justice issues and what the church represents (Smit, 2003:26).

These two notions of the church and its relation to mission are described by Bosch as the church having a monopoly on proclaiming salvation. From this perspective, mission is the conversion from death to life. At

the other end of the spectrum, the church is best viewed as a sign of the proclamation and action of God's mission in the world. Mission, from this viewpoint, encompasses God's presence and transformative action towards the "humanisation of society", with the church acting merely as a "consciousness-raiser" (Bosch, 1991:381). The two different notions of the church are not necessarily antagonistic nor polar opposites. Rather, they exist in tension, more specifically in "creative tension" (Bosch), which depicts the fluidity, flexibility, and adaptability of the church for effective mission in the world.

Tveit, who served two terms as the General Secretary of the WCC starting in 2009, draws a meaningful parallel between the declarations made at the WCC's first Assembly in Amsterdam in 1948, which stated, "we are committed to stay together", and the slightly revised commitment at the 10th Assembly in Busan in 2013: "We are committed to move together". Despite the wording changes, the call and commitment remain consistent: "We can only move together as churches when we are united in our faith in the God of life, who created all to live in fellowship and who calls the church to be a sign and foretaste of the unity of all life and humankind: one life and one humanity". Tveit (2019:237) further asserts that only through active, participative, and engaging interaction with the world as it is - alongside fellow humans as they are, beyond the security of the known - can the church struggle for justice and peace and experience a shared joy within fellowship.

3. Internationalisation at institutional level

The cooperation between UWC and VID adopted an institutional approach in two forms: one focused on institutional ideas and the other on societal impact. In 2017, an MoU was signed, committing both institutions to collaborate on student and staff mobility, fostering mutual research interests, and providing support for teaching and learning. This MoU was initiated with a visit from UWC academics, which included a multidisciplinary group of emerging and established researchers, diverse in gender and race. The second MoU was signed in March 2024, following a visit from a high-level delegation from VID, which consisted of the rector,

dean, representatives from various disciplines, and the management of the NORPART cooperation.

The shift from a general institutional agreement to a more focused and intentional cooperation is reflected in the headings of the launch of the documents. The first document bore a generic title reflecting a broad cooperation: *Prominent Visitors from South Africa*. Ingunn Moser, the then rector of VID, stated,

UWC and VID have high ambitions for this collaboration. We both want a strategic collaboration that involves all faculties and levels in our educational portfolio for both students, employees, education and research. Our hope, for this visit is to get to know each other's across academic and research environment. And also to decide on a plan on how to collaborate towards concrete goals and measures, says Ingunn Moser, rector of VID (Leis-Peters, 2018).

However, the second one reflects the intentions of the cooperation. It is geared towards fostering transformation as noted in the heading of the launch of the MoU *UWC and VID University of Norway Forge Transformative Partnership* (Gophe, 2024).

The Deputy Vice Rector for Research and Innovation, Professor Jose Frantz, emphasised the new direction of the partnership by stating,

We do not have many partnerships with private universities, and so opening up our doors and inviting them into our spaces is something that is going to be new for us. I think as we navigate this path together and talk about how we can incorporate SDGs into our curriculum, it will be something that will be a common force that will drive us and consolidate this partnership moving forward.

Similarly, the rector of VID, Professor Bard Maeland, shared a vision of collaboration when he remarked,

I'm very glad that we have signed the agreement so that we can search out new possibilities to work together. We have a common value-based mission for our institutions and I think there is huge potential to develop what has been done already into new areas of cooperation (Gophe, 2024).

There is a clear shift at an institutional level from a generic and strategic approach to a value-based and societal impact cooperation. Similar to the WCC's transition from a one-way direction (North to South) towards a more self-reflective and open missionary agenda, both institutions recognise the contributions that they can make to each other and the broader academic and scholarly landscape. The shift of the WCC was not only ideological but also theological and specific. The move towards development brought about a new paradigm for ecclesiology and ethics, or theory and praxis. In the same way, the MoU between the two institutions reflects an outwardly embedded shift. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UN, 2015) and value-based mission indicate a move beyond abstract intellectual engagements, bringing to the forefront the impact that research, teaching, and learning have on societal and global matters such as hunger, poverty, inequality, gender, education, and justice. The scope of cooperation has also been broadened to include more disciplines, research areas, and personnel.

