

UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE
THEOLOGICAL EXPLORATIONS

VOLUME 6



**GLOBALISATION,
MISSION AND
DEVELOPMENT**

Perspectives from African
and Nordic Regions

John Klaasen &
Tomas Sundnes
Drønen
EDITORS

L. Sutton
SERIES EDITOR



GLOBALISATION, MISSION AND DEVELOPMENT

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UJPress

Globalisation, Mission and Development: Perspectives from African and Nordic Regions

Published by UJ Press
University of Johannesburg
Library
Auckland Park Kingsway Campus
PO Box 524
Auckland Park
2006
<https://ujpress.uj.ac.za/>

Compilation © John Klaasen and Tomas Sundnes Drønen 2026
Chapters © Author(s) 2026
Published Edition © John Klaasen and Tomas Sundnes Drønen 2026
First published 2026

<https://doi.org/10.64449/9781997468790>
978-1-997468-78-3 (Paperback)
978-1-997468-79-0 (PDF)
978-1-997468-80-6 (EPUB)
978-1-997468-81-3 (XML)

This publication had been submitted to a rigorous double-blind peer-review process prior to publication and all recommendations by the reviewers were considered and implemented before publication.

Proofreading: Mike Leisegang
Cover design: Hester Roets
Typeset in 12/15pt Adobe Garamond Pro



Dedication

In 1844 the very first missionary sent by a Norwegian mission society arrived in KwaZulu Natal and ended up as the personal assistant of the Zulu king Mpande. Since then, mission work has turned into partnership and academic collaboration has become a central part of joint teaching- and research activities between the University of Western Cape, Free State University and VID Specialized University. Through staff and student exchange a true spirit of community and reciprocity has developed, and we have been able to share ideas and thoughts about community development and world Christianity as scholarly approaches towards understanding religious and economic change in a globalised world. This book is a fruit of these conversations – and it is an example of how different perspectives, from southern Africa and from the Nordic regions, might shed light from different angles on the social and religious reality that we share, despite large geographical distances. This book is dedicated to all individual participants in these meetings – and it is an invitation to further collaboration.

Tomas Sundnes Drønen

Centre for the Study of World Christianity and Religion

VID Specialized University

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INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

The *UFS Theological Explorations series* is an initiative of the Faculty of Theology and Religion at the University of the Free State (UFS), situated in Bloemfontein, South Africa. History, both in South Africa and worldwide, has shown that solid academic research is vital for stimulating new insights and new developments, not only to achieve academic progress, but also to advance human flourishing. Through this academic series, the Faculty of Theology and Religion at the UFS hopes to contribute to worthy causes such as these.

The university wishes the research conducted by its staff to be relevant and innovative within the South African context. In addition, the research should have an international impact and visibility and should encourage national and international collaboration. The type of research published in this series is focused on achieving these goals. Accordingly, *UFS Theological Explorations* publishes only research that is of a high academic standard, has been thoroughly peer-reviewed and makes an important academic contribution to fundamental theological issues on both national and international levels. Furthermore, we maintain that good research should not only be aimed at creating significant new academic knowledge but should also be a deliberate attempt to include various and even opposing perspectives. Finally, we believe that it is especially important that research takes into account the social context within which we generate new knowledge.

This series contains both monographs and collected works. In the case of the monographs, one or more researchers work on a particular topic and cover the subject matter extensively. In this way, the monographs make a significant contribution to original research. In the case of the collected works, a group of researchers from various theological and other disciplines work together on a particular topic. The collected works contribute new insights on the research question from different perspectives and thus advance scholarship collectively.

The Editorial Board trusts that *UFS Theological Explorations* will have a positive and lasting impact on theological agendas all over the world! A special word of appreciation to John Klaasen and Tomas Sundnes Drønen, the editors of this volume, for his hard work and dedication in seeing this project through.


Prof. Lodewyk Sutton

Series editor: UFS Theological Explorations




Introduction

John Klaasen 

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This book arises from a long-standing collaboration between institutions of higher learning in South Africa and Norway. Over the past five years, this partnership has encompassed academic publications, conferences, teaching and learning, student supervision, project planning, and staff and student mobility.

The two editors have shared numerous ideas, insights, and perspectives on church mission and development. Research visits, sabbaticals, and institutional cooperation have offered valuable experiences and critical reflections that have enriched academic debate. This publication invites scholars from both countries to engage with the editors in exploring how mission and development, when viewed from diverse worldviews, need not be mutually exclusive or antagonistic.

Scholars from a range of disciplines across are encouraged to consider how scholarship from the two continents can contribute to a shared sense of humanity. This volume will examine reflections on internationalisation through collaborative engagement, focusing on the intersection and interaction of mission and development.



The so-called “classical” model of partnership - between donors in the North and recipients in the South, where material aid is accompanied by religion as an “added value” - will be contrasted with the concept of “reverse mission”, which may offer new insights into the dynamic between centres and margins in mission (Drønen, 2022). In addition, recent studies on the impact of globalisation on economic development, religious practice, and cultural exchange (Drønen, 2013) will provide a theoretical framework that supports a diversity of approaches to the questions addressed in the various contributions.

The specific interaction of ideas, perceptions, and worldviews amongst participants in the various academic activities over the past five years - combined with current trends in scholarship - will form one aspect of the academic contribution. Another will come from academics and postgraduate students currently engaged in either empirical research or conceptual analysis within the framework of mission and development, and its influence on internationalisation. A further valuable contribution will be made by those actively involved in faith-based ministries, whether lay or ordained.

Within the World Council of Churches (WCC), development forms part of missiology. At the 1970 Montreux gathering, economic activity was emphasised under three interrelated themes: economic growth, self-reliance, and social justice. The second gathering, held in 1975, built on the foundations of the 1970 event, with Indian economist Samuel Parmar as a leading voice. A moral perspective began to take precedence over purely economic, technological, and material notions of progress. People - particularly the poor - were placed at the centre of agency, while the dominant model of modernisation came under significant critique (Klaasen, 2021). These gatherings represent two Kairos moments in the history of the ecumenical church. The development focus of these ecumenical meetings aligns with major international initiatives such as Bretton Woods, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank. Despite the emphasis on development within church-led and, to some extent, secular approaches, there has been a clear shift from an exclusively economic model towards a more people-centred approach. Development has also evolved to encompass a range of forms, including gender development, social development, human development, and community development (Alkire, 2010).

These shifts, often referred to as globalisation, manifest through technological advancement, geographical and environmental changes, neoliberalism, and political or religious ideologies, all of which significantly influence mission and mission studies. This publication invites scholars whose work intersects mission and mission studies with these shifts and the diversity inherent in development. The aforementioned factors, along with the various forms of development, will be critically and theologically explored.

Ideas about the church, and religions more broadly, emphasises the practices and foundational principles of faith traditions. The World Bank has moved beyond merely engaging with religious figures and practices, now incorporating religious ideas into its development mandate. This shift was influenced by former World Bank President James Wolfensohn, who stated:

[My] aim was always to go beyond formal contact with leaders 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 (Wolfensohn, 2011: vii-xviii).

A multidisciplinary approach will be adopted. Research areas include spirituality, faith-based organisations and values, and the role of church communities in development. Contributions are drawn from theologians and scholars from other academic disciplines.

This volume is primarily academic in nature, including professional theologians such as university professors, as well as students currently pursuing doctoral studies in theology with a focus on development or diaconia. One contributor is completing a Master's degree in Development and Social Innovation, representing the collaboration between VID Specialized University in Norway and the University of the Western Cape (UWC) in South Africa - a partnership that has spanned several years. Many of the authors are also ordained ministers within their respective churches.

This broad spectrum of authors and perspectives makes the volume a compelling starting point for what the two editors envisioned. The all-inclusive aim of the project is to explore the nexus between mission and development, and to consider the establishment of a formal research cluster

between institutions in Norway and South Africa. The goal is to foster a more egalitarian partnership in engaging mission and development - distinct from the colonial models of the past.

PART 1

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

The first part provides the context and background to the themes selected for this publication. Klaasen was involved with VID Specialized University for six years before taking up a position at the University of the Free State a year ago. Makgoba is a Master's student at VID Specialized University and is one of approximately 20 students from the African continent supported by the NORPART project. Funded by the Norwegian government, this initiative offers African students with opportunities to equip themselves for innovation and social development in their home countries. As a former student of UWC, Makgoba exemplifies the value of intercontinental collaboration in mission and development.

This chapter offers a brief overview of the research projects and types of cooperation grounded in mutual growth, reciprocity, and egalitarian relationships. The authors share insights from their personal academic journeys between two institutions, two countries, and differing scholarly traditions. Drawing on theology and development debates within the WCC, alongside the growing interest in religion and development, the chapter identifies key markers for fostering more effective internationalisation within academia.

Eriksen examines phenomena such as power, capital, management, and control as key mechanisms shaping mission between faith-based organisations (FBOs) from the Global North and South. The central concern lies in the capacity of international FBOs to apply innovation in fostering equitable collaboration in global mission and development.

Drawing on empirical research, Eriksen employs social-symbolic institutional theory and practice architecture to investigate and evaluate organisational and management approaches within international FBOs. Focus groups were conducted with participants from two international FBOs. The findings highlight features such as decentralisation, polyphonic and polycentric

organisational structures, and the use of a standardised membership structure instead of hierarchy. Issues of partnerships, power relations, and diversity are more effectively addressed through innovation and diversification. Within mission and development, issues such as management, organisation, and systems are critically evaluated against equal partnerships and power relations within the framework of innovation.

Bosman further explores mission and development from a biblical interpretative perspective, with a particular focus on marginalised figures, such as the woman in 1 Kings 17:8–16. Drawing on a narrative approach and the *Ubuntu* philosophy within African thought, Bosman provides an intelligent hermeneutic of the Scripture. Using the theoretical framework of *Ubuntu* and the emerging theme of personhood within religion and development, Bosman demonstrates the significance of hospitality, reciprocity, and becoming for equal partnership, mutual growth, and benefit.

PART 2

MISSION, SPIRITUALITY AND DEVELOPMENT

This second part addresses the fundamental aspects of mission, spirituality, and their role in development. The first section of this part discusses the crucial role of spirituality in the leadership of mission and development. Karlsson, Eriksen and Rapisarda analyse peace in Ethiopia as a mission of the Pentecostal movement. Their research concludes that religious leadership from movements such as Pentecostalism brings a dynamic to peace processes through the re-imagination of the role of religious leaders. At the core of such re-imagination is the ability to maintain the tension between the spiritual and secular, social reality and prophetic imagination, and the prophetic role and subjection to politics.

A critical examination of the history of Pentecostalism in Ethiopia and the practices of its leadership opens a crucial path for a renewed approach to spiritual leadership in contexts of serious conflict. This includes a critical analysis of the fundamentals of Pentecostalism, such as the role of the Spirit in leadership, formal theological training, conversion, and calling.

Pinyana shifts from denominational spiritual leadership to personal spiritual leadership development. The challenge of globalisation and the rapid changes brought about by technology, neo-liberalism, and consumerism challenge the essentialist approach of religious leaders to the resultant social, economic, environmental, and political uncertainty.

Drawing from the multiple spiritualities and leadership models within the Christian church and secular society, Pinyana seeks to formulate a leadership model based on spiritual development. Spirituality and spiritual formation provide the yardstick for sustainable and consistent leadership within uncertainty. Spiritual leadership serves as the connecting point between the sacred and the secular and therefore has the potential to address development issues more holistically and wholistically. Such leadership derives from a rootedness in the community and, through an all-encompassing process, extends the agency of the leader beyond the physical and relative. Spiritual leadership encompasses the development of the leader and the call to a ministry of social and spiritual maturity.

Hannibal uses spirituality in a broader sense than Karlsson, Eriksen and Rapisarda and Pinyana. By employing the ordinary human activity of walking, she draws from her own experience as an experienced walker. Hannibal explores walking as a spiritual exercise that lies at the heart of human and spiritual development.

Using ethnographic methodology and qualitative, semi-structured interviews with a sample of 30 women over a lengthy period, she concludes that the incorporation of walking into daily life leads to significant improvements in spiritual health and overall well-being. The research findings indicate that walking enhances qualities such as caring, healing, engaging, sympathy, thinking, and sharing. This preliminary research provides valuable insights into the potential for spiritual formation amongst those involved in mission and development.

Beukes investigates the role of spirituality development and mission as a mechanism to foster social transformation in relatively religious societies such as South Africa. A careful analysis of the socio-economic, cultural, and political landscape of contemporary South Africa, coupled with a cursory

description of spirituality, development, and mission, sets the backdrop for Beukes' threefold nexus for social transformation. The nexus refers to the interconnectedness of spirituality, development, and mission.

PART 3

CHURCH, MISSION AND DEVELOPMENT

Drønen provides an overview of the Protestant churches' mission in conflict situations. A detailed analysis of migration and the causes thereof within Cameroon provides the context for the church's missionary activities and the role of the church in development in the aftermath of war and the ecological and environmental decay that is the consequence of such devastating violence. The response of the Full Gospel Church, referred to as a guesthouse approach, provides those on a short stay in towns with a space to find a home and a sense of belonging. Migrants and refugees find networks and job opportunities, such as farming. The eco-theological approach is associated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon. This approach is diaconal and involves institutions such as schools and hospitals, supported by non-governmental organisations such as Doctors Without Borders. These social actions are supported by an ecological theology that cares for the whole of creation.

The next contribution reverses the roles, approaches, and dynamics from a giver-receiver model to a multidirectional missionary activity. Models of church, such as "mother" and "daughter", and the long-standing development model referred to as the so-called "dependency syndrome" within ecumenical relations and the development discourse are critically engaged with. Focusing on Pentecostal Christianity, Andrews posits that mission and development (including diaconia) need to undergo a decolonisation of mission and theology. He further argues that a contextualisation of mission in Pentecostal Christianity through the lens of decolonisation will present the church with a more critical understanding of the *missio Dei*. This approach to mission and development leads to missional transformation.

Analysing the conflict between Gaza and Israel, Haugen analyses the responses of churches and church-related organisations concerning "apartheid" terminology. Emphasis is placed on the events leading up to the 2022 WCC

General Assembly's statement, *Seeking Justice and Peace for All in the Middle East* and the Young Men's Christian Association's (YMCA) World Council statement of *Just Peace for All - A World Free from Occupation*.

Haugen draws on the conceptual framework of "*vocatio, ad-vocatio, provocatio*" and Luke's "theory of power", along with Mott's outline of Christian ethics. Identifying two opposite responses - provocative and effective - Haugen concludes that churches and church-related movements are more effective when responses to crises are part of broader movements rather than single entities. Terminologies like "apartheid" can cause antagonism and forward movement. Haugen concludes that such terms could benefit from appeals to international law.

The final chapter in this section analyses the diaconate as a diaconal ministry within the Anglican Church in Southern Africa (ACSA). Tracing the diaconate from the Early Church, it is described as social responsibility and liturgical formation. An analysis of the diaconate within the ACSA provides a glimpse of the distorted emphasis on the liturgical aspect of this ministry. The transitional nature of the diaconate has positioned this ministry as subordinate to priestly ordination.

Walters offers a critical analysis of the diaconate, proposing that a mission-driven model provides the framework for a holistic ministry that integrates social responsibility and liturgical formation. Deacons are presented as distinct yet integral to the mission of the church. Their ministry is transformative in nature - vocationally rooted within the margins of society and amongst the vulnerable - with a call towards wholistic liberation.

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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

¹ John Klaasen is Adjunct Professor at VID Specialized University in Norway.

(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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Chapter 2

Innovating towards equality in global mission and development

“We all belong together in this world”

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1. Introduction

Between approximately 1492 and 1950, the Western missionary movement emerged from the era of Christendom and followed a territorial model often described as ‘from the West to the rest’ (Vethanayagamony, 2010). This movement was inextricably linked to structures of power, including colonial systems (Longkumer et al., 2016). In recent decades, world Christianity has experienced profound demographic shifts, with a decline in Western Europe and North America and significant growth in Africa, Asia, and Latin America (Zurlo et al., 2020). These shifts are partly the result of European expansion and migration, alongside Western missionary efforts (Kim & Kim, 2016).

Scholars have argued that the Western church must undergo a spiritual transformation in order to acknowledge these fundamental changes and their implications for practice (Vethanayagamony, 2010; Longkumer

et al., 2016; Van Gelder, 2013). Increasingly, there is recognition that a new posture is required - one that moves from a missiology of power to a missiology rooted in relationship and vulnerability (Bevans, 2010). This has been a growing concern since the latter half of the 20th century, with churches and mission organisations seeking ways to respond to globally unjust power structures (Biehl, 2016).

Although some progress has been made in shifting from a colonial framework to a post-colonial, globalised approach, the majority of financial resources for mission still reside in the Global North (Johnson & Ross, 2009). Despite widespread affirmation of mission as a movement “from everywhere to everywhere”, it continues to be practised largely within the classical star-shaped model of the historical Western missionary movement - with the centre in the Global North supporting churches and organisations in the Global South and the East through bilateral relations (Biehl, 2016).

Many have emphasised the urgent need to counter asymmetrical power dynamics in the field (Longkumer et al., 2016; Kalu et al., 2010; Duncan, 2007). Yet despite this long-standing awareness, innovative, equitable partnerships have not been widely implemented (Longkumer et al., 2016; Jørgensen & Larsen, 2014). It remains, as Goheen (2022) puts it, an “unfinished agenda”. Thus, even with increasing recognition of the need for new structures, transforming the organisational models of mission remains a significant and ongoing challenge.

The organisations examined in this study also operate within the field of international development cooperation, where faith-based organisations (FBOs) play a significant role (Heist & Cnaan, 2016). This field is marked by power dynamics between wealthy Northern donors and Southern recipients, often perpetuating regimes of inequality. Some scholars argue that the language of partnership is more rhetorical than real (Hayes et al., 2018). Genuine partnership requires shared understanding, mutual trust, sustained commitment, and interdependence. However, these ideals are difficult to realise in practice because of underlying suspicion and asymmetries in resources, institutional capacity, and power between actors in the Global North and South (Baijnath & James, 2014; Eikenberry et al., 2023).

Girei (2016:193) contends that “development management orthodoxy narrows the possibility for NGOs to engage in transformative practice and in social change agendas, while it wittingly or unwittingly supports the expansion of the political and cultural hegemony of western donors”. Similarly, Burchardt (2013) found that the hegemonic influence of donors often reshapes local religious actors to fit technocratic and globally standardised development templates - even when these contradict local religious understandings.

As long as power, financial control, and decision-making authority remain concentrated in the North, paternalism continues to shape partnerships - raising a critical question about how such dynamics can be disrupted in pursuit of truly equitable collaboration (Jørgensen & Larsen, 2014). There is an urgent need for innovation in the ways that partnerships are structured and practised, to foster more just and equal participation in the *missio Dei* (Digni, 2021; Kurlberg & Hoksbergen, 2023).

This study was also motivated by theoretical concerns. Organisational change and innovation are fundamental, enduring issues in management theory and practice (Suddaby et al., 2016), but because of dramatic changes in many dimensions of society, “the need in management theory and practice to understand processes of organization change and innovation has never been greater” (Poole & Van de Ven, 2021:v).

These practical and theoretical concerns motivate this collective case study that investigates how actors in international FBOs innovate towards equal collaboration in global mission and development.

Two FBOs, referred to in this study as Serikat and Muungano, were purposively selected as case studies because they had successfully innovated towards more equitable forms of collaboration. These organisations had developed and implemented new organisational practices, processes, and structures to address pressing social needs - an approach defined in this study as social organisational innovation.

These innovations were driven by core values and centred on reimagining Western-based organisations as global coalitions, in which former partners from the Global South were included as full members, with equal voice

and voting rights in all decisions - ranging from policy and strategy to budgetary matters.

2. Theoretical frameworks

This study applies theoretical perspectives from organisation studies to understand and reflect upon how FBOs can innovate towards more equal organisational forms of collaboration.

2.1 *Social-symbolic perspective from institutional theory*

This perspective describes social reality as consisting of social-symbolic objects, defined as “a combination of discursive, relational and material elements that constitute a meaningful pattern in a social system” (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019:24) - including institutions, values, policies, and structures. In organisational life, these objects often appear stable, pragmatic, and taken for granted. However, even if widely accepted, they are not neutral; rather, they shape the distribution of opportunities and benefits within a social system (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019).

Challenging these social-symbolic objects requires intentional and reflexive efforts (Suddaby et al., 2016; Van Wijk et al., 2019) on the part of organisational actors in order to bring about more equitable and just organisational arrangements. Such transformative efforts represent instances of profound social innovation (Nilsson, 2019).

When organisational actors seek to create, shape, disrupt, or maintain social-symbolic objects, they engage in intentional and reflexive efforts known as social-symbolic work (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019). In the literature, such efforts are typically named after the type of social-symbolic object being addressed. In this study, institutional work, values work, and organisation work are applied as theoretical lenses to understand how organisational actors innovate towards more equal collaboration in mission.

Institutional work involves purposeful and reflexive efforts to create, alter, or sustain institutions (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Within institutional theory, the term *institution* is not used the same way as in everyday language where it can describe an older established organisation like a hospital. Here *institution* is defined as a “taken-for-granted and self-policing *convention*

guiding organizational practices” (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019:190). This view implies that intentional efforts to change institutions are embedded within and shaped by a complex web of relationships in the social world (Battilana & D’Aunno, 2009). From the perspective of institutional work, individual agency is neither fully unconstrained nor entirely absent; it is exercised through reflective engagement with institutional structures to shape these self-policing conventions and habits.

Values work refers to actions that strengthen ongoing processes of knowledge and reflection, infusing organisations with value-driven practices (Gehman et al., 2013). Effective value enquiries involve reflection on real-life situations, encouraging the questioning of previous norms, collaborative identification of needs, and sustained experimental actions. These practices feed further value reflection (Aadland, 2010; Espedal & Carlsen, 2024) and support innovation efforts (Breuer et al., 2022).

Organisation work concerns how organisational actors purposefully and reflexively construct, shape, or disrupt organisational life and arrangements (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019). It should not be confused with organisational work - the production of goods or services by the organisation - but rather focuses on shaping the organisation itself as a social-symbolic object.

When institutional, values, and organisation work extend beyond merely addressing immediate challenges - disrupting fundamental social practices and relationships to embody values such as equality and promote agency - these efforts constitute profound social innovations (Nilsson, 2019).

2.2 *Practice architecture*

This framework provides a lens through which to understand and analyse the social practices within an organisation (Kemmis, 2022). It illustrates how social and organisational life are produced, reproduced, and transformed through practices. The framework is grounded in the belief that practices are constituted by three interrelated elements, unified by a common project or purpose.

Sayings refer to the discursive aspects of a practice - such as the language, symbols, and meanings employed within it. *Doings* encompass the physical and material actions carried out as part of the practice. *Relatings* involve the

social interactions and relationships that are established and maintained through the practice.

These sayings, doings, and relating are not isolated activities but are interconnected, and are enabled, constrained, and made possible by the cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political arrangements present at the site of practice. These arrangements - also referred to as 'practice architecture' - shape the conditions for what can be said, done, and related to within a particular practice.

A visual representation of the practice architecture framework is presented in Figure 1.

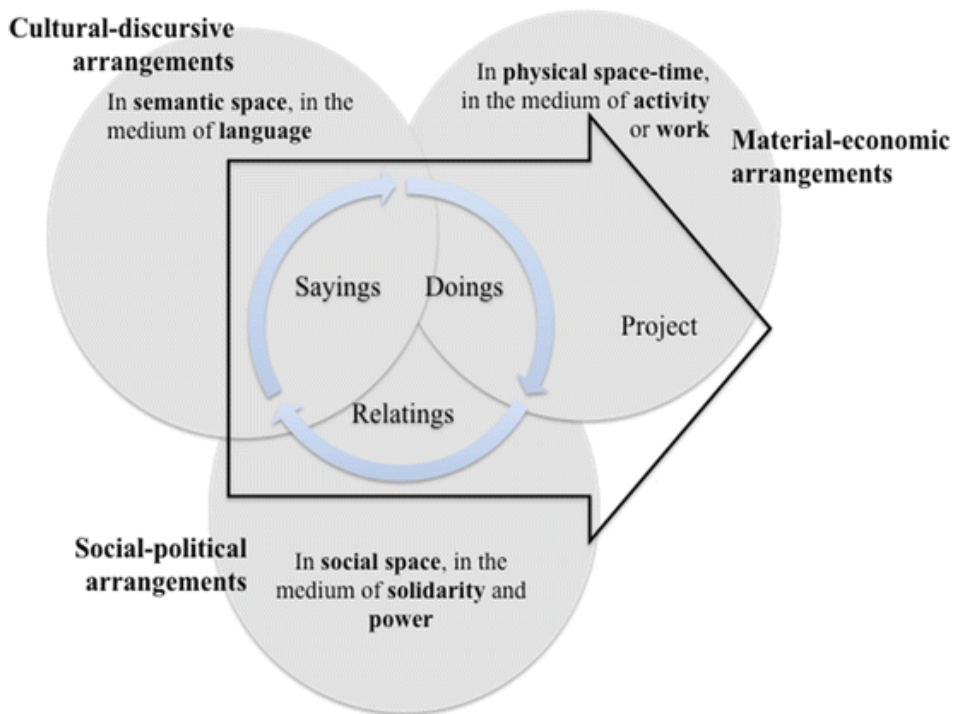


Figure 1: Practice architecture (Source: Mahon et al., 2017)

The practice of team meetings can illustrate this framework. The sayings include the jargon, meanings, and terminology used within the organisation, the agenda items discussed, and the way that decisions are

communicated. The doings may involve the act of scheduling and attending the meeting, the use of technology to facilitate remote participation, and the process of taking and distributing meeting minutes. The relatings encompass the power dynamics between team members, the norms around participation and decision-making, and the relationships between team members. The practice architecture, in this case, might include the organisational culture that values open communication (cultural-discursive), the availability of a meeting room and video conferencing tools (material-economic), and the hierarchical structure of the organisation (social-political). Through the lens of practice architecture, it is possible to see how these elements and arrangements come together to shape the practices that are involved in conducting team meetings. This understanding can then be used to identify areas for improvement and to guide interventions to transform the practice. A central argument from within this framework is that to change the practice of an organisation, one must address and transform all three elements of the architecture that form practice.

In this study, the social-symbolic work perspective is combined with the practice architecture framework. This allows for the exploration of the diverse and nuanced efforts of organisational actors to innovate towards equality by altering the practice architecture of the organisation.

3. Methods

Considering the research question and relevant literature, I purposively selected global FBOs for their innovation towards equality. Conducting a collective case study (Stake, 2003) enabled me to explore the dynamics and processes within different organisations. Each case illuminated the interpretation of these dynamics in the others, leading to a deeper understanding and sharper theorising than a single case study could provide (Chmiliar, 2010).

3.1 Data collection and analysis

I triangulated data-gathering methods by using interviews, observation, document analysis, and critical group reflections as data sources. I digitally conducted 25 research interviews. Participants were selected based on specific criteria through dialogues with contact persons in the

case organisations. The interviewees varied in gender, nationality, and organisational role; they represented 16 countries across five continents, thus providing rich material. They described the ongoing innovation process, including any significant stops, incidents, or actors. I asked why it was initiated, its effects, what drives, enables, or hinders it, and how they worked to make it happen. I also enquired about their personal experiences and the roles of values and power. I anonymised the organisations and interviewees. To obtain multiple data sources, I analysed more than 2,400 pages of documents and conducted 53 hours of digital participatory observations from online meetings and courses. These data agreed with the interview findings. Additionally, I undertook a 20-hour collaborative process of critical reflection on values and organisational practices over four months at one of the case organisations, as described by Eriksen and Strumińska-Kutra (2022) and visualised in Figure 2.

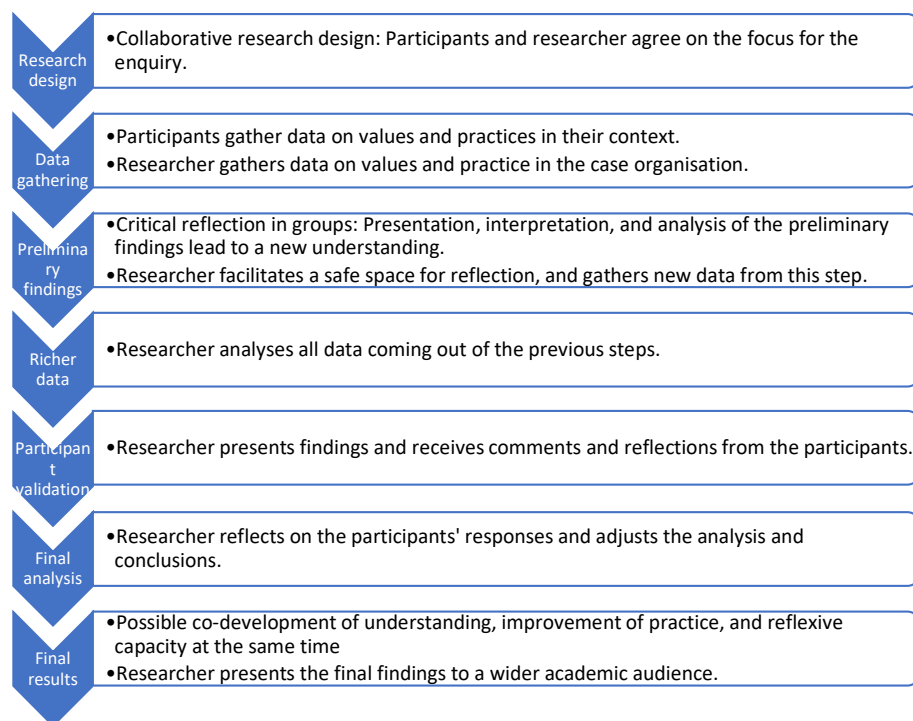


Figure 2: Collaborative research process

The various data collection methods yielded empirical material comprising 3,000 pages of documents, transcribed interviews, and field notes. First, I coded the material and identified the parts relevant to the scope of this study. *NVivo* was used for thematic analysis and systematic coding of the data. The analysis involved revisiting the empirical data and theoretical framework, backtracking, and checking the material until I was satisfied with my justifications of the interviewees' experiences (Rinehart, 2021). This process of oscillating between the data and the literature signals the use of an abductive approach (Golden-Biddle, 2020). In the next phase, I developed first-order concepts and second-order themes and ended up with the aggregated category as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Data structure with first-order concepts, themes, and categories

First-order concepts	Themes	Category
Learning and reflecting together in safe spaces	Innovating the cultural-discursive arrangements	Innovating towards equal collaboration in mission
Refining values and missiological understanding		
Developing new terminology and fundamental statements		
Sharing metaphors and inspiring stories		
New mindset		
New financial routines	Innovating the material-economic arrangements	
Relocating the head office and working remotely on different continents		
All positions are open to everyone, ensuring global and equal representation in decision-making bodies		

First-order concepts	Themes	Category
New bylaws and constitution that provide everyone with an equal voice and vote, a new structure, and new decision-making procedures	Innovating the social-political arrangements	
Opening up all positions for everyone		
New conflict-resolution mechanisms		
New procedures for projects and bilateral partnerships		

3.2 *Participant validation*

To strengthen the validity of my findings, I presented the preliminary results to the participants (Lindheim, 2022). Their reflections and responses enabled additional analyses. Follow-up interviews were conducted to further explore the issues before the final analysis, contributing to a robust evaluation and the transferability of our findings.