A significant shift has been the emphasis on a people-centred agreement. The transition from novel ideas to people-centredness reflects a commitment to justice, equality, and restitution. This theme has been central to one of the research groups, and UWC's delegation played a major role in shaping VID's approach to tracing and monitoring reconciliation within Norway. The theme of justice will also play a crucial role in the nature of the ongoing collaboration between the two institutions at all levels of the agreement.

The institutional agreement acknowledges the need for new approaches, innovative scholarship, relevant paradigms, and effective models. Similar to the WCC's ongoing engagement with traditional and classical theological ideas - as well as the emergence of continuity and their revision - the two institutions are committed to exploring new ways of being and doing. There is a clear indication that the modus operandi and outcomes of the previous MoU serve as a building block for innovation, growth, inclusivity, interaction, and mutuality.

4. Diakonia, internationalisation and witness

The Community Development Research Group (CODE), the Reconciliation Research Group, the PhD Centre under the leadership of Professor Annette Leis-Peters, the NORPART cooperation, and the Social Department have been key partners in research, teaching, and learning. The activities of these partnerships have included teaching exchanges, research outputs, student and staff mobility, conference attendance and hosting, as well as the dissemination of scholarly knowledge and community activism. While some partnerships, such as those with the Social Work Department and the PhD Centre, have focused on student mobility and teaching and learning, the NORPART project has fostered a five-year collaboration aimed at upskilling African students for community development work within Africa, alongside student and staff mobility, with an emphasis on physical engagements in the Global South and the Global North. CODE and the Reconciliation Group have concentrated on conference meetings across different continents, aiming for scholarly outputs. A number of book publications have resulted from these engagements.³ However, the scholarly outputs have primarily emerged from extensive interactions, including conferences, research projects, collective funding applications, seminars, brainstorming sessions, and discussion platforms that provide critical input on each other's research ideas.

The Department of Religion and Theology at UWC has been the most active participant in these partnerships. There is a strong history of commitment to societal issues at the institutional and departmental levels from both organisations. VID espouses a strong Christian ethos and values, while the Department of Religion and Theology has a historical legacy of Christian ministerial formation. UWC, in general, has a notable historical legacy of political and social scholarly engagement.

Not only have several staff members been involved in teaching community development, but they have also made significant contributions to scholarly publications. Two staff members have held the Kjell Nordstokke Chair in

3 H. Morten Hauge, B. Tveter Kivle, T. Addy, T. Bue Kessel & J. Klaasen. 2022. *Developing just and inclusive communities: Challenges for diakonia/Christian social practice and social work*. Oxford: Regnum Books International.

Community Development.⁴ One of these staff members currently serves as Adjunct Professor in Community Development. The body of literature produced, along with staff and student mobility, teaching and learning, conferences, and colloquia, has predominantly been published and engaged with under the broad theme of *Diakonia*.

Within the WCC, a direct link exists between development and diakonia. While “development” held a central role in the WCC’s mission perspective through the 1970s, diakonia became more prominent in the church’s mission from the 1980s onwards. This shift, which followed the 1975 WCC Assembly in Nairobi, was unsurprising. The transition from a Northern to a Southern perspective, along with a more holistic and inclusive approach to development and mission, prompted a clearer Christian engagement with societal issues such as poverty, inequality, social and political instability, and systemic oppression. Koinonia became closely, almost interchangeably, connected with diakonia. Sakupapa (2018:5) observes,

More recently, an understanding of diakonia as an integral dimension of the ecumenical movement has been underscored and found expression at the WCC Assembly held in Busan, Korea in 2013. Such a perspective sees diakonia as part of the nature and mission of the church within the framework of the pilgrimage of justice and peace.