3.3 *Ethical considerations and methodological limitations*

This research was approved by the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (now SIKT). Participants were informed of the purpose of the study, the intended use of the data, confidentiality measures, and the voluntary nature of participation. All participants provided written consent.

Most of the data collection was conducted digitally, which limited non-verbal communication compared to in-person meetings. However, the sessions were recorded, which enhanced the accuracy of my field notes during participant observation. Another limitation was that the interviews were conducted in English, although the interviewees' mother tongues varied. Nevertheless, all participants were accustomed to speaking English and interacting digitally. To minimise the risk of misinterpretation, I mirrored my interpretations back to the interviewees, who generally confirmed the accuracy of my understanding.

4. Findings

Findings from this case study are presented in two parts. First, I offer an overall description of how Muungano and Serikat have innovated towards more equitable collaboration in global mission. Second, I present how they worked to transform the various elements of the organisational practice architecture.

4.1 *Muungano*

Muungano provides essential resources for church-related activities and literacy work. It was founded in North America in the 1940s and subsequently expanded into a centralised, hierarchical, Western-led organisation. Its head office in the Global North directed various country offices, partners, and affiliates across the globe. Within this international structure, only a few founding organisations held voting rights, while newer affiliated organisations from Africa, the Asia-Pacific region, and Latin America were excluded from decision-making.

Through the adoption of new bylaws, Muungano reinvented itself as a global alliance comprising more than 100 locally embedded, self-governing organisations, all holding equal membership status and voting rights - regardless of their size, history, or financial capacity. The revised organisational structure is illustrated in Figure 3.

In this new alliance model, organisations enter into relationship with one another by signing a covenant that articulates the shared values and vision to which they commit. Together, these covenanted organisations constitute the Muungano alliance. Leadership is now exercised by a global board appointed by all members and supported by an alliance leadership team consisting of the executive director, regional directors, special advisors, and administrative staff for areas such as communication and finance. This team operates virtually across multiple continents and countries.

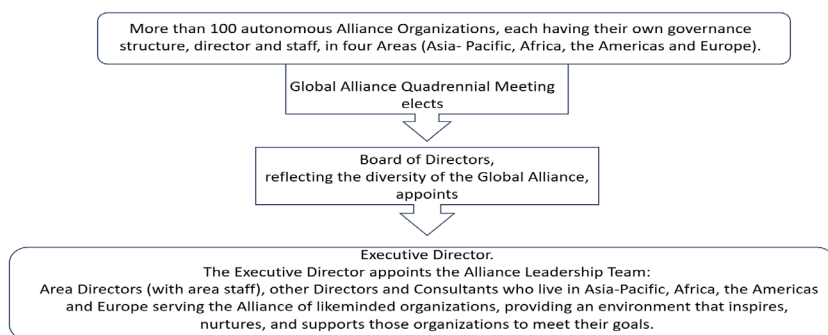


Figure 3: Organisational structure of Muungano after the innovation

The innovation within Muungano can be described as a transformative journey from a hierarchical, Western-oriented, centralised organisation to a polyphonic, polycentric, and decentralised global alliance of autonomous member organisations operating across world Christianity. Throughout this transition, the organisation radically reimaged its bylaws, structures, terminologies, and mental models to facilitate more equal collaboration across the Global North–Global South divide. Key social organisational innovations included: the consolidation of multiple membership categories into a single category granting all members equal voice and vote, regardless of differences in size or financial contribution; the establishment of seven participation streams to enable diverse forms of engagement within the alliance; the downscaling and relocation of the head office from the Global North to the Global South; and the subsequent development of a decentralised leadership structure, with the alliance leadership team operating virtually from offices across multiple continents. Although the organisation remains legally registered in the United States, these innovations reflect a profound mental and structural shift in how Muungano members understand their identity and role in the *missio Dei*.

4.2 Serikat

Serikat pursues a holistic mission encompassing advocacy, development, diaconia, and evangelism. Established in the early 19th century, Serikat has evolved from a classic star-like structure - in which European FBOs

supported partners in Africa and Asia - into a communion of approximately 40 churches, where former recipient partners have become full members and co-owners of the organisation (see Figure 4). This transformation led to a new constitution that granted all members an equal voice and vote, with African and Asian member organisations now forming the majority in the General Assembly and the International Council, which determines key matters such as policy, strategy, and budget. This represented a radical shift, especially given that the majority of financial resources still originated in Europe.

Recently, Serikat has seen increased financial contributions from African and Asian members, which has been interpreted as a sign of progress and a step away from the traditional donor–recipient paradigm. A particularly telling example occurred during the floods in Germany in the summer of 2021, when African and Asian Serikat member churches raised substantial funds in solidarity with those affected.

Serikat now actively promotes workforce diversity, with all positions open to all members regardless of geographic origin. It operates with three regional offices - in Europe, Africa, and Asia - although the European office is still often perceived as the head office because of historical legacy. Most staff and functions also remain based in Europe, and the organisation continues to be legally registered there.

Serikat is currently engaged in an ongoing process of reflection on how its identity can remain innovative and relevant in light of the diverse challenges faced across its organisational practices and structures. Central to this process are questions around how its international character can be expressed consistently, and what equal partnership means in practice. Through these innovation efforts, Serikat seeks to advance in global mission with equitable partnerships in which all members are both givers and receivers.

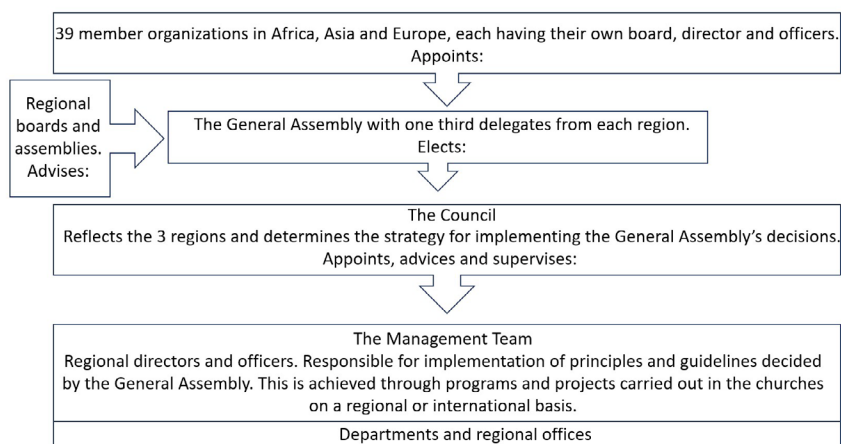


Figure 4: Organisational structure of Serikat as a communion of churches after internationalisation

4.3 Efforts of innovating towards equality

In Serikat and Muungano, the organisational actors engaged in various types of social-symbolic work to shape and innovate different elements of the practice architecture. Some of these key efforts are described below, accompanied by illustrative quotes.

4.3.1 Innovating the cultural-discursive arrangements

In the case, organisations and actors engaged in institutional work and values work to shape the cultural-discursive arrangements, as described below.

4.3.1.1 Learning and reflecting together in safe spaces

In Serikat and Muungano, collective learning and reflection on values and practices in safe spaces were driving efforts towards more equal collaboration, as illustrated by this quote from a board member of Muungano:

The change started was happening as a result of reflections. So, it started by Missiological reflection going through why we do what we

do. What is the biblical basis and working through areas of our values to see. The aim was that this reflection and thinking and discussing would lay the groundwork to say how should we work together. And so the changes came out of these experiences and reflections and sharing and consulting between people from different backgrounds. And so instead of just continuing with this, in a way, the speed boat of the Western organization heading up everything and just letting the world join while we continue. And the[n] you know, the power boat is all fueled with a lot of money and resources and competent staff and computers and people with degrees and all of that. It was a way of saying, let's stop, let's think through things. And what needs to change?

4.3.1.2 Refining values and missiological understanding

This shared process of learning and reflection helped to refine their values and understanding, as illustrated by the following quote from a member of Muungano's global alliance team:

They begin with some reflection on the image of God. And then move to reflection on the mission of God. And the reason I'm saying these two things is that I think it's important for us to realize that our creation in the image of God is so significant because it means that it is the basis for the equal dignity of every human being and that needs to be our starting point in our perception of other people. And then as we participate with others in mission there's also kind of a basis for equal participation in the fact that this is not our mission, not ours. You know, it's not all about our strategy, but it's about that no matter where the believer comes from their point of origin, their current status, whatever. As a believer, we as believers, we are all equally called to participate in what God is doing in the world.

4.3.1.3 Developing new terminology and fundamental statements

Based on these efforts of communal learning and reflection - which refined core values and deepened their missiological understanding - Muungano developed new terminology, foundational statements, and practical recommendations. As a national director from a North American alliance organisation within Muungano put it:

So often what would happen would be there'd be three or four missiological consultations in various regions (of the world) that would draw people together, to give input. And then all that input would kind of get built up towards setting a new policy or a philosophy statement or practices for kind of best practice recommendations for all the organizations. So all of that helps draw new thinking and to really think deeply about it and say, why do we practice it this way? It was one of the key ways, I think, to challenge Western assumptions the practices that were maybe being assumed that everybody, any new organization would also adopt. But it really didn't make sense that they should, and maybe it didn't even have biblical basis. that had a western church assumption.

In Serikat, similar processes took place as they engaged in discussions around terminology and underlying assumptions, as expressed by their General Secretary:

So at the moment, we have a very intensive discussion on the term of partnership. And I would say the majority of the European people was also thinking that partnership was a wonderful and perfect term. And then the management team came up with a paper that was drafted by our international staff. Some of those who are not from Europe. And the question of this word partnership because partnership is coming from the world of the economy and has a bad connotation in many of the cultures.

4.3.1.4 Developing and sharing metaphors, slogans, and inspiring stories

Part of shaping the cultural-discursive arrangements involved introducing and sharing stories, metaphors, and slogans that conveyed and promoted the emerging missiological understanding within the organisations. For example, in Serikat, the International Council guided a process of communal learning and discovery by critically reflecting on commonly used expressions:

What guides us is this question of our leading body, the council: Do you discover any notion of “we here and they there”? It's so simple. It's so simple. But this is really our guiding motto to think: Are we working and thinking in that direction and acting in that direction? – A regional director in Serikat.

In Serikat, they also share well-known stories that illustrate how things used to be, serving as wake-up calls and inspiration for working towards greater equality and dignity in cross-cultural relations. Now, they aspire to achieve “eye-level contact” in these interactions.

In Muungano, members adopted the metaphor of a journey to help people to understand and navigate the ongoing change process. The former model of Western dominance was likened to a powerboat, symbolising control and unilateral direction. In contrast, the new global alliance - characterised by mutual interdependence and shared leadership - is described as a sailboat, where the crew must collaborate and rely on the wind of the Holy Spirit to move forward.

4.3.1.5 New mindset

These efforts to change the discursive-cultural arrangements resulted in new mindsets, as illustrated by the following quote from an Asian member of the management team in Serikat:

Because we would like to move from the old understanding of mission that North European is superior, they are the first, the old brothers and sisters- And Churches in the south is its younger sisters and brothers, and they always need help from the North. But now it is different. We all are subjects. We help each other so that I think is the internationalization.

The General Secretary of Serikat further highlights that,

We do not have partners, we are members. So we are talking about membership. To be a member also is part of changing the mindset.

This new mindset was demonstrated in the incident when churches in Africa and Asia raised support for victims of the flood in Europe in 2021. This story is now shared as a result of the internationalisation process, “because you hear the people say well, as we have received in the past, we are also in the position where we can give”, stated the General Secretary of Serikat.

4.3.2 *Innovating the material-economic arrangements*

The organisational actors combined the institutional and values work described above with organisational work focused on the “harder” dimensions of the practice architecture - particularly the material-economic arrangements. These efforts and their outcomes are outlined below.

4.3.2.1 New financial routines

Money plays a significant role in partnerships, heavily shaping the dynamics of mission and development work. Consequently, in their efforts to innovate towards more equitable collaboration in mission, Serikat and Muungano undertook the establishment of new financial routines.

In Serikat, this was addressed by creating a unified budget for all activities, regardless of the source of the funds. The General Assembly - comprising equal representation from Europe, Asia, and Africa - determines the amount of membership contributions and approves the budget. This shift was regarded as controversial and radical, particularly because most financial contributions still originate from European members, while African and Asian members now hold a majority in the decision-making bodies. Nevertheless, this change has fostered increased mutuality, as churches in the Global South have raised their financial contributions, now seeing themselves not as partners but as full members.

Another contentious innovation was the decentralisation of financial resource administration. Initially, there were objections rooted in legal constraints, fears of corruption, and assumptions of limited capacity in Africa and Asia. Serikat is now also rethinking how to incorporate non-monetary contributions into their budgeting and accounting practices. They argue that doing so would more accurately reflect the significant contributions from African and Asian members - contributions that are typically invisible within traditional Western budgeting frameworks.

Muungano, by contrast, does not operate with a centralised budget for projects. Member organisations within the alliance collaborate on specific projects, with some acting as funding partners and others as implementing

partners. Nevertheless, Muungano has engaged in substantial reflection on funding and resource distribution in the context of *missio Dei*. Through various missiological consultations, the alliance has developed funding principles centred on generosity and the faithful stewardship of God's resources for God's mission. These principles are intended, in part, to counter the donor–recipient paradigm. As one national director from South America emphasised: “because we are members of this same alliance, the relationship with them [the donors] are equal. But because they are donors, they have guidelines that the other organization who receive the donation must follow”.

4.3.2.2 Relocating and redefining the head office, and opening up all positions

Moving towards equal collaboration in their mission, Serikat as well as Muungano decided to change the physical set-up of their organisations to better reflect their new identities as global entities. Muungano moved their head office from the US to Singapore, before transitioning to a decentralised structure where everyone in the alliance's global leadership team works from different locations. Currently, the alliance does not have a physical office or other property, but it is still legally registered in the US. Serikat has three regional offices, although most people still perceive the office in Europe as the head office. The General Secretary does not refer to a headquarters and emphasises that in the future, more workers will be based in different locations. In line with this more decentralised structure, all positions are advertised internationally, and they consider whether a position must be placed in Europe or if it can be located in the office in Africa or Asia. Another initiative in Serikat is their annual planning week, where they meet from the three regions to discuss ideas. Their efforts to change the material and economic arrangements reflect their new understanding and identity as global mission organisations.

However, remnants of older mindsets concerning financial and legal matters remain evident in their relationships and interactions. As one of the regional directors in Serikat observes: “Structures and traditions of paternalism and

maternalism are also a challenge. We are not in paradise... and there is also the economic gap between the haves and the have nots and all of those in between. That is still a challenge". A similar concern is voiced within Muungano, where a member of the global alliance team notes:

The power dynamics related to perceptions of one part of the world of another part of the world, the whole funding issue makes it very difficult to have a truly mutual relationship.

4.3.3 Innovating the social-political arrangements

Serikat and Muungano have implemented significant changes in their socio-political structures. Building on the efforts outlined above, they undertook organisational reforms focused on revising bylaws and formal procedures. Some of these initiatives and their outcomes are outlined below.

4.3.3.1 New bylaws providing all with equal voice and vote, new structure, new decision-making procedures

Because of the new missiological understanding of the equal sending and participation in the *missio Dei*, the founding organisations from Europe and North America chose to relinquish their power and exclusive voting rights. They unanimously agreed to amend the bylaws and redefine the corporate identity in order to include former partners in the Global South as full, formal members with equal voice and vote. The new organisational structure stands as the definitive formal expression of the radical innovation towards equitable collaboration in global mission that Serikat and Muungano have undertaken.

4.3.3.2 New procedures for projects and bilateral partnerships

In line with their new missiological understanding and their redefined corporate identity as a global communion, Serikat has established new procedures for deciding which projects to support and undertake. Through global consultations and collaborative processes, they have developed formal partnership guidelines and procedures for integrating these into daily partnership work. This includes fostering South–South partnerships as well

as North–South collaborations. Although Muungano has retained bilateral arrangements for project collaborations and has not developed common procedures for project selection like Serikat, it too has altered how its members work together on projects.

There is this progression. Muungano started as a Western organization and then they changed to international organization and then to an alliance, you know. So we are learning in this journey how to do things better. Yeah, because in the in the past, the missionary coming he will do everything. You know, he has all the knowledge and the funding and all that. But now we learn to do things different, you know, we have qualified people on the ground. That are ready to take over the leadership of the projects, you know, and of course, they have their own way of doing things. We run projects less and less, the projects are run by the local communities, local boards, and we come and provide services. - National director in an East European alliance organization.

4.3.3.3 New conflict-resolution mechanisms

In a global, decentralised, polycentric alliance like Muungano, mechanisms have been developed following Third Space principles (e.g. commitment to mutual respect, learning, influence, and shared benefit). The Third Space is further characterised by confidentiality; respect for cultural issues; participants' willingness to engage in open dialogue; a desire to seek outcomes that benefit all involved parties; transparency; and trust built through the process being followed. In situations where such dialogue proves difficult, a more formal mediation process may be considered.

4.4 Values-driven innovation

When exploring the efforts of organisational actors to innovate towards equal collaboration in mission, I found that they did not merely focus on values in missiological reflections but intentionally sought to translate these new insights and refined values into principles and innovative practices. The following excerpts illustrate this values-driven innovation approach:

I think it's just putting into practice ecumene, the whole basic idea of human ecumenical. We all belong together in this world. I think Christianity knew that all people belong together from the beginning on, and now is a time to put it into a new kind of praxis (A regional director in Serikat).

Take a bit of time to think about the significance of the dignity of every human being because of our creation in the image of God and the equal participation we're called to, because this is God's mission by his spirit, not ours. And, you know, if it were someone in an organization, say, just begin the journey of allowing these two things to soak into how you operate on a daily basis (A member of the global alliance leadership team in Muungano).

5. Discussion

Reflecting on their values, ultimate goals, and the developments in world Christianity, Serikat and Muungano both innovated towards equality in attitudes, structures, and organisational practices. The new organisational structures and processes established to rebalance the power gaps in the organisations represent a radical shift. In light of the dynamics of these fields, it is clear that moving away from a star-like structure - where power and resources originate in the Global North and bilaterally support partners in the Global South - to a global association where members from the Global South form the majority in bodies deciding on policies, strategy, and budget is more than just an organisational change; it is a radical social organisational innovation that disrupts entrenched dynamics of asymmetry and inequality in the field.

Using a social-symbolic work perspective, we can explore the diverse and nuanced efforts of organisational actors as they innovate towards equality in global mission. Institutional work and values work both address the cultural-discursive dimension, including the institutions and values on which organisations rely for their understanding of the world and their evaluations of appropriate behaviours (Micelotta et al., 2021). These, in turn, guide the organisation work that shapes the material-economic and social-political arrangements of a specific organisation and provides it with legitimacy.

Institutional work and values work can either hinder or drive social organisational innovation, as changes at the institutional level may prescribe or proscribe organisational templates, thereby regulating what forms of organisational innovation are considered legitimate (Micelotta et al., 2021). In the case organisations, their shared reflection on values, purpose, and the shifting context of world Christianity led them to recognise the need to change their organisational structures and procedures as part of their organisation work. By combining these different forms of work, they have been able to innovate towards more equal collaboration in global mission.

According to Wilkinson and Kemmis (2015), organisational actors seeking to innovate the practices of leading and organising by focusing solely on transforming knowledge, values, or attitudes may encounter difficulties because the organisational structure, procedures, and power relations can hinder the implementation of such innovations in practice. Innovative efforts may also fail if they are directed only towards structural experimentation while overlooking values and the soft power of culture, guiding conventions, and terminology. To truly transform organisational practice, the cultural-discursive dimensions and the material-economic and social-political dimensions that shape organisational life must be addressed (Micelotta et al., 2021; Wilkinson & Kemmis, 2015).

In the case organisations, all three elements of the practice architecture were addressed. Common learning and reflection in safe spaces across significant diversity facilitated missiological reflection and the development of new understandings, which were expressed in new terminology and foundational statements adopted by the global board. These efforts of shared reflection and learning are examples of institutional work and values work, which produced new missiological understandings that profoundly transformed the cultural-discursive dimension of the practice architecture. This, in turn, gave legitimacy to subsequent organisation work that resulted in changes in the material-economic and socio-political dimensions of the practice architecture - such as new bylaws, structures, decision-making processes, financial procedures, and HR (human resources) regulations.

Further, Muungano dismantled the material-economic and socio-political arrangements by shifting from a central headquarters in the US to a model where global leaders across five continents work virtually from their homes.

Since the organisational structure was reimagined into a global alliance, there was no longer any interest in, need for, or possibility of control-and-command-style leadership. Instead, the leadership style transformed into one of humble, servant leadership. For Muungano, this meant that global leaders would facilitate reflection and dialogue around shared values and how these could be expressed in practice, rather than correcting or instructing member organisations on how to act.

The “soft” innovations and changes in values and institutions shaping practice are expressed and reinforced within the organisational arrangements. This combination of different types of social-symbolic work contributes to innovating and transforming the entire architecture of cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political arrangements that shape practice (Kemmis, 2022). Together, institutional and values work primarily address the cultural-discursive dimension of the architecture, while organisation work expresses and reinforces these “soft” changes by rearranging the material-economic and social-political structures - what can be termed “hard changes”. However, in the messy reality of organisational life, these delineations are not so clear-cut, and it is the integration of these types of work that is essential for transforming the architecture that shapes organisational practice.

This implies that when organisational actors seek to innovate how they organise and lead towards more equal relationships, it is not sufficient merely to change the attitudes and knowledge of individuals; it also requires transforming the other elements of the practice architectures that support the interconnected practices of leading and organising (Wilkinson & Kemmis, 2015).

These combined efforts may transform the cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political conditions of the practice architecture that shapes organisational practice (Kemmis, 2022). If organisational actors focus solely on innovating values or transforming attitudes, they may encounter difficulties, as the material-economic and social-political conditions can hinder the implementation of these innovations. Conversely, if innovative efforts are directed only towards structural experimentation while overlooking values and the soft power of culture and terminology, innovation and change efforts towards equal collaboration in global mission may also falter.

The findings from the cases point to the need for values-driven innovation work that combines “soft” and “hard” changes to establish a practice architecture that supports equal collaboration. As these efforts of institutional, values, and organisation work go beyond fixing concrete problems to disrupt social practices and relationships within the organisation - seeking instead to reflect values such as equality and enhance agency - they stand as expressions of profound social innovation (Nilsson, 2019). From this discussion, I would argue that the integration of different types of social-symbolic work, each addressing distinct dimensions of the practice architecture, is crucial for innovating towards equal collaboration in global mission and development.

6. Conclusion

This study shows how global mission and development organisations have been able to innovate towards equal collaboration. Conceptualising social organisational innovation as comprising different types of social-symbolic work targeting each dimension of the practice architecture is a theoretical contribution. This study also offers an empirical contribution by describing new and more equal forms of partnership that respond to a pressing call from the field. These innovations carry promising implications, as other studies have highlighted the significance of such innovations (Eriksen & Løvaas, 2022). On a broader level, since all organisations are values-based (Friedland, 2013) and compelled to address current global challenges (Gümüşay et al., 2022) and work towards the Sustainable Development Goals,¹ I argue that the findings of this study are transferrable and relevant to other nonprofit, governmental, and for-profit organisations engaged in global partnerships.

1 www.sdgs.un.org/goals

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Chapter 3

From nobody to somebody through the gift of giving: “A woman, a widow” becomes “the mistress of the house” in 1 Kings 17

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1. Introduction

My contribution to this special collection comes as an Old Testament (OT) biblical scholar. I specialise in the translation and interpretation of OT narrative texts, with a particular interest in the ancient stories that introduce us to people on the margins of society. In analysing 1 Kings 17, I employ the methodology of narrative exegesis, as explained and demonstrated for OT texts by Gunn and Fewell (1993), Brown (2017), and Fewell (2016).

Gunn and Fewell (1993:1) argue that stories, including the ancient stories in the OT, are not merely explanatory but have a performative action, as they can “powerfully shape people’s lives”. These stories draw readers into what Brown (2017:79) calls “a complexity of narrative dynamics, including plot development, characterization, repetition and variation, ambiguity, irony, tension, and subtle interconnections”.¹

1 Fewell (2016:3–26) explores the significance of biblical narrative in her introductory chapter to “The Oxford handbook of biblical narrative”. Gunn and Fewell (1993:2–3) introduce the elements of readers and listeners, characters, plot and word patterns and go into more depth into each of these elements in ensuing chapters of their book *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*. In *A handbook to Old Testament exegesis*, Brown

In my presentation of 1 Kings 17, which includes a brief historical background to the narrative, some summarised sections, and others with more detailed analyses and discussions (drawing on the aforementioned elements of narrative exegesis), my focus is on the character development of the woman first introduced in 1 Kings 17:9 as “a woman, a widow”.² My aim is to show how this woman’s identity development, as a marginalised person, is closely linked to how she is perceived in society and by the (opportunity to) agency that she has. I connect this to the concept of personhood as explained by Klaasen (2017). In the unfolding of the plot, several crucial factors contribute to the woman’s growth, including the ancient practice of hospitality and the notion of reciprocity.

Taking up Brown’s (2017:195-197) challenge to bring “text to table” by engaging with 1 Kings 17 from an “embodied, contemporary” place and perspective, I undertake a reading of the narrative through the African hermeneutical lens of *Ubuntu* (humanity towards others). Exploring the notions of hospitality, reciprocity and personhood on the margins, the chapter attends to the possibilities of growth and development within individuals and amongst strangers through reciprocal acts of care during times of disruption and challenge. It aims to demonstrate journeys of transformation that can be reciprocal. Developing spaces of reciprocal transformation has the potential to strengthen the collaboration between Nordic and South-African researchers and communities, especially within the context of globalisation, mission and development.

2. *Ubuntu* as a hermeneutical lens for reading 1 Kings 17

Rooted in African philosophy, the Nguni Bantu term *Ubuntu* means “humanity”. It is an all-encompassing concept central to African thought and culture (Anofuechi & Klaasen, 2024:1). *Ubuntu* represents a philosophy of human interconnectedness and mutual support, as captured in its common translation: “I am because we are”. This reflects the belief

(2017:79–93) provides a strong methodological foundation for OT narrative exegesis, adding to the discussion additional elements of plot development such as interruptions, surprising twists and climaxes (2017:79).

2 This epithet is repeated in verse 10: “... and look, there was a woman, a widow gathering wood”.

that a person's identity is fundamentally shaped by their broader community and interpersonal relationships (Ajitoni, 2024:1). At its core, *Ubuntu* teaches that no person is an island - we depend on one another not only to survive, but to thrive. Numerous African scholars have contributed significantly to the discourse on *Ubuntu*.

Simon Ahiokhai, a theologian born and raised in Nigeria, has written extensively on the African ethic of hospitality (Ahiokhai, 2017:20). He rightly argues that Africa's long-standing tradition of hospitality, which affirms the nurturing of all life, has a crucial role to play in the global church's vision and mission for a pluralistic world (Ahiokhai, 2017:20). For Ahiokhai (2017:32), *Ubuntu* is an expression of African hospitality, as it promotes kindness towards the other. When employing the lens of *Ubuntu* in reading 1 Kings 17, it is important to consider the central role of hospitality within the African worldview. This practice creates a meaningful connection between the African *Ubuntu* context and the OT context, where 1 Kings 17 is regarded as one of the classic ancient texts on hospitality (Hobbs, 2001:22; Martin, 2014:4).

The South African theologian John Klaasen (2017:34) links the notion of *Ubuntu* with understandings of personhood and identity formation. He explains that the African concept of *being human* is rooted in community: "a person is not born with personhood, but grows into a person" through their connections with others. In this sense, we can argue that a person "becomes truly human through their interactions and connections within their community" (Ajitoni, 2024:10).³ Since an individual's identity is deeply connected to their relationships with others, the community plays an integral role in shaping a person's sense of self. Individuals are responsible for one another's well-being (Anofuechi & Klaasen, 2024:4; see also Ajitoni, 2024:10). This responsibility - expressed through acts of care, compassion, and trust - fosters personal development (see Klaasen, 2017:40). However,

3 Ahiokhai (2017:30) also accentuates the connection between hospitality and identity. He cites Bujo's (1997) phrase "'*cognatus sum ergo sum*' (I am related, so I am) ... Without communal relationship, one can neither find his or her identity nor learn how to think". In the same vein as Klaasen (2017), Ahiokhai (2017) maintains that African hospitality is linked to the question, "what does it mean to be human?"

relationships are never one-directional; they involve dialogue, reciprocity, and mutual commitment. As Klaasen (2017:41) rightly asserts:

Development is an interactive process that takes both parties as active participants and not passive recipients. Development is not about the professional against the unskilled, but everyone is viewed on the basis of her capacity, whether it is technical skills, human capital or informal knowledge.

In my analysis of 1 Kings 17, I will demonstrate how the reciprocal relationship that develops between two strangers on the margins of society - the Israelite prophet Elijah and the widow of Zarephath - creates space not only for community, but also for personal development. Over the course of the narrative, “a woman, a widow” is given the opportunity to become a giver. Through this transformation, she claims her place in the household and becomes “the mistress of the house”, a respected member of the community.

3. A story of becoming in 1 Kings 17

3.1 Background

First Kings 17 follows chapter 16, where King Ahab of Israel, in an effort to forge a political alliance with the Sidonians (Phoenicians) to the north, marries the Sidonian princess Jezebel and begins worshipping Baal (1 Ki 16:29–34; see also Howard, 2012:172). Ahab’s disloyalty to Yahweh, the God of the Israelites, leads to political and religious divisions within Israel. It is within this context of tension and hostility that Elijah appears on the biblical scene for the first time in 1 Kings 17:1.

The chapter is composed of three consecutive stories, each centred on the theme of well-being: 1 Ki 17:1-7, 1 Ki 17:8-16, and 1 Ki 17:17-24 (Gallagher, 2014; Nelson, 1987:107-108). This triad of stories forms the introduction to the narratives about Elijah and his resistance to King Ahab’s rule (Sweeney, 2007:208). While this chapter focuses primarily on the central story (vv. 8-16), it is important to consider the two surrounding stories in order to grasp the full significance of the woman’s character development in the focal text. It is in the final story (vv. 17-24) that the

development and effects of the events in the central narrative (vv. 8-16) become fully visible.

3.2 *The marginalised Elijah announces a drought (1 Ki 17:1-17)*

In the first story, spanning 1 Kings 17:1-7, Elijah the Tishbite from Tishbe in Gilead announces an impending drought to Ahab. The purpose of the drought is to prove that Yahweh, the God of the Israelites, holds power over rain and fertility - unlike Baal, the god of the Phoenicians, who was commonly associated with fertility. As Todd (1992:12) explains, “Elijah’s prophetic message is that Ahab has been praying to the wrong weather god, and the judgment is the drought”. Elijah reinforces this proclamation by linking it to an oath formula:

By the life of Yahweh, the God of Israel before whom I stand (whom I serve), there will not be dew and rain in these years except by my word (1 Ki 17:1b; author’s own literal translation).⁴

The epithet used to describe Elijah - “the Tishbite from Tishbe in Gilead” - reveals the ambiguous nature of his identity. Wyatt (2012:443-450) writes compellingly about Elijah’s estrangement as a character, noting his abrupt appearance and the lack of clarity offered by the phrase “the Tishbite from Tishbe”. Elijah is the only Tishbite mentioned in the Bible, and Tishbe itself is an otherwise unknown location with no further biblical reference. Furthermore, Gilead was situated in the Transjordanian region, an area whose tribes were often not regarded as fully part of the Israelite community.⁵ Wyatt (2012:449) captures the estranged identity of Elijah as follows:

4 All translations of 1 Kings 17 in this chapter are literal translations by the author of the chapter.

5 Many scholars hold similar views to that of Wyatt. Brueggemann (2000:214) speaks of “the abruptness” of Elijah’s appearance and that he had no credentials or authority (we read of no calling narrative) besides what he claims for himself. Likewise, Walsh (1996:225-226) notices Elijah’s sudden appearance and his lack of substantial background information. Walsh (1996:226) is in agreement with these findings and he is also attuned to the gaps in the text, arguing that the narrator does not introduce Elijah as a prophet. In the same vein, Sweeney (2007:211) notes the complications with the

[W]e meet Elijah from Trans-Jordanian Gilead. He is a prophet with no specific parentage, with no call narrative to legitimate his mission from YHWH, originating from a town that has no record of existence outside of its mention in relationship to him, living in a portion of Israel that is narratively questionable. He may even be a foreign immigrant to Israel, but even this claim remains unclear. The narrative's ambiguous description of him opens the possibility that Elijah may not be an ideal Israelite. Narratively speaking, Elijah is an estranged character, isolated from the legitimacy tradition has accorded him.

From this introduction to the figure of Elijah in 1 Kings 17:1, it is evident that he emerges from the margins of society. By the authority of the God of Israel, before whom he stands, Elijah announces a drought that will last for years. He is then sent by this very God to hide - presumably from King Ahab - in the Kerith Valley, where he is sustained with food from the ravens and water from the stream (1 Ki 17:2–6). The scene concludes as the drought intensifies, and the stream eventually dries up (v. 7).

3.3 Through acts of hospitality and reciprocity a widow in Sidon becomes a provider (1 Ki 17:8–16)

At the end of his resources and at the beginning of the second story, Elijah is once again sent by Yahweh his God - though, surprisingly, this time he is sent directly into enemy territory, to Zarephath in the region of Sidon, the homeland of Jezebel and her god Baal, to live there. What follows is even more astonishing: “Look”, says Yahweh, “I have commanded a woman, a widow [from] there to provide for you” (v. 9). In the ancient world, widows were counted amongst the most vulnerable and desolate members of society (Gallagher, 2014; Coomber 2007:390; De Vries, 1998). Without a man to care for her in a patriarchal system, a widow faced severe disadvantage - especially in the face of natural disasters such as drought and famine. The narrator's omission of the widow's name further signals her low status on the social hierarchy (see also Brueggemann, 2000:210).

terms “Tishbe”, “Tishbite” and “Gilead”, concluding that “the people of the Transjordan might very well be viewed as foreigners”.

As Elijah approached the city gate of Zarephath, he saw “a woman, a widow” gathering sticks (v. 10). Thirsty, he called out to her with a polite request: “Please bring me a little water in a cup” (v. 10). As she turned to fetch the water, Elijah called to her again - this time with a more substantial request: “Please bring me a scrap of bread in your hand” (v. 11). In response to this second request, the widow broke her silence, offering words that revealed the severity of her situation:

As surely as the Lord your God lives, I have no food except for a handful of flour in the jar and a little oil in the jug. Look, I am gathering two sticks for a fire. Then I am going and I will prepare it for me and for my son and we will eat and we will die (1 Ki 17:12).

The widow is observant; she recognises that Elijah is a foreigner who serves Yahweh and not one of the Sidonian deities. Nevertheless, she is willing to extend hospitality as far as she is able - offering a small amount of water. However, when Elijah adds a request for food, the language of scarcity and desperation that pours from her lips is striking: “no food ... a handful of flour ... a little oil ... two sticks”.⁶ She intends to use her final provisions to prepare a last, meagre meal for herself and her son before they die (Nelson, 1987:110). Her statement on scarcity begins with an oath formula invoking the life of Yahweh, the God of Elijah, and ends with the despairing acceptance that she and her son will perish. Her response moves from life - her first word in the biblical Hebrew text - to death - her final word - symbolising the only outcome that she can envisage for them both (see also Walsh, 1996:229).

Elijah, who had previously asked passively for sustenance, now responds actively (Todd, 1992:13). He begins with a word of reassurance, then - surprisingly - makes an even greater request than before, followed by the promise of a miracle from Yahweh, his God:

Do not be afraid. Go and do as you have said, but make for me a small cake first and bring it to me, and make for you and your son afterwards. For this is what the Lord God of Israel says, “The jar of

6 In his article, “The recipient becoming a participant and the participant becoming a recipient...”, Van der Walt (2021:225) also emphasises the extreme scarcity by using language of minimalism”.

flour will not be empty and the jug of oil will not run out until the day that the Lord makes it rain on the surface of the ground” (1 Ki 17:13-14, author’s italics).

Whilst promising a miraculous, never-ending supply of flour and oil for as long as the drought lasts, Elijah adds an extremely challenging condition: before preparing the envisaged meal for herself and her son, the widow must use some of the flour and oil to prepare a meal for him first. The position of the words ‘first’ and ‘afterwards’ emphasises their contrast and highlights the extreme sacrifice to which Elijah calls the widow (Walsh, 1996:230). He expects her to place hers and her son’s lives in the hands of a foreign prophet - the very prophet who announced the devastating drought in the name of his God - and in so doing, he asks for the ultimate display of hospitality and trust. Whether out of faith or simply driven by the realisation that they had little left to lose - sharing their final meal would not significantly shorten their lives, but it would allow her the opportunity to offer hospitality one last time - the widow went and did as Elijah had said (v. 15a).⁷

The play on words between Elijah and the widow is significant in the unfolding of the plot. Both of them use the language of scarcity (“a little water”, “a scrap of bread”, “a handful of flour”, “a little oil”, “two sticks (for a fire)”, “make a small cake” (vv. 10-13). Elijah sent the widow to “go and do as you have said” (v. 13) and she “went and did as he had said to her” (v. 15a). In verse 13, Elijah asked the widow to bake for him and serve him first, before taking care of herself and her son. However, in verse 15b, the reality of the eating seems to have been integrated, with Elijah listed between the widow and her household rather than before them: “and she ate - she and he and her house for days” (v. 15b).

Through this interplay of words and phrases, the narrator vividly brings to life a scene of hospitality and reciprocity between strangers on the margins of society, creating a space of solidarity and a rhythm of give and take (also see Gallagher, 2014). Elijah, the stranger, requests a little water and a scrap of bread, but the widow swears by the life of Elijah’s God that she has only

7 Van der Walt (2021:225–226) views the widow’s response as bravery, stating that she took an “extreme risk” by “trusting a stranger who claimed that a God she did not know would provide”.

a handful of flour and a little oil - just enough to require only two sticks for a fire on which she will prepare a final meal for herself and her son before they die. Elijah then responds with a salvation oracle⁸ “Do not be afraid” and instructs the woman to go and do as she had said, but then he inserts himself into the production line of her last meal plan, emphasising (with emphasis in the biblical Hebrew text) that she should serve him before she and her son eat. While this request comes with the promise of miraculous, never-ending provisions until the end of the drought causing their current devastation, the extent of the request should not be overlooked. Given that Elijah was a foreigner and his God was the reason for the drought, the widow had no incentive to believe his promise or to share their food with him. The fact that he asked to be served first could be interpreted as arrogance and greed, considering the desperate situation she and her son were in; however, it could also simply reflect the normal order of serving in ancient hospitality culture.

The widow then goes and does as Elijah (not she) had said, meaning that she prepared a meal for him first and then for herself and her son. However, when it came to the actual eating, this order changed, and “she ate – she and he and her household for days”.⁹ The subsequent supply of food provisions lasted for as long as the drought continued, for “the jar of flour was never empty and the jug of oil never ran out, according to the word of the Lord which he spoke through the hand of Elijah” (1 Ki 17:16). The biblical Hebrew phrase, literally translated as “through the hand of Elijah”, emphasises Elijah’s active role in providing for the widow and her household. His contribution stemmed from the promise of supplies he made in the name of his God, Yahweh. Elijah spoke God’s promise into

8 Brueggemann (2000:211) defines salvation oracles as “a characteristic formula whereby and utterance of powerful presence alters circumstance. It is spoken against death in order to assure life. It is spoken against exile to assure homecoming. It is spoken against despair in order to assure hope.”

9 Sweeney (2007:207–208) and Todd (1992:13) both discuss the interchange between “go and do as you have said” and “she went and did as he had said”. Walsh (1996:230) also emphasises the significance of this variation. Further emphasising the argument of this article, Sweeney (2007:207) and Todd (1992:13) highlight the order of eating – “she and he and her household”.

action, as the words of God became effective through the hand - that is, through the actions - of Elijah (also see Sweeney, 2007:213-214).

It is at this point that our focus text - the story at the centre of the chapter - comes to an end. However, to fully grasp the implications of what has transpired, it is important to consider how the narrator refers to the widow (previously introduced as “a woman, a widow” in vv. 9 and 10) following the drought.

3.4 *The widow is reintroduced as a respected member of the community (1 Ki 17:17-24)*

It happened after these things (that) the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, got sick... (1 Ki 17:17a, author's focus in bold).

Disaster strikes once again, this time in the form of a serious illness that befalls the son. While this next predicament is not the focus of the article, the new way in which the narrator refers to the widowed woman in verses 9-16 is significant. Setting the stage for the third story of 1 Kings 17, he now introduces her as “the woman, the mistress of the house”.

Twice in the previous story, the woman is referred to without the use of a definite article in the biblical Hebrew text, and by the addition of the diminishing descriptor “widow”, also without an article - thereby emphasising her marginalised identity: “a woman, a widow” (vv. 9 and 10). Besides these two direct references, she is afforded no other identity. She speaks only once (in v. 12), and that is in response to Elijah after he addresses her. The content of her utterance is filled with scarcity, as she explains why she cannot help him with his request for food. After this, Elijah is the one who speaks again, and she obeys. In the unfolding of the courageous act of hospitality in the face of starvation - masterfully portrayed through careful word choices - a reciprocity between Elijah and the widow is born. The outcome of their mutual acts of kindness and care is the survival of them all.

Another often-overlooked outcome is the change in agency: from charity case (reflecting the dire status of widows in the ancient context) to hostess - providing Elijah not only with food, but also with a place to stay during the drought - resulting in a transformation of identity. Through the eyes

and words of the narrator of 1 Kings 17, “a woman, a widow” becomes “the woman, the mistress of the house”.¹⁰ It does not stop here. In all subsequent references to this woman in 1 Kings 17, she is granted the definite article: no longer “a woman”, but “the woman” (vv. 18 and 24); no longer “a widow”, but “the widow” (in Elijah’s prayer to Yahweh, v. 20). And for the first time, she is also referred to as “his mother” in verse 23 - an acknowledgement that she is more than a widow, and more than the owner of a house: she is a mother to and provider for her son. Once she was given the opportunity to care for her household and for Elijah - to reciprocate in a time of deep distress, to act as a hostess rather than a mere charity case - she became a respected member of the community. The narrator clearly recognises this change.

As a deeply concerned mother, the mistress of the house no longer waits to be addressed, as she did in the previous scene. When her son falls ill, she takes the initiative - raising her voice and confronting Elijah (v. 18). By taking up agency, it is this act that sets her son’s healing process into motion.

4. A Story of hospitality, reciprocity, and becoming

Hospitality in the OT meant something completely different from our modern understanding of hosting friends or acquaintances. Janzen (1994:43) observes that:

10 Prominent OT scholars either fail to recognise this significant change of identity or they ignore it in their discussion of the text. See, for example, Todd (1992:14-15) who continues to refer to the woman as “the widow” in his discussion of 1 Ki 17:17-24. Likewise, Walsh (1996:230-231) also persists in calling her “the widow”. His only reference to her as “owner of the house” is in a footnote (1996:230). Nelson (1987:110) mentions that “the woman’s social status seems to have improved”, but he does not elaborate at all, not even by remarking on the new epithet “mistress of the house”. Brueggemann (2000:211-212) does not attend to the narrator’s new introduction of the woman as “the mistress of the house” either; however, he does pick up on the focus on her status as mother in the last scene. Sweeney (2007:214) is amongst the few scholars who explicitly mention that the woman is identified as “mistress of the house” in v. 17, but then states that she is later again called “the widow”. He does not notice the added definite article that did not appear in the previous scene and that also functions to emphasise the development of her identity.

[T]ravel, in the ancient world, was only undertaken for grave reasons, often negative in nature, such as flight from persecution or search for food and survival. Hospitality under those circumstances, has little to do with modern tourism, but embraces the biblical equivalent to our policies regarding refugees, immigrants and welfare.¹¹

While 1 Kings 17 is regarded as one of the classic hospitality texts in the OT (Hobbs, 2001:22; Martin, 2014:4), it deviates from established norms in several important ways. Firstly, hospitality could be dangerous from the host's perspective and was therefore not extended to just anyone. It was especially not offered to complete strangers - for instance, foreigners from different countries (Martin, 2014:2-3).¹² However, Elijah was sent into foreign, hostile territory to request hospitality from someone there.

Secondly, while travellers would make their presence known when arriving in need of food and shelter, they typically did not actively seek out hospitality. They would wait until a host extended an invitation (Hobbs, 2001:23-24; Martin, 2014:3). In contrast, Elijah invited himself, explicitly requesting water and food (Hobbs, 2001:23).

Thirdly, hospitality in the ancient world was generally extended by the male head of a household, and typically included water, food, and a place to stay (Hobbs, 2001:11). Yet in 1 Kings 17, Elijah was not sent to a patriarch with the means to act as an honourable host, but to "a woman, a widow".¹³

Lastly, hospitality was usually limited to a brief period - typically no more than three days (Martin, 2014:3) - but Elijah remained for a longer duration. Comparing the unusual features of 1 Kings 17 with standard hospitality practices in the Ancient Near East highlights the enormous risk the widow took in hosting Elijah.

11 Also see Hobbs (2001:17-18).

12 Hobbs (2001:24) states that "[h]ospitality, then, is directed at those relatively unknown travellers who are assumed to be members of one's larger community, but not immediately recognised as such. In no cases are threatening foreigners (*nokrim*) or resident aliens (*gerim*) offered hospitality".

13 Hobbs (2001:22) notes that there are some exceptions to the rule, including Gen 24, Exod 2, 1 Ki 12, 1 Sam 25, and 2 Ki 4.

Hospitality in the OT was inherently reciprocal in nature (Rathbone, 2024:1, 3–5).¹⁴ Martin (2014:7), in discussing the plight of the most vulnerable, acknowledges that people in the Ancient Near East were mutually dependent on one another:

The OT recognises our mutual dependency and requires that the stronger members of the community care for the weaker. Widows, orphans, resident aliens, the sick, and the poor are particularly needy and vulnerable.

In 1 Kings 17, we encounter two individuals - both vulnerable, both marginalised - who come together in a time of dire distress. Through reciprocal acts of intervention and care, they survive a famine that would likely have resulted in starvation. Wyatt (2012:449–450) rightly argues that “Elijah’s displaced status establishes a stronger relationship between him and the other characters in the story, the widow of Zarephath and her fatherless son”. She notes that vulnerable people - such as widows, orphans or the fatherless, and foreign residents - are often grouped together in the legal codes of Deuteronomy.¹⁵

One who lives as a widow, orphan or foreign resident shares the status of ‘living apart from his or her own kin group’. Furthermore, they share a common plight; they are all dependents that survive by virtue of the care of others. Elijah (the alien), the widow of Zarephath (husbandless), and her son (fatherless), must depend on one another for survival in this story (Wyatt, 2012:450).

In the development of a reciprocal relationship between host and guest, the guest is usually unable - and is not expected - to match the charity extended by the host. Even so, the mutual relationship is nurtured through the host’s acts of hospitality, which contribute to the host’s reputation and honour in the public sphere (Rathbone, 2024:4; Hobbs, 2001:28). Reynolds (2006:198), writing on the connection between identities and hospitality within the Christian tradition, states that:

14 Also see Hobbs (2001), Martin (2014:6–7), and Reynolds (2006:196–197), amongst others, on reciprocity in the OT practice of hospitality.

15 See Deut. 10:1–819; 14:29; 24:17–21; 26:12–13; 27:19.

hospitality lets the boundaries between host and guest become blurred. Created is a liminal zone of mutual sharing, a kind of covenantal exchange that both receives and gives. In this exchange something counterintuitive happens. As the host gives to the guest, the host paradoxically gains a gift, unexpectedly becoming more than he or she was before. The host becomes honored and enhanced.

This relates to 1 Kings 17 in a significant way, since the host in this instance does not fit the expected description of a host at all: she is a woman, moreover a widow, from a foreign country. She finds herself in a desperate situation - marginalised and unable to provide for herself and her son during the famine - with a future that appears not merely bleak but utterly hopeless. She is amongst the most vulnerable, a charity case, dependent on the generosity of others for survival. She is arguably the most unlikely host who could be imagined in the ancient world. And yet, Elijah is sent specifically to her - emphasised by the use of the biblical Hebrew focus particle *hinee*, repeated in verses 9 and 10. He sees her, interacts with her, and treats her as though she has something to offer, even though she insists that she has nothing.

When she expresses her complete lack, Elijah promises a miracle: an unending supply of food that will be sufficient not only for her and her household but also for him. She is thus given the opportunity to become a hostess, a giver. Through this gift of agency - not merely of food - she gains honour within the community and becomes a respected person. As her relationship with Elijah develops, so too does her own identity. She grows from “a woman, a widow” to “the woman, the mistress of the house”. By the end of 1 Kings 17, she is also acknowledged as a “mother” - not only to her son, but to another in need.

Pohl (1995:135), writing about “hospitality from the edge”, asserts that an “important transformation occurs when poor or disempowered people have the opportunity to be more than guests, when they too can be hosts”. On the margins of society, people often have no choice but to depend on one another - and it is here that we most clearly see *Ubuntu* hospitality in action: the transformation of a person (formerly regarded as a nobody) into someone of honour and value, through the opportunity to become a giver.

5. Conclusion

This chapter presented an exegetical exposition of 1 Kings 17, focusing on the central narrative (vv. 8-16). Read through the African lens of *Ubuntu* and incorporating the concepts of personhood, hospitality, and reciprocity, it explored the development of the widow of Zarephath - initially introduced as “a woman, a widow”, but later reintroduced as “the mistress of the house”. I argue that this transformation in her identity is brought about by the gift of giving: when she was given the opportunity to become a hostess and to enter into a reciprocal relationship with the prophet Elijah during a time of severe crisis brought on by famine, she took up agency and actively contributed to the survival of herself, her son, and Elijah. This was a journey of becoming - a process of transformation - as reflected in the narrator’s shift in how he refers to her in 1 Kings 17:17-24, with respect and honour.

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PART 2

**MISSION, SPIRITUALITY AND
DEVELOPMENT**

Chapter 4

Pentecostal engagement in peacebuilding and re-imagination of religious leadership

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1. Introduction

Ethiopia has a rich heritage and vast natural and human resources, yet it is torn by ethnic, cultural, and religious conflicts and is in need of sustainable peace. This chapter develops at the intersection of three topics: peacebuilding, Pentecostalism, and perceptions of leadership. Scholars concur that religion is an important factor in relation to peacebuilding in Ethiopia, along with political, social, and ethnic factors (Haustein, 2023; Østebø et al., 2021). They also highlight the potential of religious leaders to foster sustainable peace because of the respect that they enjoy (Haustein, 2023). With Pentecostalism steadily on the rise (Mekonnen, 2013; Fantini, 2013; Haustein & Feyissa, 2022), the understandings, attitudes, and actions of Pentecostal leaders concerning peace are therefore valuable to study - for Pentecostal scholarship, for research on the church in Ethiopia, and for the broader field of religious peacebuilding.

In Ethiopia's culturally and religiously diverse yet tense societal context, Pentecostals occupy an ambiguous position between grassroots movements and political powers (Fantini, 2013). Looking at Ethiopian Pentecostals' involvement in peacebuilding, we ask: *How does the engagement of Pentecostal religious leaders in peacebuilding processes redefine the imagination of what a leader should be, teach, and do?* To address this question, we draw on observations and interviews with Pentecostal peacebuilders in Ethiopia and discuss these findings in relation to Pentecostal theology and the reflections on peacebuilding and leadership by peace theorist and practitioner John Paul Lederach.

2. Context and background

2.1 Pentecostalism in Ethiopia

The history of Pentecostalism in Ethiopia is complex, encompassing the histories of various evangelical as well as independent indigenous movements. Classical Pentecostalism appeared in Ethiopia in the 1950s and developed through the 1960s, closely connected to Finnish and Swedish Pentecostal missionaries (Haustein, 2011; Engelsviken, 2014; Nyberg

Oskarsson, 2009; Prosen, 2016).¹ The movement was quickly indigenised, primarily through student movements and the initiatives of local evangelists (Haustein, 2011; Engelsviken, 2014; Eshete, 2009; Mekonnen, 2013). In the early years, most Ethiopians viewed Pentecostals with scepticism because of their beliefs, spirituality, and perceived association with Western culture. They faced persecution and imprisonment under the communist Derg regime (1974–1987) (Eshete, 2009; Haustein, 2011). To avoid persecution, many Pentecostals were forced to go underground or join other Protestant denominations (Haustein 2011; Eshete 2009). As a result, several mainline Protestant denominations became ‘pentecostalised’ or ‘charismatised’ by these new members (Haustein, 2011; Eshete, 2009). Today, most Protestant churches in Ethiopia are charismatised, and the label ‘Pente’ is no longer a derogatory term solely applied to Classical Pentecostals. Instead, it has become a generic term for all non-Orthodox and non-Catholic Christians in the country (Eshete, 2009).²

2.2 Pentecostalism, politics and social engagement

Østebø et al. (2021) argue that religion is an important yet often overlooked dimension in Ethiopian politics, attributable to the prevailing emphasis on secularism. Religious tensions have increased in recent years and must be addressed with a view to conflict mitigation and peacebuilding (Østebø, 2021; Haustein, 2023; Haustein et al., 2023). Pentecostal churches have traditionally avoided party politics, for theological reasons and because of past persecution, instead seeking transformation through personal conversions (Fantini, 2013). The lack of broader social engagement within Pentecostalism has been critiqued by Ethiopian evangelical scholars (Deressa, 2017; Knoetze & Wotango, 2023). Freeman (2012; 2013), however, argues that Pentecostalism in Ethiopia can be a positive transformative force for development, at the individual and societal level.

1 For more on the beginnings and global growth of Pentecostalism, see 2023. *The Pentecostal World*, London: Routledge.

2 In Ethiopia, many of the *Pente* churches are members in the Evangelical Church Fellowship of Ethiopia, an umbrella organisation of born-again, trinitarian Christians. See <https://ecfe.org.et/who-we-are>

In recent years, Pentecostals have shown increasing interest in gaining political influence and holding positions of power (Østebø, 2021; Eshete, 2009; Fantini, 2013). The election of former Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn (a Oneness Pentecostal) (Haustein, 2013) and the current Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed (Pentecostal), illustrates the rise of a more politically engaged Pentecostalism. Pentecostal churches reveal a fundamental ambiguity regarding issues such as ethnicity, good governance, and development, resulting in “a plurality of strategies *vis a vis the state*” (Fantini, 2013).

2.3 *Perspectives, perceptions and practices of peacebuilding*

In a report based on focus group interviews with Ethiopian Pentecostals, Josefsson and Wenell (2020) explore issues of social engagement and peacebuilding. They found that Ethiopian Pentecostals regarded themselves as important agents of change yet remained hesitant about political involvement. Participants critiqued Western approaches to social engagement for lacking a holistic and spiritually grounded worldview. Instead, they emphasised preaching reconciliation with God and praying to transform the spiritual climate as key contributions to peacebuilding. Josefsson and Wenell (2020) concluded that Pentecostal churches predominantly interpret the causes and consequences of conflict through a spiritual lens, and raised the question of whether spiritual and political structures can be integrated in a holistic pursuit of peace.

Our interviewees were Pentecostals actively involved in a peacebuilding initiative known as the Peaceful and Resilient Communities (PaRC) Programme.³ They belonged to Classical Pentecostal churches in Ethiopia and represented perspectives ranging from grassroots to national leadership. Most held mid-level leadership positions within the development wings of Pentecostal denominations.⁴ While actively involved in various forms

3 The PaRC programme is implemented by ECFE, PMU (Swedish Pentecostal Development NGO), and NCA (Norwegian Church Aid), together with their Ethiopian partners. See: <https://pmu.se/bistand/pmu-i-stort-partnerskap-med-sida-for-fred-i-etiopien/>

4 In Ethiopia, the religious denominations have separate development wings for humanitarian or development work because of the secular constitutional law. In 2019, the former civil society law was replaced with a more permissive regulatory system

of church ministry, their leadership in development work also required engagement with communities and groups beyond the church.

Although the number of interviews conducted (eight) does not allow for broad generalisations, the findings provide valuable insight into Pentecostal perspectives on peacebuilding and leadership. According to our interviewees, their peacebuilding activities included: organising inter-religious and inter-ethnic self-help groups to address local conflicts and social or economic needs; using their broadcasting networks to promote mutual acceptance and interethnic dialogue alongside evangelistic content; supporting youth training and employment as an alternative to joining rebel groups; facilitating dialogue at local, regional, and national levels; and offering trauma healing training to pastors. In addition, the interviewees referred to their involvement in preaching, praying, and worshipping.

3. Theoretical framework

In the all-inclusive peacebuilding project led by PMU⁵ practitioners use a manual entitled *Church & Peace: Resource and Toolbox*, developed by the same organisation (Wählin, 2021). One of the peacebuilding scholars referenced in the material is peace practitioner and theorist John Paul Lederach. Several of our interviewees also referred to Lederach. For this reason, Lederach's contribution - particularly his insights on the role of religious leaders in peacebuilding - forms a key element of the theoretical framework which we use to analyse the empirical material. The other major element of our theoretical framework is Pentecostal theology, particularly in relation to leadership and prophetic imagination. We argue that the intersection of these two theoretical perspectives enables us to analyse the interview material in order to address the central question of this study: *in what ways does engagement in peacebuilding lead Pentecostal actors to reimagine Pentecostal leadership?*

(see, for example, Lupin 2022), but churches and development wings still work rather separately.

5 PMU stands for *Pingstmissionens utvecklingssamarbete*, but the abbreviation is normally used instead of the full name.