The Assembly held in Busan was preceded and informed by the Colombo gathering of June 2012. It was here that diakonia took on a more inclusive form. Instead of the powerful providing service to the powerless, marginalised, and poor, diakonia found authentic meaning within and through the marginalised. This gathering reflected theologically in an inductive, contextual, and experiential manner on diakonia. While the participants acknowledged the classical forms of diakonia and focused on justice as a continuous theme of the WCC, the starting point differed from the traditional diaconal perspective of “those who have” towards “those who do not have”. The statement from Colombo 2012 opted for a more people-centred approach that not only included the poor and vulnerable but also recognised those at the margins as agents of diakonia. This perspective

4 Professor Ignatius Swart and Professor John Klaasen, who has subsequently joined the University of the Free State as Dean of the Faculty of Theology and Religion, are Adjunct Professors at VID.

challenged the monopoly of the North and brought the South to the forefront (WCC Theological Perspectives on Diakonia in the 21st Century, 2012, Colombo, Indonesia).

Stephanie Dietrich, the Faith and Order Commission moderator, asserts that there is a new paradigm shift within diakonia towards the margins. The emphasis is not on aid or developing others towards the perceived developed, but rather,

The main emphasis today is on mutuality, helping each other because we are part of the community of human beings called to share with each other. We are not merely “donors” or merely “recipients” of help, but, bound together in this community, we are both at the same - sometimes more as givers, sometimes more as recipients.

Dietrich (2014:14) further claims that the call to help each other is a core aspect of identity and human interaction.

This perspective on diakonia differs significantly from institutionalised attempts at internationalisation. While institutionalised internationalisation focuses on policy, legality, and principles, the diakonia of the marginalised concerns the humanisation of what it means to be human. Diakonia of the margins emphasises concrete relationships and physical interaction. It transcends mere statements, declarations, and agreements that characterised the Assemblies prior to the Colombo Assembly. These statements, heavily influenced by the abstract notions of autonomy and individualism associated with the modern project, are now being challenged to incite action originating from the marginalised. There is a need for a shift towards an inclusive form of progress that starts with the agency of the poor.

The collaborative projects between VID and UWC, later extending to the University of Malawi, exemplify this shift. The 2017 MoU became increasingly tangible as projects, including conferences, meetings, visits, and shared resources, rotated in terms of space, time, and personnel. Staff members built meaningful relationships, participated in informal gatherings, extended connections to family and friends, visited one another's homes, and engaged in open and honest discussions that were intellectual and emotional in nature.

The scholarly outputs recognise the contributions of participants from the Global South, who drew on the region's intellectual and cultural assets. In these efforts, participants from the South expressed agency within safe, free, and life-giving spaces. African worldviews, concepts such as *Ubuntu*, and consultative processes like *indabas* assumed a central role within the research groups. This kind of relationship reflects what Dietrich (2022:98) describes as a paradigm shift that “is more than the claim for a participatory approach; it seeks to turn traditional power structures and mechanisms and the power to define reality upside down”.

5. Towards taking responsibility for development and mission

Development and mission are interlinked, as found in the WCC and illustrated in the cooperation between UWC and VID. While the terms “development” and “mission” need to be critically approached and are by no means normative, their connection, in light of the theological perspective of the WCC and the collaboration between the two institutions, highlights the dynamic and creative potential that this interaction offers for the internationalisation of institutions of higher learning.

In addition to institutional and personal approaches to development and mission, a third dynamic - taking responsibility for development and mission - contributes to a greater common humanity and the restoration of those who have been marginalised, ostracised, and dehumanised.

Taking responsibility for development is an evolving approach that emphasises the importance of being accountable not only for one's own growth but also for the development of the community and society to which one is connected through a sense of belonging. The theological idea of being created in the image of God forms the basis for the question of who we ought to be. Here, de Gruchy's (2003) concept of linking creation to vocation - being and doing - serves as a theological compass for doing good. It suggests that we engage in good deeds not out of a desire for control or to set things right, but because doing good is inherently part of who we are created to be.