3.1 Lederach

In his seminal book *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*, John Paul Lederach (1997) discusses the role of religious leaders in conflict transformation and peacebuilding. He outlines a pyramid model to describe leadership roles across three levels of society: the top, the middle, and the grassroots. At the top of the pyramid are the political and military leaders - highly visible figures often driven by political ambition. These leaders typically participate in high-level negotiations. In the middle of the pyramid are middle-level leaders, whose positions, Lederach (1997) notes, are not necessarily tied to or controlled by the government or opposition movements. These leaders may belong to religious communities, academic institutions, or humanitarian organisations. Given their visibility and role, they are often known by top-level leadership and the general population. They act as connectors between the top and the grassroots. Although they are in contact with high-level leaders, their positions are not dependent on political or military power, nor are they driven by the pursuit of such power.

Middle-level leaders are familiar with the experiences and context of grassroots communities, but because of their higher social status, they typically live under less precarious conditions. Thus far, Lederach refers to the vertical linkages that middle-level leaders maintain - with the elite and the grassroots. He also highlights their horizontal relationships with counterparts across lines of conflict. At the base of the pyramid is the population at large - the greatest number of individuals affected by conflict. Grassroots leaders may include members of indigenous organisations, healthcare officials, or refugee camp coordinators. These leaders are knowledgeable about local politics and are often familiar with local political and military figures. Importantly, they share in the vulnerabilities experienced by the communities which they serve (Lederach, 1997).

Lederach's goal is to trace an infrastructure for achieving and sustaining peace. At the core of this infrastructure is the nurturing of human relationships and the linking of forces that contribute to peace. He identifies middle-level leaders as key actors in this peace infrastructure. However, he also emphasises that for peace to be sustainable, change must occur at every level of society: the top, the middle, and the grassroots (Lederach, 1997).

In *The Moral Imagination*, Lederach (2005) revisits the pyramid and the role of middle-level leaders, again highlighting their vertical and horizontal linkages - bridging grassroots communities with top leaders and crossing ethnic, linguistic, and cultural divides. However, the primary focus of *The Moral Imagination* is to explore what motivates and sustains engagement in peacebuilding. Lederach defines the 'moral imagination' as "the *capacity to imagine something rooted in the challenges of the real world yet capable of giving birth to that which does not yet exist*" (Lederach, 2005) (italics in original). Transcending violence, he argues, requires imagination.

The language of the 'already and not yet' evokes the spiritual and theological undertones of the moral imagination. Lederach draws on Walter Brueggemann's (1978) *The Prophetic Imagination* to elaborate on this idea. Imagination and transcendence share a paradoxical character: "Each must have a foot in what is and a foot beyond what exists" (Lederach, 2005:lx). He further references the prophet Isaiah: "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing!" (Is. 43:18-19) (Lederach, 2005). Engaging in peacebuilding, for Lederach, is a response to a prophetic vocation. He reflects on his own sense of calling: "Beyond profession, my concern has been to find and follow a calling, a deeper voice" (Lederach, 2005:24).

This vocation, like that of the prophets, entails upholding positive human relationships and living in alignment with the Creator. The reference to the Creator is significant: envisioning peace requires drawing upon a creative force divinely embedded in the human spirit (Lederach, 2005). Such creativity is essential for imagining and realising peace. Lederach's emphasis on the potential of middle-level leaders and on the spiritual and theological foundations of peacebuilding highlights the vital role that religious leaders can play in fostering sustainable peace.

In their article 'The recovery of the prophetic voice of the church: The adoption of a 'missional church' imagination', Eugene Baron and Moses Maponya (2020) explore the relationship between the church's prophetic task and the reimagining of its identity and role in relation to social engagement. They argue that shifts in the social and political context compel the church - its members and leaders - to become a prophetic presence and voice in society. To fulfil this prophetic role, the church must reimagine

itself, meaning that it must examine its identity and, if necessary, undergo transformation to remain an effective presence in its context (Baron & Maponya, 2020).

Imagination and the prophetic role in relation to positive social transformation are central in the work of Lederach and in the article by Baron and Maponya. According to Baron and Maponya (2020), the call to be prophetic - meaning 'the sent one' - is received by the church in its context. Furthermore, the theological and ecclesiological work of reimagination can only occur in that specific context. The church comes to understand (or reimagine) itself as shaped by what is happening around it and by how it responds (Baron & Maponya, 2020; Taylor, 2004). This work of imagination is theological, as it involves discerning God's work in this context and responding accordingly. It is through such engagement in society in response to God's call, that the church develops its prophetic voice.

This transformation or reimagination described by the authors includes listening to strangers and those in need, crossing boundaries, and being open to change (Marais, 2017). It also involves active participation in reconciliation and peacebuilding efforts (Baron & Maponya, 2020). The authors emphasise that prophetic presence and societal engagement is the responsibility of the whole congregation. However, they acknowledge that the task of reimagination is primarily undertaken by religious leaders (Baron & Maponya, 2020).

Lederach refers primarily to the transformation of a context marked by conflict into one of restored relationships and peace. Baron and Maponya (2020) emphasise reimagining the identity of the church as open and responsive to society. Yet, Lederach, Baron and Maponya move in the same direction when Lederach speaks of the peace practitioner's new self-perception in response to a (divine) call, and when Baron and Maponya highlight the contextual nature of imagination and of the prophetic role. Here, imagination is also connected to the transformation of a context marked by injustice into one of healed relationships.

3.2 *Pentecostal models of spiritual leadership*

Historically, sociologically, and theologically, Pentecostal theology is most fundamentally a contextual theology - rooted in historical Pentecostal revivals, spirituality, and theological reflection on experience and practice. Except for the rise of Pentecostal scholarship in recent decades, Pentecostal theology has often been oral, grassroots-oriented, and largely retrospective (Vondey, 2020). Despite the significant differences across the global Pentecostal-charismatic landscape - historically and in the present - the plural term 'Pentecostalism' is frequently used to describe what may appear to be irreconcilable diversities within the broader Pentecostal spectrum (Anderson, 2004). At the same time, it is also possible to argue that a common theological logic or 'Pentecostal DNA' emerges - shaped by experience-based epistemologies and pneumatologically-oriented worldviews and spiritualities across Pentecostal traditions (Vondey, 2017; Kalu, 2008).

Pentecostal theology is fundamentally holistic in its understanding of the 'full gospel', proclaiming that God is present and active in human affairs - redeeming not only the sinful condition of humanity but also healing, empowering, and transforming the world (Vondey, 2017; Richie, 2022). In line with the Acts of the Apostles, Pentecostal theology is transformational and missional, aiming to bring change to the individual, the church, and the world.

3.2.1 *'Prophetic politics'*

Despite their belief in divine interventions, such as healing, Classical Pentecostals often emphasise God's future reign, thereby de-emphasising, for instance, political engagement. Neo-Pentecostals, on the other hand, tend to highlight God's reign in the present, not only in the life of the believer but also potentially within society and the world at large (Yong, 2019). Today, however, these Pentecostal strands have frequently merged. As a result, tensions exist within Pentecostal thought between the here-and-now and the not-yet, the spiritual and the physical realms of reality.

When applied to the political sphere, Amos Yong (2010) introduces the concept of "prophetic politics" to describe how Pentecostals may engage in the public sphere. First, he notes that Pentecostals may pray for

political matters in ways that perform a political function. Secondly, they may boldly express “antithetical political stances” on issues they perceive as threats to the church or the Christian faith. Thirdly, Yong highlights the role of the Pentecostal church itself, where “prophetic politics of Pentecostalism is manifest in the kinds of counter-cultural and counter-conventional communities shaped by Pentecostal spirituality and piety”. In such contexts, as Yong writes (2010:13), “Pentecostal communities [may] function as alternative ‘cities’” - either ignoring broader political realities or demonstrating solidarity with people in socio-political and economic vulnerability.

3.2.2 The pneumatological imagination

The holistic dimension becomes especially noticeable in ‘majority world’ contexts, where Pentecostalism has not only grown exponentially (Anderson, 2004; Lindhardt, 2015), but where - as anthropologists and contextual theologians highlight in relation to various African contexts - Pentecostal spiritualities align with traditional African worldviews and spiritualities (Nel, 2019; Adaeze et al., 2019). In these settings, the (invisible) spirit world encroaches on the realities of the (visible) physical world. Nigerian-born ethicist and theologian Nimi Wariboko (2020:121) frames a Pentecostal rationality (a ‘Pentecostal hypothesis’) that represents “the way by which Pentecostals engage the world, their social realities and the depth of their religious existence”. This rationality involves a ‘dialogical imagination’ (Wariboko, 2020) that reflects a spirit-infused and spirit-augmented logic that insists on engagement and decision-making in the physical world (“it makes sense”) while simultaneously relating to the spirit world (“it makes spirit”).

In simple terms, the Pentecostal worldview presupposes a physical–spiritual (or human–divine) interaction in most aspects of life (Wariboko, 2020). This multilayered theological rationale undergirds and informs Pentecostal theologies - whether on faith (all things are possible for God; we believe), healing (God heals; we pray), or speaking in tongues (the Spirit provides the language; we speak). The concept of ‘spiritual warfare’ exemplifies this duality, emphasising the need to engage in prayer against evil spiritual forces to achieve victories in the physical sphere. This corresponds with

a ‘theo-logical’ approach and with what Amos Yong (2020) calls the ‘pneumatological imagination’ - a “Pentecostal social imaginary” that reflects how Pentecostals relate to God and the world (see also Gungor, 2025; and Kgatle, 2023).⁶

3.2.3 A Pentecostal theology of leadership and peacebuilding

What has been discussed so far provides a backdrop for delineating a Pentecostal theology of leadership. Theologies of Pentecostal leadership can take many forms, depending on historical contexts, denominational structures, and theological nuances. While some Pentecostal ecclesial bodies are episcopal and hierarchical, others are grassroots oriented. Yet, there is arguably a shared emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit in leadership.

On the one hand, Pentecostals generally affirm and emphasise the importance of the Spirit in selecting, empowering, and sustaining leaders for God’s mission in the world). On the other hand, the Spirit’s involvement does not necessarily undermine or negate the value of formal training or human capabilities. The Pentecostal logic emphasises the need for dependence on the Spirit to accomplish spiritual work. Old Testament narratives of anointed prophets and kings, along with Spirit-filled Christologies (Luke 4:18; see Nel, 2020; Peppiatt, 2014), offer theological models for leadership and spiritual empowerment.

However, within the context of African Pentecostalism, Alex R. Mayfield (2018:94) highlights tensions between the rise of independent prophets and prominent “Men of God” on the one hand, and more democratic processes that stress the idea that “anyone can be anointed” on the other (see also Asamoah-Gyadu, 2013).

Deep within the Pentecostal emphasis on conversion, holiness, and transformation lies a theology of peace and reconciliation - with God and with fellow human beings. Reflecting on the ‘Korean Pentecost’ (1907–2009) and similar revival movements, Allan Anderson (2010:1) highlights how “the various revival movements began with a strong but individualistic peace and reconciliation theology”. In line with this rationale, Martin W.

6 According to Yong, the term was initially used by the Catholic theologian Lucien Richards, OMI; see p. 152.

Mittelstadt (2010) shows how, from a Pentecostal perspective, the Luke–Acts narratives present a ‘gospel of peace’, where “Spirit-inspired witnesses consistently call prospective candidates to embrace God’s message of peace”. This calls for prophetic leadership that seeks ‘full gospel’ - not only for individual reconciliation with God but also for society at large, including grassroots communities and the political sphere (Alexander, 2002).

Consequently, Mittelstadt (2010) challenges Pentecostal leadership to adopt a peacemaking vision that reaches beyond one’s own position and power (Afolayan et al., 2018). Historically and contextually, however, Pentecostals have at times supported peace and, at other times, war and conflict (Yacob-Haliso & Iyanda, 2018).⁷

In a similar line of thought, from an African context, Kgatele (2024) connects spiritual and societal transformation and introduces the term ‘pneumatocracy’ to argue for a kind of Pentecostal leadership that is anchored in the rule of the Spirit while seeking to transform society (see also Yong, 2019). In other words, being filled with the Holy Spirit must translate into transforming communities. While acknowledging challenges associated with this model, such as the risk that anyone might claim to be empowered by the Spirit, a responsible and community-oriented pneumatocratic model of leadership can encompass the spiritual embeddedness of Pentecostal faith and the social responsibility to which prophetic Pentecostal leadership is called.

4. Method

The empirical material⁸ on which we reflect in this chapter is based on eight semi-structured interviews and participatory observation conducted during various PaRC trainings⁹ and programmes, a Pentecostal leaders’ conference,

7 A number of contextual studies discuss how Pentecostals and evangelicals have engaged in reconciliation and peacemaking in practice. See, for example, Miti (2024) (South Africa); Tarusarira (2020) (Tanzania); Newberg (2010) (Israel/Palestine); Shannon (2024) (Northern Ireland); and Penner (2024) (Ukraine).

8 The empirical research was approved by SIKT, ref no 431433. Oral consent from the as obtained and recorded prior to conducting the interviews.

9 Occasions when key actors come together to report on project progress, learn from each other, and receive further equipping for peacebuilding efforts.

and visits to Classical Pentecostal churches and Pentecostal development organisations. The first author conducted the interviews - six in English and two with the assistance of interpreters and a transcriber. The interviewees were identified through the PMU network and by using a snowball sampling method.

To reflect the theoretical assumption that peacebuilding efforts must be undertaken at all levels of society (Lederach, 1997; Baron & Maponya, 2020), we aimed to gather a range of voices, from grassroots actors to those in high office. We conducted content analysis, manually coded the material, and identified emerging themes.

The researcher who carried out the interviews and observations is a Swedish Pentecostal - an insider in terms of faith, but an outsider with respect to culture and language. While limited cultural and linguistic knowledge posed a significant challenge in the Ethiopian context, sharing Pentecostal identity proved helpful in building trust and relationships.¹⁰

5. Key findings

In this section, we present the findings from the interviews and observations, organised around the following themes: the relation between peacebuilding and politics; what is implied in imagining a different reality; the interplay between the spiritual and the secular; and a call to action.

5.1 *Peacebuilding, politics, and leadership*

All interviewees stated that religious leaders are under pressure to submit to political structures and control. As one interviewee put it: “*the government has infiltrated the religious institutions*” (Interviewee B). Several participants indicated that such submission to political authorities stemmed from fear, complacency, or the pursuit of status and positions. Nonetheless, they clearly affirmed that religious leaders must demonstrate boldness and speak out against societal injustices.

10 The two co-authors of this chapter represent different denominations and cultural backgrounds. In our view, this diversity and their complementary perspectives contributed to a richer analysis of the interview material.

In this one year, what I have noticed is that pastors are afraid of these politicians. They believe the truth, but do not go in bold to challenge politics. But you know, the church MUST play that role (Interviewee C).

When reflecting on their motivation to engage in peacebuilding, all interviewees spoke of a divine, personal calling: “*God put me in a position... and can help me to be a voice in the loudness of confusion*” (Interviewee D), while another shared:

What my internal spirit is telling me is that I need to be qualified towards this. ...I want to craft myself toward that (Interviewee E).

This sense of calling - combined with practical experience and growing knowledge of peacebuilding - appears to motivate these individuals to influence other leaders and shift their focus. As one interviewee, a theologian involved in leadership training and church planting, explained: “*You know, with training and different activities, we change autocratic leadership to servant leadership*” (Interviewee C). According to this interviewee, autocratic leadership tends to overlook the peacebuilding potential found at the grassroots level. In contrast, a servant leader, by engaging directly with the community, is better positioned to recognise and harness this potential for peacebuilding.

5.2 *Imagining another future*

According to some interviewees, certain identity markers - such as ethnicity, geography, or religion - carry greater potential for peacebuilding.

And, you know, it is my birthplace, so I know the leadership and the families of those fighters who are fighting against the government... I know two languages so, I can influence Amharic speaking people, and Oromo speaking people also (Interviewee E).

Several interviewees emphasised faith and the Bible as key resources for peacebuilding, while also recognising that, given the complexity of peacebuilding, secular and academic knowledge holds significant value. As one interviewee notes: “*I learned from various scholars on conflict, like John Paul Lederach... They can give you perspective*” (Interviewee D). A number of interviewees stressed the importance of adopting a broad and comprehensive

approach to peace. For example, they noted that focusing solely on conflict resolution may have limited impact:

In addition, one thing that we missed during the implementation process is that we didn't incorporate any kind of humanitarian activities. (Interviewee B).

Despite numerous ethnic, religious, historical, and political obstacles to peace, the interviewees remain committed to their peacebuilding efforts - within and beyond the church. Such engagement requires a resilient and imaginative mindset:

In peace building, we shouldn't stop speaking, teaching and acting on it... this is a very, very important principle ... there is a saying in Amharic: A drop of water can really penetrate a big rock (Interviewee C).

5.3 *The spiritual and the secular*

Our interviewees described what they referred to as a biblical worldview, within which conflict is primarily attributed to the influence of the devil or evil spirits. According to one participant, the limitation of 'secular' peacebuilding lies in its lack of spiritual discernment:

You cannot solve spiritual problems with material things, with carnal things. There are principalities, there are powers, and one must really understand that and seek for the wisdom of God, the humility of God. (Interviewee D).

The interviewee does not advocate for a purely spiritual perspective but emphasises the complementarity of secular and academic knowledge in the pursuit of peace.

The Pentecostal spirituality of the interviewees includes experiences of worship, speaking in tongues, and prophetic utterances. God is seen as someone who guides them in different ways, including through dreams:

I think it's God's grace, the gift that God gave me. I see a dream before something happens... And I pray a lot about that dream and after some time I tell another person...It needs prayer. And mostly, it happens (Interviewee A).

The interviews reveal a perceived tension between the spiritual and secular realms, resulting in a dualism that some interviewees reject. As one interviewee explained:

...you will be considered as a good and devoted Christian if you spend all night and the day in the church compound. And if you are running your own business or if you are a politician, you are not born-again Christian (Interviewee E).

While criticising the church for creating a false dichotomy between the spiritual and the secular, the interviewee also highlights the limitations of knowledge that lacks spiritual insight and contextual sensitivity:

Having biblical knowledge and secular knowledge is so important. Sometimes, I invite PhD-holders from the nearby universities...they preach *von oben* [from above] and it will be challenging for them to localise. And it is difficult for them to bring in the spiritual aspect of life (Interviewee E).

5.4 *A call to action*

In reflecting on ideal leadership, some interviewees pointed to the example of Christ, emphasising that Christlike leadership must be taught and embodied in practice. As one interviewee explained:

We often forget the methodology that he did. Visiting the poor, crying with those people who hurt, crossing the boundaries, reaching out. These are methodologies (Interviewee D).

Moreover, the interviewees expressed the view that leaders should adopt a more holistic understanding of the church's identity and mission - one in which peacebuilding is not an added responsibility, but a natural outworking of the church's mission:

...my dream is for my leaders to engage and to be a voice for the voiceless, to call for justice, because that's the mandate of the pastor, the church, the evangelist. Of course we are responsible to spread the Gospel, plant a church and ... parallelly the church leaders should ask for justice and mobilize the community for peaceful co-existence and living together. I want to see the pastors standing on the pulpit and teach the church members about peacebuilding (Interviewee F).

These interviewees prioritise a model of servant leadership that fosters peace and reconciliation. At a peace conference attended by the lead author, pastors from a conflict-ridden area expressed feelings of abandonment by the rest of the denomination. The situation was perceived by the observer as volatile. A turning point occurred when a highly respected, older leader embodied reconciliation by kneeling before his younger colleagues, asking for forgiveness, and demonstrating his willingness to attend to their needs.

The interviewees were observed mediating between conflicting parties - within and outside the church; visiting leaders of other denominations and religions, such as Orthodox fathers, Muslim imams, and traditional leaders, to establish relationships; seeking out rebel youth in the forests in an attempt to reunite them with their families; and offering trauma healing in conflict zones. They further explained that, in undertaking these activities, they aimed to embody the very qualities that they wished to see in church leaders.

Active engagement in peacebuilding has made these interviewees acutely aware of the church's shortcomings and those of its leadership. They conveyed the view that, in order to address tensions in society, the church requires leaders who are trusted, well-connected, and who possess an understanding of the current political landscape and the complexities of peacebuilding.

Interviewees also spoke of the need for resilient hope and the capacity to imagine a different future. When navigating various worldviews, they emphasise the importance of spiritual discernment and belief in divine encounters, where God is seen as directly involved. Some expressed a desire to move beyond a dualistic understanding of spiritual and secular realms towards a more holistic perspective that embraces both dimensions.

Others warned against political alignment that might compromise the prophetic witness of the church and its leaders. They described themselves as motivated by a prophetic calling, prompting them to reimagine what a leader should be and do. Christlike character and action were cited, along with the call for a fuller, more holistic theology - one in which peacebuilding becomes a central theme, to be taught in Bible colleges, preached from the pulpit, and enacted in practice.

6. Discussion

6.1 *Tension between prophetic role and subjection to politics*

Lederach (1997:42) asserts that the position of middle-level leaders does not depend on political or military power, nor are such leaders typically interested in acquiring it. This independence contributes to the trust that they enjoy from grassroots communities as well as from top-level leadership. In contrast, our interviewees express concern about religious leaders who are constrained by, and submit to, political authorities. According to these interviewees, when religious leaders align themselves with party politics, they compromise their integrity and undermine public trust. By highlighting the dangers of political submission and affirming the importance of maintaining integrity, serving the people, and giving voice to the voiceless, the interviewees offer a critique and a call for religious leaders to reclaim their prophetic role.

A critical stance towards political engagement is not unfamiliar within Pentecostalism. Given that many of our interviewees belong to Classical Pentecostal churches, one might ask whether their critique stems from an eschatological worldview that de-emphasises political involvement. However, our empirical material suggests otherwise.

There are numerous global examples of Pentecostal politicians, and Amos Yong (2010) helpfully describes the complex “apolitical-political characterization of pentecostalism”, whereby Pentecostals engage politically, albeit often in indirect ways. Yong argues that through “prophetic politics”, Pentecostal apolitical rhetoric may actually function as a prophetic critique of the existing political order - expressed through prayer, counter-political stances, or counter-cultural church communities. Drawing on examples from Malawi, he notes that “young Malawian Pentecostal preachers are not political in any conventional sense. However, their actions are not simply apolitical or non-political, but are also an indirect yet prophetic challenge to the political status quo” (Yong, 2010).

Returning to the Ethiopian context, some interviewees report experiencing tensions between loyalty and opportunity, even to the point where “pastors are afraid of these politicians” when, in fact, they should boldly challenge

the political establishment “to bring change in the society” (Interviewee C). In other words, religious leaders occupy a unique position: they have the potential to act as prophetic voices, to lead with courage, and to drive social transformation - but only if they are willing to accept the cost of such leadership.

Using Kgatle’s (2024) concept of ‘pneumatocracy’, Pentecostal leaders can be understood as bearing a dual responsibility: to engage actively in the world while being led by the Spirit.

6.2 Tension between social reality and prophetic imagination

Lederach argues that peacebuilding must be sustained by a moral imagination - the capacity to envision and bring into existence that which does not yet exist, but is grounded in the challenges of the real world (Lederach, 2005:LX). Peacebuilding unfolds within the tension between a reality marked by conflict and division, and a vision of restored and healed relationships. Our interviewees reflect on this same tension, while also voicing frustration at the church’s perceived failure to catalyse meaningful change. Lederach (2005) and Baron and Maponya (2020) highlight the need not only to reimagine the context - from one shaped by conflict to one characterised by reconciliation - but also to re-envision the role of peace actors, including churches and their leaders, as those responding to a (divine) call to transform their context.

This ‘prophetic imagination’ aligns with a Pentecostal epistemology, spirituality, and theology - one that embraces the possibility of the impossible and challenges leaders to perceive, by faith and through the eyes of the Spirit, a reality beyond present conditions. It calls for vision, innovation, and the courage to pursue peace. Such believing and imagining do not negate human initiative; rather, faith and action work in tandem, trusting that God, by the Spirit, acts through God’s people and the church.

6.3 Tension between the spiritual and the secular

As noted above with reference to Yong (2010), the church may be tempted to form ‘prophetic’ counter-cultural communities to such an extent that they risk societal withdrawal. Several interviewees described the difficulty of

navigating a worldview that is simultaneously physical and spiritual, which often appears to demand a unilateral stance. On one hand, the church may attribute all societal ills to spiritual forces, prescribing prayer, worship, preaching, and conversion as the sole remedies. On the other, a purely human or secular response to social issues is also perceived as one-sided and inadequate.

This tension, as expressed in the interviews, echoes what Nimi Wariboko (2020) calls a 'dialogical imagination': a theological framework that embraces a dualistic worldview and requires decision-making that engages the spiritual and physical realm. This tension reflects a wide Pentecostal theological spectrum. As our material illustrates, some Pentecostals are inclined to address political and societal challenges solely through spiritual means, while others prefer to operate within 'secular' development paradigms. Taking Pentecostal spirituality seriously, one must ask to what extent Ethiopian Pentecostals can integrate these perspectives - remaining faithful to their spiritual identity and drawing on spiritual resources, while also embracing effective and proven approaches to peacebuilding.

6.4 Re-imagining the social and the spiritual

Compared to the Pentecostal focus groups interviewed by Josefsson and Wenell (2020), the group of interviewees whom we encountered were more directly engaged in peacebuilding, within and beyond the church. In order to carry out their programmes and activities, they needed to familiarise themselves with laws and regulations related to peacebuilding and development. They also had to cross ethnic and religious divides, interacting with Orthodox, Muslim, and traditional believers, and engage in mutual learning around the theme of peace. These interviewees have experience in building relationships across all levels of society, reflecting Lederach's description of middle-level leaders who are able to traverse horizontal divides.

The interviewees viewed peacebuilding as a vocation and as an endeavour that requires secular knowledge. In this regard, they spoke of efforts to deepen their understanding by reading academic literature or sourcing material online. The integration of what is perceived as secular knowledge

with their spiritual resources appears to enrich their understanding of how the church should engage in peacebuilding and clarify its mission - as a body divinely called to engage in context - and, in turn, reimagine what leadership should look like, what should be preached, and how one should act.

This reimagination carries a distinctly prophetic tone, especially when the interviewees call on leaders to speak for justice, promote reconciliation across ethnic divisions, and resist the temptation to align with those who misuse power. As argued earlier, imagination is theological in nature: it involves discerning God's work in context and responding to divine initiative. Through their engagement in peacebuilding as a response to God's call, the interviewees appear to find their prophetic voice - a voice that is also critical of the blind spots within their own communities.

Their prophetic reimagination of Pentecostal communities and leadership includes a more holistic understanding of mission and a vision of servant leadership. This reimagination of the church's role and of prophetic, servant leadership represents a contribution to peacebuilding and an expansion of Pentecostal theology itself.

The interviewees articulated a reimagined understanding of the role of the church and its leaders. It is therefore pertinent to ask whether their theology remains recognisably Pentecostal. As previously noted, although Pentecostalism encompasses a wide range of expressions, it may be argued that it retains a common theological logic - or a shared Pentecostal DNA. The model of peacebuilding that emerges from our empirical material is fundamentally holistic in a Pentecostal sense. While the interviewees express faith in God's transformative power, there seems to be a shift in their focus from the individual to the larger society (cf. Anderson, 2010; Kgatle, 2024). Their view of social engagement is not a typical Classical Pentecostal one, as they encourage social involvement, nor does it emphasise God's reign in the form of dominion theologies, which is often the case in neo-Pentecostal circles. Instead, they refer to an "already but not yet" (Brueggemann, 1978). What is distinctly Pentecostal is the way that they navigate their engagement, presupposing a physical-spiritual interaction. They still believe in spiritual warfare and that prayer, worship, and personal encounters

are important, but they emphasise the significance of complementary perspectives in order to be truly holistic.

In terms of approaches to leadership and perceptions of leadership roles, our interviewees appeared to favour servant leadership over the “strong man” type of leaders. For example, they mentioned democratic leadership. Consequently, the leaders whom we engaged with did not conform to the neo-Pentecostal stereotype of ‘big Men of God’ (cf. Asamoah-Gyadu, 2013). At the same time, they expressed scepticism towards politically elected leaders and referred to Christlike leaders as an ideal. A way to summarise their ideal view of leadership could perhaps be the anointed, Christlike, servant leader.

Anderson (2010) argues that at the heart of Pentecostal conviction lies a theology of peace. When our interviewees articulate their understanding of peace and their engagement in peacebuilding, they call for prophetic leadership that seeks a ‘full gospel’ peace – one that encompasses societal and political transformation as well as personal reconciliation with God (Mittlestad, 2010, Alexander, 2002). We contend that the peacebuilders we interviewed diverge from stereotypical portrayals of Classical Pentecostals and neo-Pentecostals, yet they unmistakably embody Pentecostal DNA. Their perspectives affirm and expand the diversity of positions within global Pentecostalism, offering valuable insights into the ways Pentecostal theology, leadership, and peacebuilding intersect in the Ethiopian context.

7. Conclusion

In light of the discussion above, our central thesis affirms that engagement in peacebuilding within the Ethiopian Pentecostal context is sustained by Pentecostal theologies that give rise to a particular, contextual reimagination of the role of religious leaders. This synthesis of Pentecostal theology and peacebuilding practice is distinctly contextual, drawing upon secular theories and a holistic worldview. Consequently, our analysis contributes a nuanced understanding of contemporary Pentecostalism in Ethiopia, particularly in relation to its active involvement in peacebuilding.

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Chapter 5

Spirituality and leadership development: A critical analysis of the role of spirituality in leadership development

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1. Introduction

This chapter explores the role of spirituality in leadership development. A spiritual leadership approach fosters a sense of belonging and meaning in the workplace, fulfilling the need for spiritual well-being. However, challenges in many institutions and communities are prompting leaders to consider alternative approaches to achieving desired outcomes. The growing interest in spiritual leadership and development has led to studies highlighting its benefits at the institutional and individual levels.