As a theological concept for identity, *imago Dei* provides “markers” for taking responsibility for development. The two most common words used

for *imago Dei*, “image” and “likeness”, in Hebrew “*tselem*” and “*demut*”, when connected, refer to the body that is reflected or confronted with another. This can be interpreted as the mirroring of the other in the presence of the self in a process of progression, growth, and beyond. Two important points emerge from this: first, that Christian anthropology is a continuous continuum, and secondly, that others are an integral part of this continuous growth or development (Klaasen, 2021:199).

The Hebrew term “*rada*”, meaning “rule”, as used within the Near Eastern social and political context, can be compared with “vocation” when linked with “*tselem*” and “*demut*”. When rule or vocation is part of the image of God, participation in the freedom and peace of human beings becomes intrinsic to who people ought to be. Justice thus becomes the hallmark of individuals, not out of obligation, but because it is part of the essence of who we are and what we are called to be and to do (Klaasen, 2021:193).

Such an approach to development transcends materialism and economics. Spirituality - encompassing worship and liturgy, word and proclamation, creeds and doctrines, rituals and symbols - represents spiritual capital and capabilities that keep before us God’s work in this world for the fullness of life for all people.

6. Towards a more egalitarian approach to international cooperation

The relationship between VID and UWC is notably successful, especially given the complex missionary and colonial history between South Africa and Norway. VID has a history of missionary activity in South Africa, particularly in KwaZulu-Natal, and recent efforts have extended to Cape Town through academic exchanges, scholarships, and staff appointments. These recent research engagements have also been initiated against the backdrop of these missionary principles and values.

Sustainable cooperation began with scepticism, fear, feelings of inferiority, domination, and marginalisation. The initial gatherings can be described as superficial, ambiguous, and characterised by unwarranted perceptions and patriarchal attitudes. However, as interactions became more frequent, these characteristics were replaced with trust, genuineness, honesty, openness,

and freedom. The engagement grew more robust, intense, critical, and meaningful.

The shift from a cautious and suspicious stance to a more open and critical approach facilitated an organic process of cooperation, marked by:

1. **Relationality.** The individualism prevalent in the Western worldview was challenged by the African perspective. The notion of *Ubuntu* was introduced by colleagues from UWC in meetings and scholarly outputs. This enabled colleagues from both institutions to respect autonomy within the framework of meaningful relationships, without undermining individual freedom. The colleagues were empowered to form meaningful relationships by acknowledging the value of the other and their own freedom. Such relationships deepened over time and extended beyond conferences and meetings. Through these relationships, stories and narratives were shared, providing personal and meaningful perspectives for the depth of cooperation. The values of respect were complemented by principles of equality.
2. **Personhood.** The narrow identities of North and South, race, gender, and culture were critically examined, with the theological concept of the image of God emphasising shared human-createdness as a more universally accepted identity throughout the research outputs. Confronted by mission and development models that once upheld the status quo during racially oppressive regimes and inhumane wars, individuals faced the stark reality of humanity's capacity for evil. The value of personhood was rooted in the principle of attentive listening.
3. **Vulnerability.** Cooperation is often intertwined with notions of fixity, completeness, normativity, and absoluteness, where each party holds specific ideas about how things should proceed and what outcomes should be achieved. Sustainable partnerships, however, embrace the power and inevitability of vulnerability. In the cooperation between the two institutions, openness to change, transformation, redirection, and goal-shifting enabled the initial seven-year MoU to be renewed for another term. This adaptability is reflected in the new insights gained by participants and the leadership involved in these partnerships. Through various activities and personal

engagements, participants experienced growth, and the institutions gained new educational partners, enhancing their international reach and status within the higher education landscape. Here, vulnerability is interwoven with compassion and a commitment to the principle of meaning.

4. Common goal. Ultimately, every effort, activity, and aim is directed towards the restoration of God's world. The objectives of each institution must transcend narrow, institutionalised goals to embrace the broader ecology, of which humanity is only one part. Each institution's initiatives can be enhanced, supported, and enriched through the innovations of its partners. Partnerships that welcome additions, new perspectives, complementarity, and uniqueness thrive when all efforts are directed towards the flourishing of creation and the nourishment of all God's creation.

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