Our contemporary era is characterised by rapid social, political, religious, and economic change (Jahan et al., 2014). Globalisation has given set to diversity and differences; exclusivism has been supplanted by inclusivity; essentialism has been challenged by particularity; and outdated modes of personhood, such as gender complementarity and gender binaries, are increasingly rejected. Moral issues, including corruption, greed, and exploitation, have become destabilising factors in transforming societies like South Africa. These and other emerging discourses have posed challenges to leadership as a phenomenon of transformation and change. Moral and ethical leadership, grounded in clear moral principles, faces challenges from

relative realities, contextualities, and diversities. Institutions and structures - such as societies, cultures, religious communities, and civil societies - are confronted with the universal frameworks perpetuated by neoliberal worldviews and the aftermath of modernity.

The field of leadership has been subject to renewed scrutiny and research since the 20th century. However, Judge et al. (2002) found that building upon the traditional “great man theory” plays a vital role in determining leader effectiveness. To be effective, leaders must adapt their behaviour to different situations. Effective leadership is not solely about possessing comprehensive managerial skills or a commanding personal presence, nor is it about the exercise of power and control. It also encompasses strong virtues and values. In this regard, effective leaders are those who model and embody the principles of their societies and practice the values and goals that they wish others to adopt.

Nonetheless, after observing ongoing dysfunction and ineffectiveness in many church communities in our dioceses and based on the findings of a study (on church communities and moral formation) conducted by the researcher, which revealed leadership malaise in fulfilling church expectations (Pinyana, 2021), this chapter critically studies the role of spirituality in leadership development. The presence - or absence - of a connection between leadership and spirituality remains a crucial issue within church communities.

2. Spirituality explained

Spirituality has long been a neglected dimension in leadership discourse. In the Old Testament tradition, ‘spirit’ signifies the power and presence of the living God. In Pauline writings, ‘spirit’ refers to the presence and action of the loving God manifest in the Christ event, which summons Christians to be ‘spiritual’ persons or to ‘walk’ in the spirit (Lescher & Liebert, 2006). In the International Institute for Spiritual Leadership, Allen and Fry (2002) define *spiritual leadership* as a model that fosters an intrinsically motivated learning organisation, optimising the focus on social and environmental issues in line with financial issues. However, the human spirit is the vital principle or animating force traditionally seen as an intangible yet

life-affirming force within all individuals. It is characterised by a deep connection to one's inner self, guided by higher values and morality, as well as a recognition of the intrinsic truth and nature of others.

In terms of spirituality, Gardner (2011) argues that there is a strong desire amongst people to express aspects of their spiritual or religious selves at work or in education. Gardner (2011) maintains that one of the challenges faced by those working with spirituality is exploring or explaining their understanding of what spirituality is. Spirituality is that which gives life meaning, encompassing a sense of something beyond or greater than the self. A broad definition of spirituality encourages an inclusive approach; even those who reject a religious view of life can affirm what gives their lives meaning. Cupitt (1994), commenting on Gardner, attests that critical spirituality affirms the importance of recognising the influence of history and social context and their impact on individuals and communities. Therefore, this suggests that critical spirituality does not accept attitudes or behaviours that are harmful to others or those who seek to impose one form of spirituality or religion on others. It is equally important to emphasise spiritual practices that are life-affirming, emphasising wholeness and constructive mutual relationships in communities and embracing diversity (Gardner, 2011).

Spirituality exists in the world of borderlands between theory and practice, theory and other disciplines, the sacred and the secular, interiority and exteriority. It is a reflection on 'felt experience' and 'lived practice', and, by its nature, ventures into the ambivalent because of its fundamental orientation towards otherness and transcendence (Lescher & Liebert, 2006). In this way, spirituality calls theology of its task of crossing thresholds and challenging human absolutes. Furthermore, Lescher and Liebert (2006) assert that it begins in prayer and ends in prayer. Contemplative prayer, in its flexibility and complete freedom, is a limitless language - a language that knows no barriers, a language that goes, at least inchoately, well beyond what is explicitly expressed and into the inexpressible. In essence, theology stems from prayer.

In postmodern times, spirituality suggests a revival of interest in a traditional approach. Part of the value of the postmodern position is that it allows for difference, and those who find meaning in traditional religion can continue

searching for meaning in other ways and can also be valued. In our own age, the spirituality of Scripture, ecumenism, and liturgy - or the spirituality of the church - could be studied from the perspectives of various groups: the laity, the clergy, the religious, urban society, and others (Cary-Elwes, 1986).

Furthermore, the spirituality of an age, a group, or an individual is intimately connected with prayer. Thus, different kinds of prayer will provide a clear indication of the depth of the Spirit: liturgical prayer, the sacraments, the Divine Office, private prayer, devotion to the Eucharist, and the place of Christ and his Passion (Cary-Elwes, 1986).

A broad view of spirituality also raises the issue of how people assess their experiences to determine what is authentically spiritual. An important question might be: what are the principles by which one is being guided? Additionally, this can explicitly include principles of being inclusive and non-violent; that people will express spirituality in a way that allows others to express theirs (Gardner, 2011). Consequently, one advocates for a grounded or integrated view of spirituality, seeing the spiritual as a fundamental aspect of how people live out their lives. Most people are afraid - and rightly so - of exhibitionistic spirituality that longs to be noticed and praised. Suspicion of spirituality also stems from disgust with those individuals who use it to escape responsibility. Those who practice escapist spirituality find a way to bend the rules, blame others, or twist an interpretation of a situation so that they are exempt from responsible behaviour (Johnson & Dreitzer, 2001).

Tacey (2009) views spirituality as encompassing a broad range of forms, focused on connectedness and relatedness to various realities and existences, including individuals, society, the world, the stars, the universe, and the sacred. This inward journey often involves exploring the so-called inner or true self, where diversity is believed to reside. However, the connection between the outer and inner worlds is often integral to the spiritual experience and provides meaning. This connection unites what is commonly referred to in religious language as the *transcendent* - that which lies beyond us - and the *immanent*, which relates to the divine or the spirit within ourselves. There is a consensus that spirituality can be conceptualised as a broad umbrella, with religion representing one of the various expressions of spirituality (Lindsay, 2002). However, significant features of Christian

life, such as devotion to the Passion and apostolic zeal, remain central. Spirituality varies across cultures, and therefore, it involves the application of doctrinal, moral, and especially ascetic principles to ways of Christian living. Consequently, a religious tradition may still serve as the primary means of expressing spirituality, with religious practice remaining the usual path to experience it.

Anderson (2000) describes spirituality as the vital, animating force traditionally believed to be an intangible, life-affirming force within oneself and all human beings. It is characterised by a deep connection to one's inner self, guided by higher values and morality, as well as an awareness of the intrinsic truth and nature of others (Fairholm, 1998).

The expanding body of literature indicates that spirituality can make a positive and meaningful contribution to individuals' lives and organisational well-being (Dantley, 2005; West, 1982). Spirituality may have been overlooked in the past, partly because of what some scholars describe as the prevalence of academic hegemony in higher education institutions (Denton, 1996; Meyers, 2004). Additionally, Noebel (2001), supported by Coleson and Pearcey (1999), argues that the dominance of the atheistic naturalism ideology has contributed to the exclusion of much research on spirituality and leadership.

Spirituality is primarily the domain of meaning and inspiration, with a long, rich history. Despite this, theories and models of spirituality have sometimes become overshadowed by the dominance of secular models, as Van Saane (2018) observes. Spirituality is defined as the ongoing search for meaning, characterised by an open attitude focused on sustainability and credibility, rooted in self-knowledge and a desire for growth and development (Van Saane, 2018). Therefore, spirituality involves the pursuit of meaning and is closely tied to morality, with norms and values that balance the fulfilment of personal needs with broader public interest.

What a strange and wonderful God we worship, who allows the very foundations of our culture and our lives to be shaken - so deeply shaken that we find ourselves with nowhere to turn but to him. It is not in the triumph of victory, nor in the sweet satisfaction of success, nor in the joy of others that we seek God. Instead, it is in the emptiness of Earthly fulfilment, the

dryness of parched souls, and the relentless yearning for something beyond our understanding that we search for the path that leads us to our ultimate love. The shaking, quaking, and longing have become so pervasive that they touch almost everyone's life. With spirituality now more commonly found on the street than in the church, a simple walk through a secular bookstore reveals numerous volumes on Christian spirituality, as Johnson and Dreitcer (2001) note. Christians are searching for 'an authentic piety' - a term that has fallen out of favour and is often regarded with suspicion in recent years - pointing to what we have referred to as 'spirituality'. For Christians, true piety and true spirituality refer to lived intimacy with God in Christ. Piety means devotion to the attitudes and practices that shape and flow from a life with God. Spirituality encompasses not only the attitudes of the heart and the practice of spiritual disciplines but also the various ways in which we live our lives before God (Johnson & Dreitcer, 2001).

In many traditions, spirituality is conceptualised as a journey, often with a mystical variant serving as an exemplary highlight. Within spirituality, individuals can cultivate greater attention and awareness. Consequently, increased openness can facilitate growth and continuous transformation, as Van Saane (2018) maintains. The history of Christian spirituality includes an exploration of the phenomena of Christian spirituality interpreted through the invisible signs of God's self-giving grace, which has been present in the hearts of men and women throughout the ages (Perrin, 2007). Historical narratives not only reveal past events but also illustrate how individuals interpreted or perceived the active Christian Spirit in their lives. They strive to live purposeful and meaningful lives based on their discernment of God's active Spirit in the world (Perrin, 2007).

It is prudent to understand that we do not operate in a vacuum, least of all when facing moral problems. It is the nature of the world and the way that people are that often gives rise to these very moral inconsistencies. The background to leadership and spirituality can have a significant effect on the decisions that we make. It may also shape the form and content of those decisions. Our task, therefore, is to grasp the nature of spiritualities, the decisions that we make, and the context in which we make them. To do this effectively, we need to know as much as we can about the contexts

of our lives. Consequently, examining the world in which we live and the values that surround us are essential aspects of our modern world and our way of life.

There is a need to review leadership praxis from the perspectives of broader spiritualities and to link the spiritual search with contemporary managerial practices, while surveying the breadth of and commonalities within varied philosophical positions regarding the spiritual search.

3. The role of spirituality in subjective well-being

A person's spirit is traditionally understood as the vital, intangible, and life-affirming force within an individual. This state represents a deep connection with the inner self, encompassing higher values, morality, and an understanding of the inherent truth within others. As many leaders undergo significant personal and professional transformation, there is an increasing trend to integrate spirituality into their work, reflecting this profound shift in their lives.

However, as Swanson (2021) argues, a crisis in spiritual leadership has persisted for the past 2,000 years. A spiritual leader is primarily someone who has first been led before they can lead others. Following precedes leading, and Jesus redefined leadership through the roles of servanthood and shepherding (Mk 10:45; Jn 10). Leadership that does not involve servanthood, Swanson (2021) asserts, is not spiritual. The primary duty of a shepherd is to lead, feed, and meet the needs of the flock. When we cease to care for the needs of God's people, we relinquish the right to lead. People do not care how much we know until they understand how much we care. Spiritual leadership is a combination of acquired traits that, when blended, form the foundation of effective leadership. The purpose of spiritual leadership is to address the fundamental needs of leaders and those being led for spiritual well-being through a sense of calling and belonging; it aims to create vision and value congruence across individuals, institutions, and communities.

Spirituality in the workplace involves leaders and followers who recognise themselves as spiritual beings with a sense of calling, which provides meaning and purpose in their lives. The Dalai Lama (2010:n.p.) explores

issues of spirituality and religion in *Ethics for the New Millennium*, where he states:

Religion I take to be concerned with faith in the claims of one faith tradition or another an aspect of which is the acceptance of some form of heaven or nirvana. Connected with this are religious teachings or dogma, ritual prayer, and so on. Spirituality I take to be concerned with those qualities of the human spirit - such as love, and compassion, patience, tolerance, forgiveness, contentment, a sense of responsibility, a sense of harmony - which brings happiness to both self and other.

Consequently, spirituality, as manifested through these qualities, forms the foundation for most of the world's spiritual and religious traditions. Christian spirituality, according to Perrin (2007), implies more than simply acknowledging historical events as recorded in the chronicles of Christian life. It also encompasses the deeper question of why these events occurred - the interior dimension of faith. The examples of martyrs illustrate how a relationship with God is reflected in the selfless acts of men and women who lived out their profound personal love relationship with Jesus. Ultimately, this love relationship, one that is characterised by faith and modelled on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, represents the truth of embodied Christian life (Perrin, 2007).

The history of Christian spirituality encompasses traditions that include beliefs, attitudes, rituals, prayers, and practices, all of which bear witness to the ways in which the relationship with God and each other has been understood and lived out throughout history. At the same time, these traditions anchor enduring truths for the lives of present and future members of Christian communities, as Perrin (2007) asserts. These traditions evolve over time, gradually taking shape in the consciousness and practises of faith communities.

Christians, however, place their trust in the presence of the Holy Spirit to guide and renew the community through its grace-filled presence. Based on these beliefs, persuasions, and convictions, Christians live today in continuity with the past, while always interpreting the received traditions within the context of the present. Spirituality, therefore, assists tradition by recognising the dynamic exchange between interpreting the past as it has

been received and interpreting the present as it is lived. Christians rely on the presence and influence of the Holy Spirit to renew traditions as they are lived, so that Christian spiritualities are shaped in fresh ways to meet the needs of the world today and tomorrow.

4. Leadership well-defined

Kouzes and Pozner (2002) define leadership as the art of mobilising others to willingly work towards shared aspirations. From their perspective, effective leadership entails inspiring and motivating individuals by articulating a vision of a long-term, challenging, desirable, compelling, and better future. When combined with a clear sense of mission - defining who we are and what we do - this vision shapes an institution's culture, establishing its fundamental ethical framework and core values.

According to Van Saane (2018), the concept of 'leadership' is encapsulated within the paradox of leadership theories. She argues that the leadership paradigm shifts from focusing on the personality of the leader to interactive and reciprocal influencing processes between the leader and followers. However, this apparent contradiction can be addressed when the paradigms of spirituality are considered within the realm of leadership (Van Saane, 2018).

Gardner (1990) describes leadership as a process of persuasion or example through which an individual, including a leadership team, guides a group towards objectives either personally held or shared by their followers. He emphasises that within an established group, individuals assume different roles, one of which is leadership. Thus, leaders cannot be considered apart from their historical context, operational setting, or the system they oversee.

Theories on servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977), spiritual leadership (Fry, 2003), and transformational leadership (Bass, 1996) have become integral to the canon of leadership theories. Leadership can, therefore, be inspired by fundamental concepts from religious and spiritual traditions (Van Saane, 2018).

Previous studies have primarily focused on various aspects such as leader traits, aptitude, behaviours, task functions, and styles (Southworth, 2002; Leithwood et al., 1999). These studies explore the significant role that

leaders play in instructional leadership, cultural transformation, and the development of effective leadership. Additionally, many of these studies acknowledge the importance of church leaders as role models who promote values of care and social justice, and foster collaboration. However, it is important to note that most of these studies do not incorporate the concept of spirituality in their analyses (Southworth, 2002).

The primary objectives of leadership theories are to provide knowledge regarding the roles and responsibilities of leaders. These theories focus on the essential personality traits that leaders should possess. They emphasise the behaviour and conduct of leaders, not only encouraging appropriate behaviour amongst their subordinates but also ensuring that leaders themselves act in a manner that reflects these standards. Furthermore, these theories guide and motivate leaders to help their subordinates to achieve the desired goals. They also highlight the importance of analysing deficiencies and limitations to identify the leadership style deemed most significant for effective leadership. Finally, they ensure that leaders remain attentive to the developmental needs of those they serve.

McNeal (2006) argues that obscurity does not equate to humility, nor does fame preclude it. He asserts that humility and celebrity can coexist. Humility arises from a leader's awareness of their source of strength. The aspiration to become a significant spiritual leader liberates the spirit from the idolatry of self-centredness, as true greatness in the spiritual realm cannot be pursued without nurturing a consciousness of God. The reluctance of some spiritual leaders to openly acknowledge their ambition for greatness reveals their underlying motivations. Consequently, they often seek greatness associated with position and power (McNeal, 2006). Despite the spiritual yearning that many individuals experience today and the extensive search for a life in the Spirit, considerable misconceptions about the essence of spirituality persist, amongst the baptised and those outside a formal confession of faith. Church leaders themselves often encounter hesitancy stemming from such misconceptions in their congregants' reactions to the term 'spirituality' (Johnson & Dreitcer, 2001). These reactions likely reflect the attitudes of many outside formal religion as well.

Jesus addressed this distorted form of ambition in two key encounters with his disciples (Mk 9:33-35; 10:35-45). In his response, he neither criticises

the desire for greatness nor suggest that his followers should refrain from aspiring to it. He seizes the moment to contrast the prevailing notion of greatness with its true meaning, urging them to understand greatness in spiritual terms. Jesus' disciples often failed to grasp the true pursuit of greatness. Similarly, most leaders who present themselves as spiritual figures crave the worldly trappings of greatness - position, power, and privilege. Many leaders in the church display the same ambitions as business executives or politicians. Referring to this as ambition does not diminish what it truly is (McNeal, 2006).

Greatness is not only about character; it is also about effectiveness. In fact, all great leaders in the Bible are marked not only by their character but also by their ability to lead effectively. However, servant leadership is an attitude, not a genre of narrowly defined actions. Service is about desired outcomes and not just the type of action that a leader takes on behalf of others. McNeal (2006) asserts that great leaders bless people, inspiring and encouraging them. These leaders also help individuals to become more than they have been, and sometimes even more than they thought that they could be. Therefore, great leaders enable people to be part of something bigger than themselves.

It could also be argued that these leaders are generally capable of meeting the leadership demands placed upon them and effectively achieving things. Great leaders organise people to accomplish tasks while guiding and supporting them throughout the process. In a postmodern society, spiritual leaders are indispensable. Unlike recent centuries that sought to strip away the mystery of life and the universe, today's world is increasingly spiritual. Postmodernists recognise that life is more than physical, technological, financial, and functional. They are more determined in their search for meaning and significance, and there is a widespread yearning for spiritual leadership (McNeil, 2006). They do not link their search for spirituality to the church, nor do they limit their options in spirituality to organised religions. People bring their life issues and needs to their leaders, not only to the counsellor's office, seeking guidance and support. This reality emphasises the need for spiritual leaders in all areas of life (McNeil, 2006).

Our understanding of the sphere of spiritual leadership must include the busy street as well as the quiet abbey. Leaders who possess an appropriate

view of self, combined with the capacity to help others, do not just appear in the nick of time but are rather shaped over time. According to McNeil (2006), extraordinary character and exceptional competence develop over time, and leaders must make countless good choices and right calls to cultivate greatness. Practicing greatness in leadership requires that spiritual leaders develop key disciplines to shape their lives and character. These include self-awareness, self-management, self-development, decision-making, belonging, mission, and solitude. Great spiritual leaders should be committed consciously and intentionally to all these disciplines in order to be effective leaders.

Gardner (1990) cautions against conflating leadership with power. While leaders inherently possess some degree of power because of their ability to persuade, many individuals who hold power lack genuine leadership qualities. Their power often derives from wealth, coercion, institutional control, or media influence. This confusion between leadership and official authority has harmful consequences for many institutions (Gardner, 1990).

Leaders emerge in many forms, adopting different styles and possessing a wide range of qualities, reflecting a diversity that is virtually limitless. Gardner (1990) contends that young people should be exposed to multiple leadership models, made aware of different approaches, and encouraged to develop styles that align with their strengths. In a postmodern society, he argues, leadership must be institutionalised to address increasingly technical challenges, as rapid change outpaces any single leader's ability to personally resolve all major issues. No individual, no matter how gifted, possesses the time or expertise to single-handedly manage the complexities of contemporary leadership.

Leadership and its interactions with constituents operate not only on a rational level but also on deeper, non-rational, and unconscious dimensions of human functioning. Gardner (1990), drawing on Max Weber, asserts that leadership is granted by followers, emphasising that good constituents tend to cultivate good leaders, while executives are assigned subordinates but must earn true followers. Additionally, based on Sigmund Freud's insights into human behaviour, Gardner suggests that many individuals carry subconscious memories of the powerful, almost godlike figures who cared for them in infancy, leading them to seek out similar sources of comfort and

guidance later in life. Gardner argues that social groups establish norms that regulate the behaviour of their members, forming the foundation of social order. Within this framework, leaders emerge, shaped by the expectations and values of their communities. The social context not only influences the type of leaders who arise but also defines the standards by which their leadership is measured. A loyal constituency is won when people, consciously or unconsciously, judge the leader to be capable of solving their problems and meeting their needs, when the leader is seen as symbolising their norms, and when their image of the leader is congruent with their inner environment of myth or legend.

Conger (1994) argues that, since there has been little research regarding spirituality or spiritual leadership, it is difficult to specify precisely what the benefits of spirituality in leadership will be. However, while traditionally rooted in religion, there are new forms of spirituality that organisational actors and institutions draw upon. Additionally, there is a growing body of literature on spirituality and leadership.

Spirituality in church leadership is not solely a form of leadership; rather, it is a phenomenon observed in church leaders who incorporate their personal interpretations of spirituality into their preferred leadership practices. This integration is conducted in ways that promote their own well-being and the well-being of church communities.

However, there has been a significant assumption that leadership can be produced like any other service. In this context, leadership is often reduced to mere image and technique. It is essential to exercise caution regarding leadership development, as effective leadership is crucial for the growth and sustainability of vibrant and evolving communities, including church communities. Without competent leadership, communities tend to stagnate, disintegrate, and struggle for a sense of direction or motivation, easily becoming distracted by trivial concerns and trends. For intentional communities such as the church to thrive, there is a critical need for effective leadership. Fry (2003) argues that spiritual leadership develops within an intrinsic motivation model that incorporates vision, hope, and altruistic love. He further asserts that its purpose is to establish vision and value congruence across strategic, empowered teams and individual levels, ultimately enhancing organisational commitment and productivity.

Spiritual leadership also empowers individuals by fostering committed leaders at the strategic, team, and personal levels, who act as coaches within a learning organisation that constantly strives to listen, experiment, improve, innovate, and cultivate new leaders (Ancona et al., 1999; Bass, 2000; McGill et al., 1992). Building on this, Fry (2003) asserts that spiritual leadership is necessary for the transformation and sustained success of a learning institution. He adds that effective leaders tap into the fundamental need for spiritual fulfilment in themselves and those whom they lead, fostering greater commitment and productivity (Fry 2003).

5. Leadership development as a concept

Leadership development cannot be fully understood without looking at leadership first. Leadership comes from authenticity and requires unwavering self-assessment and deep self-knowledge (Hesselbein & Shrader, 2008). According to Hesselbein and Shrader (2008), effective leaders have followers but treat them as allies rather than subordinates. They are forward-thinking yet committed to learning from the past. They hold themselves and their teams accountable for results and actively engage in listening.

Leadership, at its core, is an enabling art - one that empowers all other arts and professions to function effectively. Within the church, leadership is a shared responsibility under the ultimate head, Jesus. This concept aligns with polycentric leadership, which requires leaders to possess the wisdom to lead and the humility to follow (Woodward & White, 2016). We say that all good leaders know how to follow, but when individuals are in roles where they rarely need to follow, they lose their follower instinct. Therefore, we need to create leadership structures that model the kind of mutual community that we seek to form (Woodward & White, 2016). Over the years, there has been a tendency to overemphasise leadership while neglecting the importance of management. In an institution, one cannot lead inventories, cash flow, costs, etc. One cannot lead information, structures, processes, facilities, and tools; instead, one must manage them. Thus, one leads people and manages and controls things. According to Hesselbein and Shrader (2008), the fundamental reality is that human beings are not things needing to be motivated and controlled; they are four-dimensional - body, mind, heart, and spirit. They also represent the

four basic needs and motivations of all people: to live, to love, to learn, and to leave a legacy (Hesselbein & Shrader, 2008). This should be taken into account by leaders as they lead people in institutions.

Leadership development can be defined as the process that helps to expand the capacity of individuals to perform leadership roles within organisations. However, it also refers to activities that enhance the skills, abilities, and confidence of leaders (Baldwin & Ford, 1988). According to Baldwin and Ford (1988), these programmes vary significantly in complexity, cost, and style of instruction. Church members and even leaders often feel like cogs in a wheel or workers on an assembly line, each performing a particular part to keep the machine running (Woodward & White, 2016). With everyone playing their role well and the ministry experiencing success, something still seems to be missing. When someone steps back from the machine for a season, the church community realises that the sense of community and authenticity that was initially present has vanished. It appears that leaders have gained the world of ministry success but have lost their souls in the process. If everything meaningful about the church seems to disappear with one key person, leadership should be different (Woodward & White, 2016). In times past, congregations have seen and experienced how power can transform a godly leader into a control freak, stifling any creativity and innovation within the community. When news breaks that they have experienced a moral fall, most are not surprised. In this case, leadership should be different.

The success of leadership development is, therefore, heavily influenced by the quality of the programme, the level of support and acceptance from superiors, and the characteristics or attributes of the individual being developed (Baldwin & Ford, 1988). Some scholars differentiate between leadership development and leader development; the former refers to development programmes focusing on collective leadership within an organisation, while the latter pertains to individual development (Van Saane, 2018).

Furthermore, scholars such as Wheatley (1992), Wilber (2001), Senge (2004), and others recognise the connection between leadership, change, and spirituality. This is evidenced by common themes in their works, including ethics, values, the common good, organisational and individual

integrity, courage, and leadership character. Therefore, these themes can be applied to the modern face of leadership as a means of encouraging individuals, groups, and society to thrive together.

The conceptualisation of leadership as a dynamic process fits into the scientific paradigm of social construction (Van Saane, 2018). In this paradigm, Van Saane argues that meaning is not only an attribute of an object, but also something that is created in the perception of the subject. Thus, it is subjective and occurs in the interaction between the subject and his or her environment (Van Saane, 2018).

Leadership development, as a social construction, is less about the leader's personality and more about how followers and key factors perceive and receive the leader (Baldwin & Ford, 1988). The way in which we approach leadership profoundly shapes the ethos of the church community and its surrounding neighbourhood. Different leadership styles cultivate different kinds of people (Woodward & White, 2016). Following the paradigm of social construction, leadership emerges through these discernment processes. The effectiveness or failure of leadership cannot be judged objectively; rather, it depends on the perception of those affected. This formulation suggests that within the paradigm of social construction, the predictability of effective and successful leadership is significantly lower than in the paradigm of the effective leader (Eliastam, 2018). Many leaders achieve success through active engagement in a complex web of carefully cultivated relationships, often in contracting contexts (Hesselbein & Shrader, 2008). However, those who intentionally cultivate these relationships and navigate diverse contexts are able to guide their institutions towards a clearly defined higher purpose. These are leaders who fully commit themselves, aware that their dedication can lead to their undoing. This, indeed, is the price and prize of leadership.

Effective leaders are willing to reveal their authentic selves, understanding that there are no universal formulas or guaranteed ways to ensure leadership success. Therefore, being attuned to context and able to sense the direction of change is as essential for leaders as it is for high-wire walkers. Leaders who successfully transform organisations challenge the norms. They read the organisational culture and adjust enough to be accepted as insiders (Hesselbein & Shrader, 2008). Leadership is a dynamic relationship

between those who aspire to lead and those who choose to follow. Leadership matters, especially in times of uncertainty, when it holds even greater significance than in stable periods. Given its importance in times of uncertainty, leadership development becomes even more crucial (Hesselbein & Shrader, 2008).

The behaviour and attributes of a leader depend on the situation. When attempting to achieve something substantial in the world, one will inevitably face large, resistant bureaucracies that seem immovable. Leaders accustomed to seeking out hidden constituencies remain undeterred (Gardner, 1990). Gardner (1990) argues that leadership is rarely discussed as a set of functions, and even more rarely as functions that can be diffused across a group. Most discussions and writings about leadership tend to focus on “the leader” as an individual, standing alone. However, a closer look at real-world leadership reveals that it is often a collective effort, with a small group of individuals working together in a team dynamic (Gardner, 1990).

Leaders have always been generalists. Tomorrow’s leaders will likely begin their careers as trained specialists, but to mature as leaders, they must, sooner or later, climb out of the trenches of specialisation and rise above the boundaries that separate the various segments of society. Leaders can accomplish a great deal when they understand the needs of their institutions and the basic needs of the people they work with (Gardner, 1990). Research suggests that workers are more effective when they take pride in their production, the quality of the service rendered, or the integrity of their institution. Since leadership requires working with shared values and goals, the task becomes increasingly difficult - eventually impossible - when shared values disintegrate. Intrinsic leaders always seek to foster group action, which can only occur when individual members are willing to commit to a common purpose. Thus, descriptions of effective leadership rarely mention the extent to which group attitudes make leadership possible. In any functioning society, everything - leadership included - occurs within a set of shared beliefs concerning the standard of acceptable behaviour that must govern individual members. Therefore, the task of leadership is to revitalise those shared beliefs and values and to draw on them as sources of motivation for everyone.

Leadership has been an area of interest for many centuries. According to Kouzes and Pozner (2002), leadership is the art of mobilising others to strive for shared aspirations. Judge et al. (2002) explain the importance of the situation in determining the effectiveness of leadership. Consequently, a good leader must evaluate the situation and act accordingly. Meng (2016) notes that an extrapolation of contingency theory is the path-goal theory, which considers motivation a crucial determinant of effective leadership. The components of this leadership theory, which are also interlinked, involve effort, performance, and reward in an advancing order.

Kerr and Jermier (1978) argue for substitutes for leadership theories by shifting the focus to circumstances that tend to neutralise the temperaments of leadership. The emphasis, however, is on modifying leadership qualities to suit the demands of a given situation to nurture a better outcome. Modern leadership theories, such as strategic leadership theory, emerged as early as the beginning of the 1980s as a result of behavioural contingency theories being questioned. During this time, there was a shift in focus. Thus, modern theories hypothesised the importance of vision, motivation, and value-based control of culture and in-group dynamics.

According to Conger and Kanungo (1998) and Muddock and Fulton (1998), the key elements of modern leadership involve consideration, fairness, agreement, social equality, and co-operation. The culture of adaptability requires that the leader be autonomous, take initiative, and be creative, learning from the fluid situation in order to develop new strategies and objectives to improve the institution. The distinction between management and leadership should highlight a direction for an institution by defining its aims and objectives. Leadership is about having a vision for a desirable and compelling future for the institution. Consequently, when a vision is stated clearly and complemented with a sense of mission by defining roles with motivation in execution, the foundation of the institution becomes strong and entrenched. Thus, the fundamental ethics upon which an institution is based should serve as guidelines for determining proper and improper behaviour (Kerr & Jermier, 1978). Building on this, Woodward and White (2016) advocate for polycentric leadership, emphasising that it shapes the individuals and the missional community they serve. However, embracing this approach requires considerable wisdom and a good sense of timing.

Throughout history, whenever God's work has advanced, there has always been a leader at the helm - a singular person called by God to guide His people in fulfilling his objectives. This is the mystery and privilege of being called by God. Spiritual leadership is the integration of natural and spiritual qualities used to influence God's people in achieving His purpose (Swanson, 2021). Swanson (2021) argues that these natural qualities are not self-produced but God-given, and they reach their highest effectiveness when used in service to God and for His glory. From this, it can be concluded that ministry is best accomplished by spiritual individuals who employ spiritual methods to fulfil God's purposes.

For spiritual leaders, 'the call' frames the central storyline in their life drama. Sometimes the call is dramatic, while for others it is progressive. Spiritual leaders cannot be understood apart from their call, as it informs them of what game they are playing and keeps them engaged, even when they feel discharged. Even more significantly, the leader's relationship with God is inextricably linked to the call. Great spiritual leaders believe that they are called not despite who they are, but because of who they are. Citing Bonhoeffer, Kelly and Nelson (2003) argue that spirituality leads to an acknowledgment of the ways in which God's Holy Spirit opens our minds and hearts to the paths of life along which we are led. They further endorse the importance of a life and spirituality guided by the Holy Spirit, which fosters strong convictions about what constitutes the proper way of living one's faith and exercising moral leadership. This understanding is not a boast; rather, it is based on an honest assessment of their abilities (McNeal, 2006). Unlike many who are naïve, great leaders know what they can contribute. This awareness permits them to be intentional with their energies and time, always playing towards their talents. They do not engage in wishful thinking regarding their abilities. They are aware of their depth and take on assignments that they can genuinely address with their skills and gifts (McNeal, 2006). Being self-aware about their talents does not mean that leaders do not have to be humble, which is also a central component of greatness. In fact, leaders who truly understand their strengths recognise the Giver of their abilities. Thus, without this clear grasp, leaders dishonour their design and may end up working outside their strengths, whether because of ignorance or an inflated ego that craves talents

that did not come from God. These leaders can even become a liability by underperforming and preventing others from operating from their God-given strengths (McNeal, 2006).

Reviewing and reflecting on key events in life can help leaders to understand, recognising God's providence over the years. They can also realise how they have been shaped by crisis and by the routine rhythms of life. This awareness can inspire confidence and provide comfort, especially to embattled leaders who need reminding that God has not abandoned them. Great spiritual leaders have catalogued their positive and negative personal markers and gleaned the heart-shaping work of God in them. This understanding, therefore, inspires humility and confidence (McNeal, 2006).

It can be understood that leaders also have a dark side, as every human being struggles with dysfunction to some degree. McNeal (2006) argues that the dark side of leaders is particularly noticeable because of the public scrutiny that they receive and the amplification of their implications through their followers. Conversely, McIntosh and Rima (1997) identify five types of dark-side leaders: compulsive, narcissistic, paranoid, co-dependent, and passive-aggressive leaders. These types of leaders take more forms than just those mentioned by McIntosh and Rima (1997). Dotlich and Cairo (2003), on the other hand, identify specific derailing behaviours of leaders that stem from the dark side. They argue that these leaders often act, speak, and think in ways that ultimately lead to their downfall, frequently without even realising that they are sabotaging their own success. McNeal (2006) asserts that these types of leadership are inevitably exposed to those whom they lead and are hard to miss. However, leaders who are captive to such darkness may not fully recognise it, making it difficult for them to manage it. Great spiritual leaders understand that confronting and becoming acquainted with the darkness is the only path to the light (McNeal, 2006).

Great spiritual leaders bless others. They are not solely focused on grand issues; they are devoted to people. Their spiritual enterprise is about enhancing lives. Leaders who achieve greatness are not only a blessing; they feel blessed. They are characterised by gratitude and consider leadership a privilege. Even though the cost of their greatness may, and often does,

include emotional, physical, and spiritual stress, they count themselves fortunate to have the opportunity to partner with God in his redemptive mission in the world.

6. Developments within religious leadership and spirituality

Traditionally, many people believed that the primary purpose of leadership was to acquire power and privilege (Nair, 1994). This form of leadership encouraged many leaders to manipulate and control others in pursuit of their goals (Freire, 1970). However, with the understanding that this paradigm cannot resolve many issues, several scholars on leadership emphasise the importance of values such as collaboration, the common good, and global concern as vital components of leadership (Rost, 1991).

Theron (2008) argues that development planning has been poorly conceived, inadequately maintained, and ultimately unsuccessful. He questions why development planning continues to falter despite the enthusiasm with which it was initially pursued - an issue that still lingers in institutions of authority and development. Addressing the historical contexts of development planning requires an examination of planning theory and the characteristics of the planning process. Additionally, the role of change agents as facilitators of development planning must be clearly defined (Theron, 2008). According to Theron (2008), this approach should be people-centred. Development failures often stem from change agents' inability to bridge the gap between their own realities and those of the people whom they serve, as well as their reliance on research rooted in a fragmented, reductionist ontology.

Development cannot simply be imposed on communities from outside, as donors in the development field sometimes assume. It is not a one-time event but an ongoing process that requires boldness, confidence, and conviction from individuals and communities (Theron, 2008). True development emerges from within - it is the realisation of creative energy awaiting the opportunity to bring something new into being.

Spirituality has been linked to secular forms of leadership, establishing a broader connection between the two. This raises the question of whether religious leadership can offer valuable insights into the relationship between

spirituality and leadership. Traditionally, the primary role of a leader within a religious context was to guide the community, ensuring alignment with theological convictions and social organisation (Barentsen, 2011). This concept of religious leadership has been reinforced by theological perspectives that link a leader's authority to a divine calling and official confirmation by religious institutions (Barentsen, 2011).

Furthermore, many of the theoretical frameworks used in social care recognise the centrality of meaning and the human drive towards wholeness (Gardner, 2011). Viewing spirituality critically, according to Gardner (2011), involves seeing people holistically - seeking to understand their backgrounds and what fundamentally matters to them. Spirituality exists as an integral part of everyday life while also transcending it. Therefore, it is essential to combine a postmodern appreciation of individual experience, with all its diversity, with a critical perspective that emphasises living harmoniously and respectfully at individual and community levels. This perspective on spirituality moves beyond religiously specific frameworks while also embracing those who identify with particular traditions.

Critical spirituality calls for lives rooted in openness, acceptance of pluralism, and the ability to coexist with contradictions and uncertainty without resorting to coercion. It recognises that spirituality, including religious expression, is rarely static, as it influences cultural change and, in turn, is shaped by it through a complexity of exchanges and connections. As a result, change is intricate, requiring strategies that operate at the broader socio-cultural level and the individual level.

Furthermore, critical spirituality fosters acceptance of uncertainty, a trait shared by professional and spiritual maturity. The capacity or discipline of sitting with what is not known can be beneficial. When dying, or perhaps most clearly during the process of dying, people often accept that there are no answers and simply want someone to be present with them, as Gardner (2011) maintains. This is also true for those wishing to explore their spirituality. However, Vernon (2007) suggests that the problem with religion currently is that it is perceived as a means of achieving certainty rather than living with uncertainty. Therefore, it is equally important to acknowledge that some people do possess a sense of certainty. For some,

this derives from their religious tradition, which provides clear and definite answers. Additionally, it is important to reflect on what matters; this is a more specific reflection, focused on articulating what is and what could be in a person's life.

7. Towards a theology of leadership

Research has revealed numerous contemporary examples of dysfunctional communities, institutions, individuals, and leaders within local contexts. Leaders are called upon to promote a legacy of existential, moral, and spiritual change in society (Dames, 2017). However, servant leadership may provide a solution to the self-imposed notion of superiority. According to Dames (2017), the absence of servant leadership and the subsequent misfortunes of leaders in Africa leave much to be desired. This is attributed to the inability of many leaders to maintain sustainable solutions to issues such as hunger, poverty, unemployment, resource mismanagement, and systemic flaws that encourage favouritism, nepotism, tribalism, political differences, ideological and religious discrimination, a lack of capacity to manage society, poor leadership, inadequate planning, greed, and the worship of materialism, as well as the failure to uphold professional ethics (Adhiambo, 2012).

Dames (2017) emphasises the importance of enhancing servant leadership to address widespread poor living conditions by providing essential services that improve the quality of life in many communities. Spears (2010), as cited in Adhiambo (2012), argues that servant leadership represents a revitalised model of leadership, reflecting the socio-economic and political realities of numerous communities. The focus, however, should be on increasing service to others through a holistic approach that fosters a sense of community and power-sharing in decision-making. This kind of leadership aligns with a vision for a reconstructed society. Furthermore, success in these leadership traits depends on strong leadership and decisive actions to address the global issues of inadequate leadership and institutions, which are at the root of societal decline. Rwiza (2008) contends that the prevailing culture of lethargy, oppression, suffering, consumerism, and ideological conflict in the developing nations and globally must be

dismantled and replaced with a culture of commitment to the service of the whole human person. These pervasive social challenges in Africa and beyond demand leaders who will respond to the call for a culture of commitment to humanity.

Servant leadership values, develops, and builds community and individuals towards the practice of authenticity, providing leadership for the benefit of those being led and sharing power for the common good. Therefore, the caring, sharing, developing, and serving approach of the leader is fundamental to the servant leadership model. The application and re-emphasis of the serving dimension within the church, aimed at enhancing the well-being of broader society through a renewed service ethic, should be pursued.

In South Africa and across the globe, inadequate service delivery by leadership has obstructed the socio-economic empowerment of ordinary citizens (Manala, 2014). The unbalanced shift from human-focused programmes to natural sciences, technology, and engineering during the early 1990s has proven to be one of the most detrimental policies in South Africa (Dames, 2017). This situation demands redress to reshape the moral fabric and spiritual landscape of humanity (Koopman & Vosloo, 2002).

According to Bam (1985), the image of the Church of Jesus Christ in this world is that of a servant, characterised by servant leadership. The church serves to make Jesus Christ a reality in the hearts of all humanity, facilitating the realisation of the Kingdom of God in the world. Consequently, Jesus is the embodiment of God's royal rule in the form of a servant (Osmer, 2008). Servanthood is fundamental to the mission of the community of disciples and the leadership within that community, as Christ has redefined the nature of power and authority by taking the form of a servant.

Huizing (2011) argues that Christianity has largely overlooked the development of a theology of leadership. Stone and Duke (2006) emphasise that applying revealed truth to all aspects of human existence is essential. The development of traits, transactional, behavioural, and transformational leadership theories offers a framework within which Christians can integrate and apply a theology of leadership (Berne, 1963; Bass, 1985). Research has shown that there are parallels to Christian thought as revealed in servant

and spiritual theories (Greenleaf, 1977; Fry, 2003). From this, R.C. Clark (2008) warns of the danger of simply incorporating these theories into the theology of leadership. He further maintains that an exegesis of scripture concerning the theology of leadership might lead to a reassessment or rejection of popular theory. Frank (2006), on the other hand, insists that it is important to balance the membership of congregations for them to have an impact on local communities. He also mentions the importance of balancing culturally driven rather than biblically driven leadership practices.

Cohn (1993) discusses the potential integration between leadership theories and Christian leadership, referencing Michel's social leadership theory. According to Michel, even in democratically structured organisations, power ultimately rests in the hands of one or a few leaders. This concentration of power is often seen as unacceptable by the organisation, yet most communities tend to gravitate toward this outcome. Cohn suggests that this understanding has been useful in understanding ecclesiastical leadership, particularly when the congregation views the church leader as indispensable, holding significant influence with no competent leader available to replace them. In such cases, Michel's social leadership theory becomes evident in church dynamics. Thus, Christian leadership scholars recognise that general leadership theories offer valuable insights and truths that can be effectively applied within a Christian context (Huizing, 2011).

The purity of scripture is essential in developing a theology of leadership. Beeley (2009) maintains that the starting point of any research in this area must be a theology that defines leadership, rather than a leadership theory that defines theology. Without this distinction, a bifurcation may arise in which church financial issues are treated as practical matters, thereby undermining the character of God as supreme in theological matters. By developing a leadership theory that emerges from theology, a dichotomy in theology may ensue. Beeley (2009) argues that all practical matters will be subsumed under the theological, which is a necessary and prerequisite outcome for all who submit themselves to the authority of Christ. In this context, Gortner (2009) contends that the similarities between the study of general leadership and Christian leadership are neither coincidental nor minimal. Rather, general leadership offers significant insights for the Christian leader. According to Huizing (2011), a Christian leader

developing a theology of leadership benefits from being deeply informed by general leadership research. Frank (2006) argues that today's church leaders often consider leadership in terms of preaching, teaching, and pastoral care.

.....the work of managing churches and church institutions races on, expanding into areas as diverse as procedures for legal incorporation of church-sponsored activities, prevention of sexual harassment and abuse, public relations and legal liabilities in leasing church facilities to community organizations (Frank, 2006:18).

Frank (2006) expands on this idea, asserting that Christian leaders must identify the critical leadership challenges facing the church today. They should integrate these issues into a biblical framework informed by general leadership theory, understand how these challenges fit within the broader historical context of the church, and examine how past leaders have addressed similar difficulties. Moreover, Christian leaders must consider the implications for leadership development - not only within individual churches and their communities but also for the global church and those outside the faith.

C. Clark (2008) contends that context is critical in the development of a theology of leadership because it shapes the way in which a leader interprets scripture and its application to the situation at hand. This necessitates involvement in hermeneutics. Thus, leaders must interpret theology or church history within its constantly fluctuating context without losing sight of other elements. It is therefore important not to overlook the significant role and influence of contexts. Allowing scripture to define the context within which the community interprets its circumstances places the weight of leadership development on the revelation of God and his empowerment and guidance. Nonetheless, it is necessary to recognise that any particular leadership context is likely to develop, evolve, and change, especially when attempting to apply it to other contexts. Suffice it to say that the development of a theology of leadership must constantly balance the biblical narrative and its contextual application.

8. Leadership competencies

Christian leadership is primarily concerned with the life and ministry of the church in various contexts. Its broader meaning necessitates investigating leadership in secular organisations, such as business institutions. Areas of interest, such as business ethics, are becoming increasingly important. Consequently, Christian ethics has emerged as a natural meeting point between economic science and theology (Kessler & Kretzschmar, 2015).

D'Souza (1999) confirms that leadership focuses on purpose. Therefore, for Christian leaders, the purpose should be to pursue the same goal that Jesus pursued - helping people to become all that they can when with God. However, the major difference between general leadership and Christian leadership is that the latter is centred on God and seeks to glorify him in all its arrangements. While general leadership may be concerned with doing the right things, Christian leadership strives to promote godly values within communities.

The spirituality of ministry and the spirituality of leaders depend on vision. Vision transcends measurement; it cannot be neatly defined or confined by statements. However, in just a brief conversation with church leaders, it becomes clear whether they are merely performing a task or truly leading with the power of a vision (Johnson & Dreitcer, 2001). The core elements of a healthy spirituality are intricately woven into the fabric of a vision. A vision arises from an encounter with the Sacred, an encounter with God, and is received as a gift from beyond. This vision captures the spirit in a way that is in a convincing and compelling manner, merging with the spirit and engaging the mind and will (Johnson & Dreitcer, 2001).

The relationship between spirituality and vision in leadership should be clear and unmistakable. A vision requires personal communion with God, an engagement initiated by the Lord. The importance of a vision for a minister or church leader is equally significant for lay leaders, in their ministry within the church and in their broader vocation in the world. Spiritual leadership requires the mutual efforts of pastors and lay leaders. In this shared quest, through God's mysterious ways, the Spirit moves over the chaotic waters churning within the human spirit, bringing order, perspective, and direction. From this encounter with God, spiritual leaders step into

their ministry with focus, certainty, and empowerment. Leaders not only perceive the vision but also take active steps to implement it (Johnson & Dreitcer, 2001).

Leadership begins when a vision emerges (Haggai, 2009). Thus, vision ranks high as one of the marks of authentic Christian leadership in the workplace. A good leader must know where the institution is heading. According to Stiles (2004), vision inspires hope and obedience and awakens courage. The Christian leader must possess foresight and insight. An important aspect of strategic leadership is the focus on solutions. Life is inherently full of challenges, and people view their true leaders as agents of change who should improve their lives, whether in politics, business, the church, or in families (Flanagan & Finger, 2003). Effective church leaders should not necessarily solve problems for their constituencies but rather prepare them with the skills to confront their life challenges.

Integrity, self-discipline, and commitment are important competencies that a leader should strive for. However, honesty is a crucial aspect of the integrity of Christian leadership. Hybels (1978) contends that integrity is not the same as reputation, which merely reflects what others perceive of us. Integrity entails living a life that is consistent in belief and behaviour, in words and deeds (Stiles, 2004). In any workplace context, personal integrity will earn respect and followership for any leader. Consequently, Scazzero (2015) describes integrity as something that enables people to lead honest and transparent lives in their relationships with those with whom they are in conflict. All leaders are expected to possess self-discipline, which is the ability to manage oneself.

A leader is a person who has learned to obey a discipline imposed from without, and has taken on a more rigorous discipline from within...Many who aspire leadership fail because they have never learned to follow (Saunders, 2015:65).

Where a leader oversees people from different backgrounds, including those who know nothing about God or Christianity, only self-discipline will help the leader to lead effectively. Self-discipline, or mastering oneself before taking charge of others, is crucial in workplace spirituality. Leadership through a competent and ethical example is an essential dimension of authentic leadership in any workplace.

9. Leadership development in context

Throughout the years, various theories on leaders and leadership have been developed. The question of leadership has been the focus of considerable literature produced from a historical and theoretical perspective. Leadership is not something that is fixed; rather, it is something that can grow and expand (Roupnel et al., 2019). Leadership development programmes have mostly focused on collaborative learning and power sharing, aiming to challenge the ways of doing, thinking, and acting that hinder change (Baron, 2007). Although institutions have been increasingly using such programmes, leadership development nevertheless remains one of the least explored areas within the field of leadership research (Avolio et al., 2010).

During the second half of the 20th century, the focus of research shifted to analysing the behaviours associated with leadership. This shift involved investigating the compatibility of a leader's style with the organisational context in which the leader operates. This development coincided with the emergence of situational and contingency theories, which postulate that a leader is only effective in various situations if they are flexible enough to adopt a leadership style suitable for each context (Burns, 1978). Luc (2004), on the other hand, argues that leadership today is viewed as an asset akin to physical strength that can be improved. Leadership also derives its legitimacy in relation to the needs of a group, thus becoming a moral responsibility (Baron, 2007).

In the public domain, leadership has been associated with multiple competencies that foster specific behaviours and directions to bring out the best in people and promote self-improvement (Orazi et al., 2013; Van Wart, 2003). According to Cloet and Bournois (2011), leadership is future-oriented, emphasising the ability to drive change, motivate, inspire enthusiasm, and encourage adherence and commitment. Thus, it emerges through the creation and sharing of meaning in terms of sense-making and added value. Everyone can be considered a leader, provided their capacities are further developed.

Marquardt (2000) argues that we find ourselves in a new century that calls for a different type of leader, one equipped with a broader range of skills and competencies. Bass (2000) maintains that as organisations and institutions,

along with their working environments, become increasingly complex and interconnected, the role of a leader at any level also becomes more complex. This complexity compels the development of a leadership style that is more attuned to the issues facing institutions. Therefore, leadership styles must address organisational challenges through the development of the relationships established between leaders and their co-workers. Deschamps et al. (2016) argue that to develop and exercise leadership, managers must cultivate emotional intelligence.

De Beer (2016) asserts that the need for leadership development has evolved in response to internal and external pressures facing institutions and organisations. Internal pressures arise from institutional structures that challenge traditional leadership roles, while external pressures stem from rapid changes that create uncertainty, unpredictability, and complex problems that cannot be solved by a few leaders alone (De Beer, 2016). As a result, leadership development is increasingly recognised as a critical competitive advantage.

Developing a leader without considering the relationships and interactions within a social context overlooks the fact that leadership is inherently a dynamic exchange between an individual and their social or institutional environment. Likewise, attempting to establish a system of shared meaning and mutual commitments without investing in individual development risks placing people in situations that exceed their capacity to navigate effectively (Day, 2000). However, Dalakoura (2010) offers another explanation for the challenges in distinguishing between leader and leadership development. She argues that researchers have often treated leadership as an individual phenomenon, emphasising the behaviours and skills of leaders. Like leadership itself, the learning process requires time and demands the participants' full attention (Henein & Morissette, 2007; Parent, 2013).

Leadership revolves around building relationships and establishing clear expectations between individuals. Leaders must demonstrate trustworthiness, integrity, and fairness - not only in their interactions with subordinates but also regarding their work responsibilities. They should work diligently and conscientiously to refine their strategies and approaches, ensuring the effective functioning of the organisation. Because of variations in the skills required, roles played, and tasks and job duties performed,

leaders must utilise their skills efficiently. Another aspect to consider in this theory is the range of skills that leaders must possess. These include time management, technical, communication, analytical ability, problem-solving, critical thinking, conflict resolution, decision-making, work ethics, and presentation skills. Leaders need to employ these skills on a regular basis. When changes occur, the effective implementation of these skills will enable leaders to carry out their work duties successfully.

Human resources are a crucial aspect of leadership effectiveness. The generation of information regarding management and the development of human resources are essential for achieving organisational goals and enhancing the overall structure of the organisation. Important factors to consider within the organisation include developing a learning climate, designing training programmes, transmitting necessary information and experience, evaluating results, providing career counselling, enriching organisational culture, promoting organisational change, implementing modern and innovative teaching-learning methods, and formulating rules and regulations.

According to the contingency model of leadership, anyone who implements strategies and approaches appropriately can be a good leader. Leadership emphasises the importance of forming sociable relationships with others and performing job duties effectively. Leaders must demonstrate consistency, integrity, sincerity, and principles when interacting with subordinates and customers, as well as during the execution of job duties and in fostering improvements to the organisational structure. They should work diligently and attentively to transform their procedures and methodologies, particularly to ensure the effective functioning of the organisation. Given the competencies required and the activities performed, leaders must be genuine and unpretentious.

Another important aspect to consider within this theory is the enhancement of relationships, which should be built on mutual understanding amongst individuals. Leaders need to possess skills in time management, the use of technology, resource management, communication, investigation, analysis, problem-solving, logical thinking, conflict resolution, decision-making, and maintaining work ethics. These factors should be taken into account by leaders throughout their roles. When transformations occur, the effective

implementation of these skills will enable leaders to perform their duties well and achieve the desired outcomes.

Research studies have examined leadership styles that enhance leaders' ability to fulfil their responsibilities and improve their efficiency. Possessing a thoughtful nature, demonstrating appropriate actions, and addressing problems and challenges are not easily manageable tasks. The critical question that requires further investigation by researchers is: what factors must leaders consider to enhance their performance and conduct? Leadership generally encompasses several meanings specific to the operationalisation of organisational structure. In all forms of communication - whether verbal or written, formal or informal - leaders must ensure that they promote positivity and constructivism amongst their subordinates. When leaders are approachable and possess a friendly attitude, they create enjoyable and harmonious relationships with their team. In this way, employees feel comfortable approaching their leaders without fear or apprehension. When subordinates perceive that leaders treat them as a cohesive unit, they are more likely to be motivated to engage with tasks and activities.

10. Conclusion

This chapter reviewed existing literature on the research topic and explored philosophical issues in scholarly writings on it. The researcher conducted an in-depth study of books, articles, and publications on spirituality and leadership development, emphasising their interconnectedness.

In conclusion, spirituality and leadership development build the collective capacity of individuals by engaging them effectively in leadership roles and responsibilities (Day, 2000). Moreover, leadership is not merely the result of traditional training but also a series of activities designed to develop communities by enabling them to learn through experience (Dalakoura, 2010). Intense Spirituality and leadership development programmes must prioritise access to diverse learning methodologies to cultivate effective leadership. Therefore, leadership development, coupled with spirituality, should not be treated as a once-off initiative, but as an institutional priority. Strengthening the personal and professional capacities of leaders will equip

them to respond more effectively to the demands of their social context, ultimately enhancing institutional mission and development performance.

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Chapter 6

Enhancing spiritual well-being through walking: A journey of transformation

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I need to stop talking and just walk; I need to walk to get my footing to walk my thoughts into the earth. I need to walk for those who do not know another way; I feel compelled to imprint a deeper consciousness of caring into our work and world. I want to walk for myself as well as for those who do not see nor know the origins or purpose of their calling. I have to have time out and just walk (Gros, 2014).

1. Introduction

I have walked through countless places and spaces, crossing the boundaries of time. Let me be your compass, guiding you through the journey of my research, step by step. This chapter explores the transformative power of walking and its impact on spiritual well-being. My personal interest in this connection was first sparked by the opportunity to participate in the Boland90 walking competition, a three-day event that involved walking 30 kilometres each day through the Hottentots Holland mountain region. However, because of trail damage from global warming, the event was cancelled, which led to the creation of a personalised walking challenge, the Stedra80-Camino.

The acronym “Stedra” (“Ste”[llenbosch] and “Dra”[kenstein]) derives from two municipal districts located in the Cape Winelands area. The Stedra80-Camino is a walking journey that covers a total of 80 kilometres over three days, starting from the Giraffe House on the R101 and passing through towns such as Klapmuts, Paarl, Wemmershoek, Franschoek, Boschendal, and Simondium in the Stellenbosch and Drakenstein districts. My familiarity with the route comes from my fieldwork conducted for my doctoral study.

Walking has been a fundamental part of human existence for millennia, with scholars offering various interpretations of this universal activity. Rebecca Solnit (2001) characterises walking as a deliberate, unhurried movement on foot that invites deep contemplation. Gros (2014), by contrast, defines it simply as the basic act of placing one foot in front of the other, while Kagge (2020) frames it as taking one step at a time. Terrien (2003) expands on this, portraying walking as not only a connection to wisdom gained through experience but also as a way of life. Watson (2006:290) sees walking as an opportunity for personal reflection, a moment to pause and assess one’s progress. Amartya Sen (1999) perceives walking as a creative activity; a form of introspection or meditation on the quality of life. Lucas and Diener (2008) highlight how walking establishes time and rhythm, while fostering a connection between the senses and the inner self, making it a transformative and motivational experience. Gros (2014) also associates walking with fun and playfulness, and Kagge (2020) emphasises that it nurtures inner peace, cultivating patience and silence.

Walking has always held a deep significance for me, shaped by my family’s tradition of walking. I come from a lineage of women who have used walking as a source of relief from pain, a form of cleansing, and a way to gain perspective. For us, walking is a means of healing and distancing ourselves from negative emotions. It plays a vital role in our overall well-being, offering fresh and unique perspectives on life that have been passed down through generations.

2. A journey of spiritual well-being through walking

The first three weeks of the COVID-19 (coronavirus disease 2019) lockdown were especially challenging for me, as someone who finds solace and joy in walking, hiking, and connecting with nature. As a free-spirited individual, I deeply cherish the simplicity of life's pleasures. In her insightful work, Collins-Kreiner (2010) explores the transformative power of walking, illustrating how it not only fosters a sense of community but also evokes profound emotional responses in individuals. Through a combination of scholarly analysis and creative exploration, Collins-Kreiner (2010) vividly demonstrates how the simple act of walking can shape our emotional landscapes and strengthen the bonds that connect us.

For me, walking is not only about developing the physique; it serves as a spiritual practice that nourishes my soul. As the weeks passed, my longing for the outdoors grew stronger. I began to explore creative ways to fulfil my need for physical and spiritual nourishment. Yet, confined to my home, surrounded by technological distractions and inundated with news of the pandemic's toll, I felt my spirit become increasingly restless and anxious. This internal turmoil manifested in various physical symptoms, from disrupted sleep patterns to digestive issues and persistent headaches. It became evident that my well-being was intricately linked to my ability to connect with nature through walking. This realisation sparked a personal journey of exploration into the profound effects of walking on spiritual well being.

Through my research, I discovered that walking has the power to enhance various aspects of well-being, including caring, healing, engagement, sympathy, thoughtfulness, and sharing (Hannibal, 2023). Walking allows us to care for others as well as the environment, fostering a sense of community and connection. It serves as a healing practise, offering solace and peace in times of distress. Engaging with the natural world stimulates empathy and encourages deep reflection.

The transition from strict lockdown measures to more lenient restrictions marked a key moment in my journey. With the move to level four restrictions, the freedom to walk outdoors from 6 a.m. to 9 a.m. brought a profound sense of liberation. Adjusting to this new routine became essential,

and I eagerly embraced the opportunity to reconnect with nature through walking. To my surprise, the habit of rising early for my morning walks left me feeling invigorated. Despite weeks of confinement, the joy of walking seemed to dissolve all previous limitations. My soul felt rejuvenated, and my body responded positively to the renewed physical activity.

The news that hiking or walking was once again permitted filled me with excitement and anticipation. The thought of venturing into the mountains, basking in the warm sunlight, and reconnecting with nature brought me boundless joy. At last, I would have the chance to experience true freedom, to immerse myself in the natural world, and to nurture my spiritual well-being once more.

Walking is a powerful tool for enhancing spiritual well-being, particularly during challenging times such as pandemics and lockdown periods. The ability to connect with nature, engage in physical activity, and reflect on one's life can have a profound impact on one's overall sense of well-being. By embracing walking as a transformative journey, individuals can tap into the deep connection between mind, body, and spirit, fostering a sense of inner peace, patience, and well-being.

3. Good health and well-being

The discourse surrounding the practice of walking in relation to well-being has gained significant attention in recent years. Researchers and organisations such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Federation for Mental Health (WFMH) have highlighted the importance of walking as a cost-effective and accessible form of physical exercise that can contribute to preventing cardiovascular disease (CVD), addressing obesity, and reducing symptoms of depression. Moreover, studies have shown that walking in natural environments can provide even greater benefits to emotional well-being compared to walking indoors (Bowler et al., 2010; Thompson Coon et al., 2011).

The idea that walking promotes health is well supported, despite the subjective nature of 'well-being' as a concept. The WHO (2012) and WFMH (2012), along with various scholars, agree that CVD (Yusuf et al., 2020), obesity (Guh et al., 2009), and depression (Luppino et al., 2010)

are on the rise, posing threats to physical and mental well-being. Research shows that walking outdoors in nature further enhances emotional well-being compared to indoor walking (Bowler et al., 2010; Thompson Coon et al., 2011).

Walking comprehends the art of knowledge and is associated with the unique features of human language. It is not merely a physical activity but is intertwined with understanding, learning, and cognition. Walking is a complex activity that embodies knowledge and understanding, similar to how language functions as a unique tool for human expression and communication. The philosophy of walking presents a series of thoughts and trends on the definition of walking (Gros, 2014). From the literature discussed thus far, it is clear that while there are correlations in defining walking, there are also notable disparities. A range of themes has emerged from these discussions, touching on aspects such as movement, thinking, lifestyle, inventory, connection, time, rhythm, space, cleansing, spirit, and healing - all shaped by the ideology of walking. You as the individual dictate the pace, space, rhythm, and time. The type of well-being that you need determines the kind of walking that you will engage in, which in turn influences and contributes to your overall quality of life (Hannibal, 2023).

While the concept of “well-being” is subjective, it is clear that walking has a significant impact on physical and mental health. The philosophy of walking, as articulated by scholars like Gros (2014), emphasises the multifaceted nature of this activity, encompassing themes of movement, thought, connection, and healing. People have the freedom to determine the pace, space, rhythm, and duration of their walks according to their specific well-being needs.

4. Quality of life: Influenced by one’s state of well-being

Enhancing spiritual well-being through walking is a transformative journey that emphasises the vital role spiritual well-being plays in improving an individual’s quality of life. This aligns with the Australian Bureau of Statistics (s.a.) definition of well-being as the pursuit of optimal health, better living conditions, and an enhanced quality of life. Well-being is measured by evaluating life events and social contexts that impact

individuals, ultimately influencing personal lives and societal cohesion. Quality of life, in turn, is shaped by an individual's perception of their place in the world, influenced by cultural and value systems, physical health, psychological state, level of independence, social relationships, and environment. Human development seeks to expand individuals' freedom to achieve what they value, contributing to longer, healthier lives, access to education, and overall improvement in quality of life (Sen, 1999).

Spiritual well-being, as explored in this chapter, plays a crucial role in enhancing an individual's overall quality of life. It adds a deeper dimension to traditional measures of well-being, encompassing meaning, purpose, and a connection to something greater than oneself. When individuals prioritise their spiritual well-being through activities like walking and connecting with nature, they embark on a transformative journey that positively influences their overall sense of fulfilment.

There has been significant focus on the impact of well-being on an individual's quality of life. This perception is influenced by cultural value systems and is affected by physical health, psychological state, level of independence, social relationships, and environment. Human development aims to expand individuals' freedom to pursue what they value in life. This can be achieved by empowering individuals to actively participate in their own growth and development. This approach promotes longer, healthier lives, access to education, and improvements in overall well-being. Success is measured not only by material gains, but also by the lives that people are able to lead and the capabilities that they can fully realise.

Gros (2014) warns that the pursuit of unlimited wealth can lead to blind materialism and a loss of quality of life. It is essential to consider the cost to one's well-being when engaging in various activities. Social, psychological, and material deficiencies, particularly amongst the poor, contribute to disparities in health outcomes nationally and globally. Addressing these disparities is often difficult, as an essential yet unrecognised component of quality of life is overlooked. Quality of life is not merely a state of mind or a condition, but rather a relationship between the quality of external conditions and an individual's personal circumstances. It holds intrinsic value and is deeply influenced by the unique qualities of the individual (Hannibal, 2023).

The relationship between well-being, quality of life, and spiritual well-being is complex and multifaceted. Recognising the significance of spiritual well-being and engaging in practices like walking can lead to profound personal transformation, enriching one’s life. This holistic approach to well-being not only benefits individuals personally but also contributes to a greater sense of unity and interconnectedness within society. By acknowledging the vital role of spiritual well-being in shaping quality of life, we can consciously pursue practices that support and elevate this essential dimension of our overall well-being.

5. Methodology: Methods and data collection

This study employed an empirical qualitative research methodology with a sample of 30 walkers. The Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Western Cape approved the ethical clearance application for this research. Participants gave their informed consent before the fieldwork was conducted. Primary data were gathered through virtual semi-structured interviews and participant observation, using various digital platforms such as Google Forms, Google Meet, Signal, voice notes, email, and WhatsApp. The sample specifically included individuals who regularly engage in walking, allowing for an in-depth exploration of their motivations and walking styles. When analysing the gender distribution across different age groups (Figure 1), it was observed that 70% of the participants were female, while 30% were male (Figure 2).

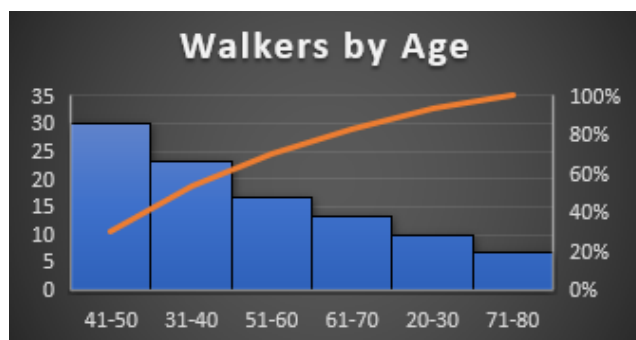


Figure 1: Age

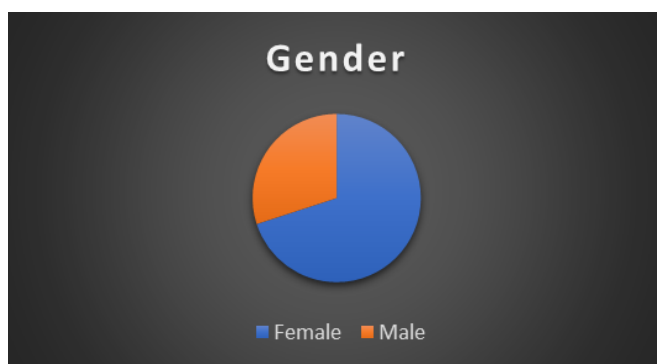


Figure 2: Gender

6. Discussion of findings

The analysis aimed to decompose data into manageable themes, patterns, trends, and relationships, providing a comprehensive understanding of the underlying components through the examination of concepts, constructs, or variables (Babbie & Mouton, 2005). To achieve this, the researcher utilised qualitative content analysis and narrative analysis. The former enables the testing of conceptual problems, measurement of impact, and evaluation of correlations within qualitative data (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Cole, 1988; Krippendorff, 1980). The latter, commonly employed in ethnographic research, focuses on analysing participants' perceptions and experiences derived from interviews, observations, and surveys (Atkinson et al., 2000; Bamberg, 2012). These two methods complement each other effectively within the research framework. The study specifically investigated how a personalised COVID-19 walking trail influenced participants' quality of life and perceptions of well-being. This was aligned with interview questions that asked probing sub-questions related to the effects of walking. It included group interactions and a sense of belonging during the pandemic. Longitudinally, data were collected over several months, with walking sessions occurring at 21-day intervals to track steps and kilometres. To ensure consistency, an interview template was developed, and the data were systematically organised in a database. The analysis process involved identifying themes and trends, employing tools such as pivot tables in Microsoft Excel to filter and organise the data based on various variables.

Introduction: Theological foundation

Walking, as a human act, can be seen as part of the theological mission of caring for the *imago Dei*, the image of the Father is embodied in each person. The Apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 3:16–17 that “you are His temple and that His Spirit dwells in you”. This assertion reminds us that the human body is sacred, a vessel of divine presence. Therefore, practises that nurture the body, such as walking and pursuing wellness, can be reframed as sacred acts, expressions of spiritual stewardship. This theological foundation supports the CHESTS model of walking and wellness, where caring, healing, engaging, sympathetic, thinking, and sharing are not merely attributes of healthy individuals, but also of those who honour the divine image within themselves and others.

6.1 Walking: The CHESTS of well-being

In contemporary society, walking continues to be a meaningful practice that embodies various qualities identified by walkers. These qualities - caring, healing, engaging, sympathetic, thinking, and sharing - together form the acronym “CHESTS”. By creating this acronym, I sought to capture the essence of safeguarding and nurturing, highlighting how these attributes contribute to overall well-being. CHESTS embodies the various dimensions of health and wellness experienced through walking, enhancing our holistic understanding of this activity. Walking serves as a spiritual tool (Lucas, 2016), intertwined with diverse discourses and recognised as a purifying practice (Slavin, 2003). It provides individuals with inspiration and intentions (Lucas, 2016).

6.2 The caring walker

Lerner et al. (2005) define “caring” as the expression of sympathetic and empathetic sentiments towards others, highlighting the intrinsic connection between empathy and compassion. Conversely, Conradson (2016) emphasises the critical role that walking plays in self-care, personal development, and fostering balance in body, mind, and spirit. Walking becomes a means for nurturing oneself while cultivating greater self-awareness. This raises important questions about why individuals identify

as “caring walkers”, encouraging a deeper examination of the relationship between walking practices and empathetic dispositions.

“It is good and important to care about one’s health – mentally and physically” (Cedar¹).

The above walker’s concern for their overall well-being is the foundation for their caring nature. This sentiment is supported by Gros (2014), who states: “I need to stop talking and just walk; I need to walk to get my footing to walk my thoughts into the earth. I need to walk for those who do not know another way; I feel compelled to imprint a deeper consciousness of caring into our work and world. I want to walk for myself as well as for those who do not see nor know the origins or purpose of their calling. I have to have time out and just walk”. In theological terms, caring for oneself and others through walking can be seen as a participation in divine compassion. Just as the Father demonstrates care for creation, the walker, embodying care, honours the sacredness of life, their own and that of others, as bearers of His image.

6.3 *The healing walker*

Walking offers pathways to healing and fosters a profound sense of spiritual liberation for those who engage in this practice. Grounded in a spirituality connected to one’s surroundings, commonly referred to as a “spirituality of habitat”, walking not only brings about healing but also evokes a range of feelings, including feelings of levity. This phenomenon arises from the inherent ability to share communal responsibilities with fellow inhabitants of the earth, as proposed by Wuthnow (1998). Several walkers shared their perspectives regarding the therapeutic properties of walking, captured as follows:

“Sometimes it helps to be out in the open to heal some wounds from the day” (Cove).

“My walking helps me stay well and manage stress and anxiety; hence, I choose ‘healing’” (Ocean).

1 Names have been replaced with pseudonyms.

“When I walk, I like to engage with people to find out their reasons for walking and whether I can relate with them” (Sage).

The walkers’ insights highlight the therapeutic implications of walking, suggesting that the activity fosters a sense of healing for the individual. This inference indicates that immersion in outdoor environments, combined with the physical exertion of walking, enhances an individual’s resilience against the emotional turmoil encountered throughout the day. Moreover, the walkers view walking as a beneficial practice that aids in preserving physical health, managing stress, and reducing anxiety. Beyond its physiological benefits, the walkers find satisfaction in interpersonal interactions during their walks, expressing a keen interest in understanding their fellow walkers’ motives and discovering common ground. Such sentiments emphasise the profound significance of social connectivity during walking expeditions, positioning it as a crucial element contributing to their holistic well-being. Healing through walking becomes an act of restoration not only of the body, but also of the soul. In Christian spirituality, healing is often linked to reconciliation with Him, self, and others. As walkers experience healing in nature and community, they mirror the holistic shalom He desires for humanity - wholeness in body, mind, and spirit.

6.4 The engaging walker

Engagement, as suggested by Collins-Kreiner (2010), fosters a comprehensive understanding of social and environmental sustainability, encompassing the collective consciousness towards these vital domains. In the context of walking, engagement evokes a profound *sense of flow* for the walker - an experiential state where temporal constraints dissolve and self-awareness recedes, leaving a heightened focus on the immediate experience. Seligman (2011) states that this concept of “flow” is a cornerstone of positive psychology, describes a state of unmitigated absorption and euphoria in the present moment. Through immersion in activities that identify deeply with personal passions and values, individuals unlock the gateway to wholehearted engagement with the present, thus transcending into the realm of flow (Seligman, 2011). The walkers demonstrated manifestations of well-being through multifaceted engagements, exhibiting a

spectrum of behaviours and interactions that highlighted their holistic state of wellness:

“Engaging – I walk with family members, and use walking as a catch-up session” (Aspen).

“When I walk, I like to engage with people to find out their reasons for walking and whether I can relate with them” (Bay).

These two walking enthusiasts, despite their unique backgrounds, shared a common passion for engaging in the practice of walking. Both walkers articulated their active involvement in walking endeavours, whether embarked upon alone or accompanied by family members. For them, walking transcended mere physical exercise, it served as an avenue for forging meaningful connections and spending quality time with loved ones. Their interactions during walks were characterised by a genuine interest in engaging with fellow walkers, seeking to comprehend their motivations and establish shared experiences. Building upon Dahl’s (1972) proposition that meaningful engagement is vital for human connection, their experiences emphasised the multifaceted nature of leisure, encompassing physical, mental, spiritual, and social dimensions, as elucidated by Andrews (2006). Engagement through walking echoes the biblical notion of walking with Him (cf. Genesis 5:24, Micah 6:8). The walker who engages with creation and community participates in a spiritual rhythm of relationship and attentiveness, fostering a deeper sense of communion with the world and with the divine.

6.5 *The sympathetic walker*

A *sympathetic walker*, also known as an “empathetic walker” or “sensory walker”, describes someone who engages in walking with the intent of experiencing their surroundings through another person’s perspective - essentially “walking in someone else’s shoes”. This concept involves developing a deep understanding and empathy for others’ lived experiences by physically immersing oneself in their environment. While the term “sympathetic walker” may not have widespread usage, researchers, psychologists, and philosophers have extensively explored the concept of cultivating empathy through shared experiences. Bogard (2020) discusses

walking as an intervention tool to promote empathy and connection, highlighting its potential to enhance understanding through shared experiences. The walkers themselves often feel that this practice shapes them into sympathetic walkers, deepening their connection to others:

“Sympathy intertwines deeply with the essence of what walking signifies to me. As I embark on each step of my journey, whether through bustling city streets or serene natural landscapes, I find myself attuned to the subtle rhythms of the world around me” (Storm).

This walker exhibits a profound emotional and cognitive attachment to the practice of walking. For them, walking transcends mere physical exercise, serving as a conduit for connection with their environment, nature, and fellow beings. Each step taken holds personal resonance, offering solace, inspiration, and opportunities for deep introspection. Walking becomes a meditative ritual, a sacred journey of self-discovery and contemplation. Amongst the various qualities associated with walking, the focus here is on the concept of the *sympathetic walker*. To walk sympathetically is to imitate the Creator, who entered into human suffering and walked alongside the marginalised. The act of ‘walking in another’s shoes’ identifies with the incarnational theology of the Father becoming human, sharing in our condition to redeem it. Notably, 75% of the walkers identified themselves as sympathetic walkers, highlighting the cognitive engagement and reflective nature that define their walking experience.

6.6 *The language of a thoughtful walker*

Various scholars present different definitions of walking. Vaillant (2012:45) defines a *thoughtful walker* as “someone who engages in walking while actively contemplating and reflecting on ideas”. According to Vaillant, a thoughtful walker approaches walking with intention and concentration, using the rhythmic motion to stimulate thought. Solnit (2001) highlights the intrinsic connection between walking and thinking, suggesting that the two are deeply intertwined in a relationship of mutual reinforcement. She describes walking as a slow, deliberate movement that naturally fosters reflection, making it an ideal companion for thoughtful contemplation. In this way, walking becomes more than just physical activity - it transforms into a therapeutic practice, offering a process of cleansing and healing.

Terrien (2003:261), whose work aligns with this perspective, views walking as not only a path to gaining wisdom but also as a way of life deeply intertwined with personal growth and reflection. The participants in this research echoed this sentiment, affirming that walking contributed positively to their well-being. They relayed the idea of thinking through walking as follows:

“I use walking to clear my thoughts. It also helps me in decision-making and calms my mind” (Canyon).

“Praying and clear thinking occurs when I walk because I am alone and feel centred. Looking at the sky and my surroundings soothe me. Walking is thinking. Walking is clarity” (Grove).

“Walking at any given time in silence gives me time to think and take a pause during activities” (River).

“When walking, I usually think about a variety of things” (Kai).

“I overthink about things when I walk by myself” (Harbor).

“Because it is noisy in my head! I listen to music to get my thoughts off work, if just for a little while” (Prairie).

“Walking allows time for thinking about all things” (Caspian).

“When I walk, I think of my personal life” (Wren).

“Because I think all the time when walking” (Juniper).

“Walking calms me and helps me to ‘air’ and process my thoughts” (Nova).

The walkers experienced a profound sense of mental clarity and tranquillity during their walking activities. Walking became a medium for channelling their thoughts and contemplating various aspects of their lives. For them, it was not merely a physical exercise but a cognitive process that facilitated self-reflection and nurtured a deeper sense of self. One walker vividly described how walking helped them untangle their thoughts, make decisions, and achieve mental equilibrium. They found solace and a spiritual connection while walking alone, immersed in the calming beauty of nature. For this walker, walking was synonymous with clarity of thought, offering

a moment of pause and reflection amid the chaos of daily life. Despite a tendency to overthink, they found relief from stress and anxiety through the meditative rhythm of walking. Whether using music as a temporary distraction or contemplating personal challenges, walking provided a sanctuary for mental rejuvenation and organisation of thoughts. As Gros (2014:20) aptly states, “Think while walking, walk while thinking, and let writing be but the light pause, as the body on a walk rests in contemplation of wide open spaces”. Thoughtful walking becomes a form of spiritual contemplation. As the Psalmist declares, “I remember you as I pour out my soul... I walk among the throng” (Psalm 42:4). In such walking, the human mind aligns with divine wisdom, and thinking becomes a sacred act, a dialogue with the Spirit within.

6.7 *The sharing walker*

Walking serves as a conduit for physical vitality and mental well-being, fostering a deep connection with the inner self. It not only revitalises the body but also nourishes the spirit, promoting personal growth and symbolising a harmonious unity within oneself. Embracing walking as a peaceful ritual lays the foundation for navigating life’s challenges with resilience and making decisions that align with one’s authentic essence (Hannibal, 2023). Power (2015) explores the concept of “rural walking” as a form of pilgrimage, encompassing traditional elements of the journey, communal exchange of experiences and wisdom, and shared meals along the way. Power emphasises that walkers form meaningful connections by sharing their knowledge and insights during these collective expeditions. This ethos of shared journeying is central to the profound spiritual connections forged through pilgrimage walking, emphasising the significance of arriving at the final destination as a unified collective. The walker identifies as a “sharing walker”, a designation rooted in a multifaceted rationale, as explained as follows:

“I chose sharing because I love sharing and the idea of how walking can change your life. Your health [and] fitness will improve, and it has a great effect [on your] mental [and] emotional state as well” (Koa).

Sharing emerges as a key facet intertwined with the practice of walking or embarking on a pilgrimage. Amidst the quiet reflection, that often defines the journey; subtle gestures of camaraderie - a smile, a nod, or a simple gesture - carry more weight than words. Within this framework, the walker expresses a deep affinity for sharing, motivated by the desire to impart their knowledge and experiences about the transformative power of walking. Opting for the descriptor “sharing”, they aim to convey how walking can profoundly influence one’s physical health, mental well-being, and emotional equilibrium. This belief aligns with their belief in the capacity of walking to bring about meaningful improvements in various aspects of life. Through the act of sharing, they hope to inspire others to embrace walking as a salutary practice. Sharing, at its core, reflects the communal nature of the Trinity and the biblical mandate to bear one another’s burdens (Galatians 6:2). When walkers share their journeys, they enact a theology of companionship, mutual edification, and spiritual solidarity, living out the truth that we are not alone in our pilgrimage of life.

7. Conclusion

In future, further research into the philosophy of walking will deepen our understanding of its role in fostering holistic well-being. By continuing to engage with this discourse, we can uncover new insights and approaches for promoting individualised quality of life through walking.

The exploration of themes in this study reinforces the idea that walking plays a vital role in the shared experiences of walkers. As the impact of walking on overall well-being was examined, it became clear that participants reported many similar experiences across the different categories of the CHESTS framework for well-being. Walking transcends its literal definition; it is more than the physical act of placing one foot in front of the other. It is closely linked to the purpose behind each walker’s engagement in the activity. Walking serves as a tool to clear the mind, bring calm, process thoughts, and facilitate decision-making. Regardless of the specific intention, walking consistently had a positive impact on overall well-being.

Furthermore, the type of walking experienced often involves overcoming obstacles, enduring challenges, and persevering through difficulties to achieve well-being. This journey allows walkers to develop a deeper appreciation for good health and well-being. Thus, walking is deemed essential for maintaining optimal health and well-being.

In addition to its physical benefits, walking fosters a profound connection with the natural world, allowing individuals to appreciate its tranquillity and effortless beauty. While time is a necessary element in any walking journey, it does not hinder the freedom to move forward. Instead, walking empowers individuals to progress, step by step, without succumbing to weariness. This paradoxical nature of walking makes it an essential aspect of well-being.

The discourse surrounding walking encompasses a wide range of topics, including walking as a form of movement, exploration, leisure, and protest. It explores the physical experience, psychological effects, cultural and historical significance, as well as the social and political implications of walking. Throughout history, scholars have shown great interest in the study of walking, exploring its connection to the mind and body, its relationship with nature, its sensory experience, and its impact on overall well-being.

The discourse also considers the conundrum of walking, encompassing the caring, and healing, engaging, sympathetic, thoughtful, and shared experiences of walkers. Ultimately, walking becomes more than a wellness practice; it is a sacred journey of spiritual formation. By walking with care, healing, engagement, sympathy, thoughtfulness, and sharing, individuals honour the divine image within themselves and others. This way of walking nurtures the whole person; body, mind, and spirit and aligns with a theological mission to honour our Creator by honouring the temple of the body. Consequently, the CHESTS framework is not only a model of well-being but also a vision of embodied spirituality rooted in the biblical affirmation of the sacredness of personhood.

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Chapter 7

Spirituality, development, and mission: A path to social transformation in South Africa

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1. Introduction

South Africa is widely recognised for its strong religious inclination, as reflected in census data from 1996, 2001, and 2012, as well as the General Household Survey of 2013 (StatsSA, 2004; 2014). Religious communities in South Africa play a significant role as some of the most influential and enduring institutions. South Africa is one of only three nations globally where religious involvement has increased in recent years (Forster, 2024). Using 2022 census data, Forster (2024; see StatsSA, 2023) reports that 96.1% of South Africans adhere to or engage with some form of religion, with 85.3% identifying as Christians across various denominations. Holte and Rabe (2022) support the characterisation of South Africa as a highly religious nation (see Beukes, 2024:195).

Research indicates that more than 50% of South Africans attend religious services weekly. Faith-based organisations (FBOs) have a distinct advantage in their ability to consistently and systematically engage with and influence the public, surpassing governmental and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Additionally, a substantial segment of the population - 79.8%,



according to the 2001 census - identifies as Christian (StatsSA, 2004). This finding is further corroborated by various scholars, including Coertzen (2012), Erasmus (2005; 2007), and Erasmus and Hendriks (2003) (see Beukes, 2024:195).

Similarly, Chipkin and Leatt (2011) share this perspective, noting that South Africans continue to view religion as significant in addressing sociopolitical issues, whether as a shield or as a means of negotiating persistent socio-economic challenges (Chipkin & Leatt, 2011:39-46). It is therefore unsurprising that religion played a crucial role in transforming apartheid South Africa into a democratic post-apartheid nation. The influence of religion in South Africa is evident in the way that religious leaders and institutions actively challenged and exposed the injustices of apartheid in all its manifestations (see Davids, 2024; Naidoo, 2023; Forster, 2024; Davids et al., 2023; Makofane & Botha, 2019:89; Weisse et al., 2015; Masuku, 2014:16).

However, since the establishment of a post-apartheid and new democracy in South Africa in 1994, Christian leaders and institutions have become increasingly passive, resulting in limited or negligible influence on social transformation (Makofane & Botha, 2019:89). While there have been improvements since 1994, progress has been too slow to bring about substantial change. Similarly, Beukes and Beukes (2023) and Davids (2024:12) argue that although democracy has been established in South Africa, it has yet to achieve a socially just and equitable society.

This is also evident in the work of Swart (2013) and Knoetze (2014), who contend that contemporary South Africa has seen a resurgence of discontent amongst impoverished black communities and labour sectors, reminiscent of the apartheid era. These groups increasingly engage in militant protests, riots, and strikes in response to inadequate living conditions and poor municipal service delivery. Furthermore, while the South African Government has recognised unemployment, poverty, and social injustice as key challenges that must be addressed to build a strong nation, its efforts to tackle social injustices in post-apartheid South Africa have thus far focused primarily on political and civil rights. At the same time, the socio-economic needs of a significant portion of the country's impoverished and marginalised population remain unfulfilled (Beukes & Beukes, 2023:2).

As a result, South Africa continues to be plagued by widespread social and economic inequities, manifesting in corruption, poverty, inequality, and unemployment. These and other social ills have, as Vellem (2014:274) describes, turned the nation into a “squatter camp”. Regrettably, it is the poor and marginalised who bear the greatest burden.

Given this contextual backdrop, the need for ongoing social transformation in South African society is well documented and remains a pressing concern for religious communities, the government, and other stakeholders in civil society - even after three decades of democracy. Social transformation reflects dissatisfaction with the current situation and the desire to move from an undesirable context towards a more just and equitable society (Beyers, 2021:44; Du Toit, 1999:3). This may signify a transition away from poverty, underdevelopment, social inequality, inadequate education, and insufficient healthcare. In this regard, the concept of “development” is closely linked to transformation (Beyers, 2021:44). Middleton and O’Keefe (2001:6) assert that development implies an initial state of underdevelopment, which, in most cases, refers to poverty. The goal of development is to promote social justice, reduce poverty, and establish strong, independent, and functioning organisations (Middleton & O’Keefe, 2001:9). Furthermore, Middleton and O’Keefe (2001:12, 14) stress that development should be understood as enabling individuals to help themselves. Tomalin (2013:5) defines development as “broad processes of social change” (see Beyers, 2021:56).

Building on this foundation, this interdisciplinary chapter explores the interconnected roles of spirituality, development, and mission in South Africa, examining their potential to drive social transformation. Through a comprehensive literature review, it briefly outlines the socio-economic, socio-political, and socio-historical context of South Africa, along with its persistent challenges related to social inequality, poverty, and systemic injustice.

The chapter further explores the role of spirituality, development, and mission in addressing these issues and fostering sustainable transformation. It highlights, first, the potential of each of these dimensions and, second, the significance of their interconnectedness in promoting social transformation in South Africa. By recognising these interconnections and utilising their

strengths, integrated strategies can be developed to tackle the country's complex challenges. The chapter concludes by calling for further research to examine the specific mechanisms and key actors involved in social transformation and to explore the potential of spirituality, development, and mission in other contexts facing similar challenges.

2. South African context: The need for ongoing social transformation

Although the end of apartheid brought the prospect of a renewed and improved South Africa, poverty remains a significant barrier to the nation's development and transformation. In 2022, 18.2 million South Africans lived in severe poverty (Cowling, 2023), an increase of approximately 120,000 individuals since 2021. Projections estimate that this number will rise to 18.5 million by 2025 (Cowling, 2023). Despite South Africa's progress in addressing poverty since the transition to democracy, poverty levels rose significantly between 2011 and 2015, threatening the gains made (World Bank Group, 2018:xx). Harold (2018:25) reports that 26 million South Africans live below the poverty line of \$2 per day. He echoes Shabala (2016), arguing that black South Africans face considerable disadvantages compared to their white counterparts, as only 4% of black South African adults hold a tertiary qualification, compared to 25% of white South Africans. Expanding on this racial analysis of poverty in South Africa, Harold (2018:25) asserts that white individuals hold 70% of top management positions in the South African economy, with 59% of senior management roles also occupied by white South Africans. The unemployment rate for individuals of African heritage stands at 28.8%, compared to just 5.9% for those of European descent. The data further indicate that approximately 61% of white South Africans live in households with a monthly expenditure exceeding R10,000, whereas only 8% of black South Africans have the financial capacity to spend at that level. Additionally, around 16% of the black South African population experiences severe poverty and recurrent hunger. In contrast, nearly all white South Africans - 99.9% - enjoy a significantly higher standard of living (see Harold, 2018).

In addition to poverty, South Africa faces numerous other challenges that are arguably interconnected with it. These social ills include various forms of injustice, such as inequality, corruption, unemployment, rampant crime, high levels of violence, gangsterism, and gender-based violence (GBV). Other pressing issues include inadequate service delivery, restricted access to public services, poorly located and insufficient infrastructure, sub-standard education in disadvantaged communities, spatial inequalities, ecological crises, and a strained public health system burdened by diseases such as HIV/AIDS (see Beukes, 2021; 2024; Beukes & Beukes, 2023; Swart et al., 2022; Harold, 2018; Swart, 2016; Maluleke, 2001).

With this brief contextual overview of South Africa's social ills, divisions, and injustices, it is evident that ongoing social transformation is needed. But in what ways can spirituality, development, and mission contribute to a transformed South Africa?

3. Spirituality and religiosity

Spirituality can be understood as relating to the essence of human life, specifically people's relationship with the "Absolute", regardless of how the Absolute is characterised or described (Waijman, 2002:1). Waijman (2002) uses the term "Absolute", while Lombaard (2012) refers to the "Other". For the purposes of this chapter, these concepts will be used interchangeably when referencing these scholars in relation to the Divine. The concept of the Absolute shapes how individuals perceive spirituality in diverse ways. From a spiritual perspective, transformation is an encounter with the Divine that brings about significant changes in a person's relationship with the Absolute. This change can deeply influence an individual's entire existence, affecting not only their immediate surroundings but also broader social and relational spheres (Waijman 2002:456).

Only through a profound internal transition - what I refer to as a "centripetal process" - can one effect change in the external world, which I call a "centrifugal process". This entails a journey of self-integration, self-transformation, and self-transcendence (see Pool, 2011:9). The Absolute transforms the self (centripetal), and in turn, the self transforms the world (centrifugal).

Lombaard (2015:2) argues that transformation is not exclusive in two respects: it is not limited to a select few, nor is it confined to individual experiences. Rather, transformation is characterised by openness and the act of opening itself - it invites many to undergo change and development. This conversion shifts inner awareness, fostering a deeper connection with the “Other” and others. As Lombaard (2015:3) states, “transformation of one’s being with God also alters one’s being in the world”.

Kourie (2010:19) defines “spirituality” in a broader context, suggesting that all individuals possess a form of spirituality that reflects the fundamental significance of their being. Spirituality encompasses the meanings and values to which we adhere, regardless of their religious nature. Similarly, Gardner (2011) describes spirituality as the essence that gives life meaning.

Mbiti contends that Africans are inherently religious, and I would also add, spiritual. Without becoming caught up in the “spiritual but not religious” slogan, I continue with Mbiti, who asserts that religion permeates all aspects of society to such an extent that isolation from it is neither simple nor feasible (Mbiti, 1999:1). Agbiji and Swart (2015:11) argue that religion in Africa serves as a fundamental source of social capital. Moreover, social, cultural, and religious or spiritual capital are interrelated rather than mutually exclusive (see Agbiji & Swart, 2015:11; Adogame, 2013:106; see Davies & Guest, 2007).

Religion pertains to the fundamental essence of human existence, unifying human life into a cohesive whole (Schuurman, 2011:273-274). Knoetze (2014:167) describes spirituality as a way of living. The concept of “spiritual and religious capital” aligns with the broader idea of social capital, as it represents a resource derived from connections that individuals and religious organisations can make use of for their own well-being (centripetal) (see Agbiji & Swart, 2015:11). These same resources can also be shared as a gift to the broader society (centrifugal) (see Adogame, 2013:106).

For these reasons, spirituality and religion must be integrated into discussions on social transformation and development (see Selinger, 2004:531). Papastephanou (2008:125) argues that the intersection of the spiritual and the social occurs when knowledge of faiths, religions, and spiritual beliefs fosters cohesion, solidarity, understanding, and collaboration

within a diverse society. Spiritually sensitive citizens can play a vital role in the intentional and responsible transformation of civilisation and their country (Beyers, 2021:66).

Religion, therefore, is concerned with preserving life in its entirety through communal engagement. It is closely linked to morality and ethical principles, which include love, peace, the sanctity of human life, human equality, human dignity, freedom, justice, and social harmony. When religious groups embody these core values, religion can serve as a powerful force for transforming African societies (Agbiji & Swart, 2015:14).

Spirituality also intersects with moral and emotional development (Hand, 2004:157) and, as a result, influences social development (Papastephanou, 2008:125). This leads to the next section of my discussion: development.

4. Development

Yoms and Bowers du Toit (2017:46) distinguish between secular and Christian perspectives on development. Initially, the concept of “development” was understood purely in socio-economic terms. Over time, however, the focus shifted towards human development and environmental sustainability (see Rodney, 2009:2-3; Yoms & Bowers du Toit, 2017:46). The primary goal was to strengthen a nation’s economic capacity to ensure long-term stability, ultimately leading to and sustaining a yearly increase in gross national production (GNP) (Rodney, 2009:2-3).

Nonetheless, Christian scholars and development practitioners have chosen to approach development from a more comprehensive perspective. A Christian theological framework for addressing human needs and fostering community development incorporates concepts such as “holistic ministry”, “transformational development”, “integral mission”, “diaconia”, and “holistic community-based sustainable development”. As I explore the intersection of development, spirituality, and mission, it is important to clarify that all references to development in this chapter will be framed holistically and understood within a Christian perspective. De Gruchy (2005:29) emphasises this holistic nature, stating that the Christian view of development encompasses “social, cultural, religious, ecological, economic and political activities that consciously seek to enhance the self-identified livelihoods of the poor”.

The Christian perspective on development is rooted in the Old Testament notion of *shalom* and the New Testament understanding of the kingdom of God, both of which embody principles of well-being, harmony, peace, and justice (Bowers du Toit, 2010:266). This concept of *shalom* as wholeness encompasses not only spiritual harmony with the divine but also fosters a sense of unity amongst all individuals within the realm created by the Divine. *Shalom* transcends the mere absence of conflict; it embodies a profound peace and harmony rooted in justice. It signifies residing harmoniously in all our relationships across four dimensions: with the Divine, with the natural world, with fellow beings, and with ourselves (De Gruchy, 2005:31). This state of tranquillity transcends mere external detachment; it fundamentally encompasses a deep appreciation and enjoyment of one's relationships. It signifies a profound joy in serving God, an appreciation for our physical environment, a celebration of community, and an understanding of the significance of being a child of God (De Gruchy, 2005:31).

The basis for Christian engagement in (community) development stems from a deep-seated concern for one's neighbour (the other) and the nurturing of the love of the Divine (Absolute/Other) (see Dudley, 1991:1; Yoms & Bowers du Toit, 2017:46). Peaceful and just relationships were the foundational intention of the divine for humanity. Nevertheless, the advent of transgression precipitated a state of social disarray. Consequently, the involvement of Christians in social transformation serves as a demonstration of the good news, thereby offering all individuals the chance to pay attention to the gospel's instructions and adhere to its teachings, while simultaneously repairing broken relationships with the Divine and others (fellow citizens). The mission includes the pursuit of justice, peace, and hope while enabling communities to reclaim their original identity and discover their role as stewards of the Divine's resources.

5. Mission

God's (the Divine's) endeavour in the world, often referred to as the *missio Dei*, embodies the pursuit of *shalom*. We affirm that a divine presence is actively engaged in the unfolding of events within the world. The world was not merely created and left to its own devices; rather, it was chosen as the

stage for divine engagement and purpose. The divine affection inherent in the Trinity extends its embrace to the cosmos through creation, specifically inviting all living beings into a covenant of love and justice - with the Divine and with one another (De Gruchy, 2005:31). De Gruchy (2005:31) further explains that at the heart of *shalom* is the existence that God has created, accompanied by the aspiration to respect, nurture, and delight in it. The Divine's work in the world is fundamentally concerned with establishing and maintaining *shalom*, as well as restoring harmony when it is disrupted. This endeavour is holistic and all-encompassing.

Knoetze (2013:44-45), in his revisitation of the traditional differentiation of mission, perceives mission as inward (centripetal) and outward (centrifugal). As illustrated in the Old Testament, mission is explained as centripetal and as centrifugal in the New Testament. Missional can thus be interpreted as centripetal, as the intention is to bless the community that we reside in through our manner of living. In this regard, we embody a missional approach, extending our outreach to our community and those seeking our assistance. Conversely, the concept of missionary work can be perceived as centrifugal, extending beyond our immediate community to engage with other communities as well. Knoetze (2013:45) believes that it is not a matter of one or the other, but rather a synthesis of missional and missionary. The term of choice will be delineated within its specific context.

The concept of transformation is a fundamental aspect of mission, as it requires changing circumstances, improving individuals' lives, and enhancing social conditions wherever mission is carried out (Alawode, 2016:5-6). David Bosch (1991:1) asserts that mission is an enterprise that transforms reality. Similarly, Alawode (2016:6) argues that mission has a profound impact, fostering lasting transformation in every context where it is applied.

Therefore, the ultimate goal and outcome of mission should be transformation. From this perspective, transformation must be the mission's ultimate result. Viewed through this lens, mission represents an aspect of faith that challenges the status quo of reality and, instead, strives to transform it.

6. Threefold nexus towards social transformation in South Africa

Steenkamp-Nel (2018:1) accurately captures the essence of transformation in South Africa, emphasising its complexity and political implications. Notably, she observes that transformation has become a widely used buzzword across various sectors of post-apartheid South African society. Across public and private domains, in diverse platforms - from podiums to pulpits to pews - and in various settings - from public funds to personal savings - there is a clear drive to solidify and realise transformation. Steenkamp-Nel (2018:1) asserts that, for the majority of South African citizens, the foundation of transformation lies in a sense of duty to the Divine and towards fellow individuals or others, aligning with Lombaard's (2015) perspective, argued earlier. She further argues that spiritual transformation is particularly well suited to the South African context (Steenkamp-Nel, 2018:1). In fact, the connection between transformation and spirituality is so profound that some scholars use the term transformation itself when defining spirituality (Waaijman, 2002:455).

Lombaard (2012:163) observes that spirituality is inherently intertwined with and shaped by the culture, context, and society in which it is expressed. Knoetze (2014:167) argues that the process of transformation and liberation can help to dispel the notion that Christian spirituality is irrelevant in socio-political contexts.

Spirituality, faith, and religion are fundamental aspects of Africanness and South African identity, with the potential to facilitate moral, socio-political, and economic transformation (Agbiji & Swart, 2015:1). The religious sector serves as a unique source of spiritual, socio-economic, and political capital in African countries, aligning with its broader socio-political and economic functions. This privileged role positions religion as a powerful force within society.

Agbiji and Swart (2015:15) go so far as to assert that no other institution or organisation rivals religious communities in fulfilling this responsibility. As community-based organisations with extensive networks, religious communities continue to serve as unifying forces and catalysts for socio-

political and economic progress across the African continent, ultimately driving social transformation (Agbiji & Swart, 2015:15).

From a Christian perspective on development, Bragg (1987:43) observes that transformation establishes a foundation in which individuals - regardless of race, religion, or nationality - can fully realise their humanity, free from the constraints of power and oppression imposed by others. Furthermore, development concerns the structure of human relationships and the pursuit of justice, characterised by a proper connection with the Divine (Absolute/Other) and fellow human beings (others), where dominion, oppression, and abuse are deemed unacceptable (Robinson, 1994:318).

The South African context, as discussed earlier, stands in stark contrast to the Divine's original plan because of broken relationships caused by sin. A transformational approach seeks to confront the consequences of sin - corruption, greed, conflict, inequality, and exploitation - elements that oppose the Divine blueprint for humanity (Davis, 2009:92-93). Moreover, evil is not confined to the human heart but is also embedded within societal structures (Bowers du Toit, 2010:266). A transformative approach critically examines issues such as inequitable economic relations, political disparities, social misappropriation, and the dominance of religious or cultural ideologies.

In this context, transformed individuals can rediscover their true identity as children of God and reclaim their calling as faithful and effective stewards of God's gifts for the benefit of all (Myers, 2011:3, 17). Regarding mission, Migliore (2004:267-268) asserts that the church's missional endeavour is to cultivate a just and inclusive community in which members use their ministerial gifts for the collective good. Myers (2011:181) further explains that these relationships extend across three dimensions: with the triune God, with the self, and with the community. Restoring these relationships, therefore, paves the way for a more just and flourishing society.

Although my argument may appear to emphasise spirituality (and religion) as the primary driver of transformation, the other two elements of the threefold nexus - development and mission - are equally significant and deeply interconnected. Their potential should not be overlooked, as they

warrant careful consideration. The integration of these three components can play a crucial role in advancing and realising sustainable social transformation in South Africa.

Given that many of the societal challenges discussed in the South African context stem from moral failings - disruptions in relationships with others and the Divine (Absolute/Other) - spiritual transformation can be seen as a restorative journey in the Divine-human relationship. This process ultimately fosters inner (centripetal) and societal (centrifugal) transformation, guiding society from brokenness towards wholeness - a more cohesive and harmonious state of completeness (see Beyers, 2021:57).

7. Conclusion

This chapter highlights the complexities involved in conceptualising the interplay between spirituality, development, and mission, as these concepts allow for diverse interpretations. Yet, these three concepts and disciplines are also interrelated. However, it distinctly situates the threefold nexus within the frameworks of religion, theology, and Christianity. From this perspective, it demonstrates that spirituality, development (from a Christian viewpoint), and mission encompass centripetal (inner / inward) and centrifugal (outer / outward) transformational processes. Additionally, the chapter provides insight into the context and realities of a society experiencing fragmentation on multiple levels.

Nonetheless, there remains a glimmer of hope. Transformation is not an isolated phenomenon. This chapter adopts a dual approach to spirituality, development and mission, which all emphasise the centripetal and centrifugal processes of transformation while acknowledging its deep connection to contextual realities and lived experiences.

My focus has been on the manifestation of spirituality, development and mission as catalysts for positive change within South African society, with the goal of social transformation. I have identified the relationships between spirituality, development, and mission as a threefold nexus with immense potential for fostering sustainable social transformation.

Utilising the strengths of these three aspects enables the development of integrated strategies that effectively address the complex challenges facing

the country. In summary, the chapter explored the concepts of spirituality, development, and mission, each framed as a process of transformation.

It may be beneficial for politicians, policymakers, and scholars to recognise that transformation includes a spiritual dimension – one that focuses not only on outcomes but also on the processes involved. Therefore, the threefold nexus of mission, development, and spirituality (religion) offers a promising avenue for future empirical research to advance a more relevant transformation agenda.

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PART 3


**CHURCH, MISSION AND
DEVELOPMENT**



Chapter 8

Migration and forced displacements in northern Cameroon: Theological and social responses from Protestant churches

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1. Introduction

Cameroon has until recently been an island of political stability in a region that has experienced civil wars, coup d'états, and violent Muslim extremism. Over the last decade, however, political conflicts and Boko Haram terrorism have also invaded Cameroonian soil. Because of the ongoing crisis in the neighbouring Central African Republic (CAR) (Minfegue, 2019), armed political unrest in the Anglophone regions (Folefac & Ani, 2022), and Boko Haram terror attacks in the Far North (Funteh & Azieh, 2015; Funteh & Ngwa, 2019; Denisova, 2021), Cameroon, by 2024, hosts more than 2.1 million forcibly displaced persons, along with over 400,000 refugees primarily from CAR and Nigeria. Even though there are large refugee camps in the country, run by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and assisted by the Cameroonian army, many refugees and forcibly displaced people seek to leave the camps and the conflict-affected areas in order to settle either in the rural areas of northern Cameroon or in the three major cities in the north: Maroua, Garoua, and Ngaoundéré.



Political unrest, being the main driver of refugee flows from CAR and Nigeria, is also the single largest cause of internal displacement within Cameroon. Nearly one million people have been forced to leave their homes in the Northwest and Southwest provinces because of the Anglophone crisis, while close to half a million individuals have returned to the region either from Nigeria or from other parts of the country. The remaining half a million forcibly displaced people, however, have been uprooted as a result of the climate crisis. Over the past decade, the extreme northern part of Cameroon has experienced not only repeated Boko Haram attacks but also several years of drought. The Lake Chad region has become increasingly inhospitable to farmers and herders, prompting entire villages to relocate southwards in search of fertile land.

This chapter is an example of how globalisation and a new ecclesiastical geography has shifted the focus in missiology and world Christianity studies from sending and receiving towards working in collaboration to solve local challenges caused by global developments. It offers a brief introduction to the main causes of forced displacement from the Far North region of Cameroon to the Adamawa region, namely Boko Haram activity and climate change. It further examines how two different Protestant churches in the Adamawa region - the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon (EELC) and the Full Gospel Mission (FGM) - are developing distinct material and theological responses to the arriving population, and leaders from the two churches have become valuable sources that give voice and humanity to the discouraging official numbers and somewhat distanced academic debate about migration and climate change in this part of Africa.

2. The human mobility context

By the end of 2023, the population of Cameroon was estimated by the United Nations (UN) to be close to 29 million. With an annual population growth rate that has gradually decreased from 3.08% in 1990 to 2.63% in 2023,¹ the country's population has nearly doubled between 2000 and

1 Worldometer. [s.a.] *Cameroon population*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/cameroon-population/> [Accessed: 23 February 2024]

2023. In most African countries experiencing similar population growth, internal migration rates are typically high. This is largely because of the high mobility of younger generations, who often leave rural areas in pursuit of educational and employment opportunities in urban centres. During the 1990s, Cameroon had one of the highest rates of internal migration in Central Africa compared to neighbouring countries (Mberu & Pongou, 2016) - a trend that has intensified because of the circumstances that this chapter will explore.

Most internally displaced people in Cameroon have been forced to leave their homes because of the political crisis, also referred to as the Ambazonia War of Independence, in the Anglophone regions of the country. This conflict, which began in 2016, has deep historical roots tracing back to the aftermath of World War I, when the League of Nations divided the former German colony into a French mandate (Cameroon) and a British mandate area collectively known as the Southern Cameroons. Following the independence of Nigeria and Cameroon in 1960, the UN organised elections in the Southern Cameroons in 1961. The northern part of the mandate chose to federate with Nigeria, while the southern part - with its own prime minister - opted to federate with Cameroon.

In 1972, Cameroonian President Ahmadou Ahijo replaced the federal system with a unitary state via a national referendum. From the perspective of many Anglophones, this marked the beginning of the erosion of their political autonomy. With the election of Paul Biya as president in 1982, tensions continued to build, eventually culminating in the strike led by the Cameroon Anglophone Civil Society Consortium in October 2016. This strike is widely seen as the catalyst for what is often described as a civil war between the Anglophone minority and the Francophone-dominated state.

Despite numerous international efforts to mediate through political dialogue, the conflict remains unresolved, resulting in several thousand deaths over the past decade. As a consequence of this protracted unrest, the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the Northwest Province alone - counting returnees - exceeded 422,000 in 2023. The figure for the Southwest Province was more than 385,000 (Willis et al., 2020; Folefac & Ani, 2022).

As the Anglophone crisis is a political issue that falls outside the scope of this publication, we now return to the other factors contributing to internal displacement in Cameroon. As in most African countries, the largest single driver of demographic change is the general trend of urbanisation. In 2000, the World Bank estimated that Cameroon's urban population was 6.8 million out of a total population of 15 million. By the end of 2023, this figure had risen to approximately 17 million, out of an estimated national population of 29 million. While the population as a whole doubled during this period, the urban population nearly tripled.

This dramatic demographic shift is linked to several factors. As previously mentioned, population growth has led to an increasingly youthful population, and rural areas offer limited opportunities for education and employment. As a result, a steady stream of young people leaves the countryside for the major cities, where universities and a more diversified job market raise hopes for a better future (Afu, 2019). According to UN statistics, more than half of the population now lives in urban areas - and that number continues to grow.²

These statistics also help to explain patterns of movement. In 2018, data showed that while 43.5% of the rural population lived in conditions of severe poverty - defined as living on less than \$2 per day - only 5.5% of the urban population fell into the same category (Alkire, 2023). Although these figures do not necessarily reflect actual quality of nutrition or overall quality of life, it is clear that urban areas are perceived as spaces of opportunity, where employment rates and cash flow are significantly higher than in rural areas.

3. The Boko Haram crisis

The second political crisis that has destabilised Cameroon over the last two decades, and the one that has attracted most public attention, is what can be broadly described under the umbrella of "the Boko Haram crisis". This movement is often characterised as a radical Muslim group, with its roots

2 <https://unhabitat.org/cameroon#:~:text=Cameroon's%20urban%20centres.-,More%20than%20half%20of%20Cameroonians%20now%20live%20in%20towns%20and,in%20informal%20settlements%20and%20slums.>

linked to the expansionist politico-religious movements of Uthman dan Fodio and Moddibo Adama, who, in the early 1800s, spread Islam from Nigeria into northern Cameroon and established Islamic hegemony in the country's three northernmost regions: Adamawa, North, and Far North (Drønen, 2013; Anugwom, 2019; Denisova, 2021; Bongoyok, 2023). This hegemony, largely administered by the Fulbe ethnic group, was gradually diminished during the colonial period, as the German (1900–1919) and the French (1919–1960) administrations curtailed the political power of the Fulbe traditional elite. Their influence was further reduced under the presidents Ahmadou Ahidjo (1960–1984) and Paul Biya (1984 to present), both of whom centralised political power in the South. Nevertheless, the majority of government officials and traditional leaders in the northern regions remain Muslim (Azarya, 1976; Drønen, 1998; Adama, 2004; Drønen, 2013:84-89). The religious hegemony of the local *lamibbe* (local kings) and imams was further challenged by the arrival of Protestant and Catholic missionaries, who, beginning in 1923, established schools and hospitals in the region, making Christianity a serious alternative to Islam amongst the non-Muslim population (Drønen, 2013:81-84).

Islam practised in northern Cameroon has, since the arrival of the Germans - who brought an end to the slave-raiding practices of the Muslim Fulbe - been characterised by peaceful religious expression, with the Tijani Sufi order influencing most traditional rulers and their imams. From the 1960s, however, a gradual shift began to affect parts of the Islamic milieu, particularly within intellectual circles connected to university campuses, where Wahhabi tendencies promoting a more 'authentic' Islam began to emerge. This movement gained momentum following the Iranian Revolution in 1979 and the rise of 'petrodollar' policies from states such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, and Egypt. It attracted a growing number of young followers through mosques led by learned *ulama* with theological training from the Arab world.

In the decades that followed, the region saw the arrival of numerous grants for students to study Wahhabi theology in Arab countries, alongside the construction of several mosques, health clinics, and Franco-Arab schools (Drønen, 2001). In 1986, Paul Biya inaugurated the university campus

in Ngaoundéré, which was funded by Saudi Arabia and became a full university through presidential decree in 1993.

Despite the historical link between religion and politics in the region, few commentators would characterise the Boko Haram crisis as primarily a religious conflict. The roots of the movement are generally traced to the early 2000s, when the group Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad (People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teaching and Jihad) began attracting public attention. It became popularly known as *Boko Haram* because of its strong critique of Western education (Funteh & Azieh, 2015:215-216; Anugwom, 2019).

The first signs of Boko Haram's presence in Cameroon date back to 2009, when members fled the Nigerian army and settled in the Far North region. Even prior to this, Wahhabi and Salafi preachers from Nigeria had paved the way for the ideology spread by Boko Haram founder Mohammed Yusuf, who envisioned a new society based on Islamic law. The newly established mosques, referred to locally as *juulirde*, challenged the teachings of traditional Sufi mosques and created tensions between the historically moderate Islamic leadership and the newly imported militant ideology from Nigeria.

After Yusuf was arrested and killed by police, Abubakar Shekau assumed leadership of the organisation in 2010, ushering in a more aggressive phase. Under his leadership, Boko Haram began targeting Sufi mosques and Christian churches. From 2012, the group intensified its military activity in Cameroon, launching random attacks on military, civilian, and religious targets near the Nigerian border. Beginning in 2013, Boko Haram also started abducting Westerners and political elites, capitalising on media attention and the prospect of large ransoms. From that point onward, kidnappings and village raids became the group's primary sources of income (MacEachern, 2020; Vincent et al., 2017).

This increase in activity prompted President Paul Biya to declare a "war on Boko Haram" in May 2014 - a declaration that led to intensified military engagement. A joint force made up of soldiers from all four Lake Chad nations, supported by US and French military intelligence, conducted extensive operations in which thousands of Boko Haram supporters were

arrested and imprisoned, with significant casualties on both sides. Official statistics list 556 Boko Haram attacks and 77 suicide bombings between 2013 and 2017, resulting in the deaths of 150 soldiers and 1,700 civilians.

The intensified military pressure from the Lake Chad coalition dealt a major blow to Boko Haram, forcing the group to shift from conventional assaults to guerrilla or asymmetrical tactics. This stagnation also gave rise to internal divisions. Boko Haram's pledge of allegiance to Daesh/ISIS³ in March 2015 led to a split with ISWAP⁴ in 2016. Further complicating the picture, a splinter group known as Ansaru, led by Abu Usama al-Ansari, continued to launch attacks in Nigeria and Cameroon alongside Boko Haram and ISWAP (Vincent et al., 2017; Kouma, 2017).

Most commentators agree that these factions should be understood more as political or terrorist organisations than as religious groups with traditional theological agendas. Their attacks on mosques and declared war on Muslims deemed “unfaithful” have caused most Muslims in Cameroon to reject these movements. Ntuda Vincent, Saïbou Issa, and Nadine Machikou attribute Boko Haram's initial success to the dire socio-economic conditions in the region (Issa, 2010; Issa & Machikou, 2019; Vincent et al., 2017). In a context lacking adequate infrastructure, education, and energy supply, many young people were drawn to promises of a better life in a new, just Islamic state. Recruits were offered a motorbike, a sign-on bonus, and a monthly salary. Loyalty was further incentivised with the promise of a future wife - an appealing offer for a generation of unemployed and uneducated youth facing limited prospects for traditional marriage because of economic insecurity.

Issa's research also shows that transborder trade has long been a central economic activity in the region, and this sector became heavily infiltrated by terrorist networks. When the government closed the border, the local

3 ISIS stands for: Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (sometimes also rendered as Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham).

Daesh is the Arabic acronym for the same group: *al-Dawla al-Islamiya fi al-Iraq wa al-Sham*, which translates to Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant.

4 ISWAP stands for Islamic State in West Africa Province.

economy suffered drastically - further reinforcing perceptions of state neglect amongst the population.

While no official statistics on religious affiliation in Cameroon exist, Vincent et al. (2017:14) estimate that approximately 40% of the population is Muslim, 40% Christian (across various denominations), and 20% traditional religious practitioners - particularly in the Far North region. Regardless of the precision of these figures, it is clear that Christians, too, are deeply affected by the region's insecurity. Lang Michael Kpughe and Moussa Bongoyok have documented in detail how churches and local Christians have been targeted. Several churches have been attacked, and many Christians killed, following Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau's public call for Muslims to attack Christians in Cameroon. In the early stages, French and Italian Catholic missionaries were abducted, leading to the withdrawal of all foreign missionaries from the region (Kpughe, 2017; Bongoyok, 2023).

Currently, most Christian services are still held in the presence of armed guards from the police or military. There are no Bible study groups at night, and all public evangelisation activities have ceased. The churches that remain open, however, do their best to care for the IDPs. They constantly collect money and share the little that they have in order to assist those in urgent need after yet another raid by the terrorists. Once a year, for instance, the Protestant Union of Evangelical Churches in Cameroon (UEEC) holds a national campaign to collect funds to support their congregations in the Far North region.⁵

The two Protestant churches that will be further discussed in this chapter have had different experiences over the past decade. The Lutheran EELC has its regional headquarters in Maroua and has no churches in the 300 villages that have been deserted along the border with Nigeria. In the Pentecostal Full Gospel Mission, several members have been killed in two separate attacks around Amchidi and Mora; in both cases, the pastors managed to escape the terrorists. Consequently, they have had to close several churches and relocate the pastors.⁶ On a positive note, there have been several acts

5 Interview with anonymous UEEC pastor by means of messages, 5 January 2024.

6 Interview with Bouba Emmanuel, Nagoundéré, 4 January 2024.

of solidarity between the Christian and majority Muslim communities. One example was the meeting of 40 Muslim and Christian leaders in April 2014, which led to the establishment of a youth forum for Christians and Muslims entitled “Young Christians and Muslims Together for Peace and Development” (Kpughe, 2017:9). Another example was the Cameroon Council of Imams and Muslim Dignitaries, which in 2022 held a three-day seminar for 300 imams and preachers on the “ills of religious extremism” (Obia, 2022).

4. Environmental crises

What is often referred to as “the environmental crisis” in the Far North region of Cameroon could be better described as a “chain of crises” with various backgrounds that together contribute to the challenging living conditions in the area. The semi-desert Sahel environment has long demanded a delicate balance between fishermen, herders, and farmers from the many different ethnic groups living according to their traditional customs in the region. This balance has become increasingly difficult to maintain because of several recent changes. The most significant development is related to demographic change. This relatively small geographical area is the most densely populated in Cameroon, with 17% of the population occupying only 7% of the total land area. Given that the total population in the country has increased by close to 50% from 2000 to 2023, it is clear that the semi-desert area has been severely affected. Insecurity related to Muslim terrorist attacks and political instability in the CAR has led to an influx of refugees from CAR and Nigeria into a region that is more stable compared to the neighbouring countries, further increasing the population. Refugees with no land and a lack of opportunities to farm the land that they inhabit place additional pressure on food security and drive up prices for imported and locally produced food (World Food Programme, 2023).

The measurable consequences of climate change are thoroughly discussed in local scholarly works (Pemunta, 2014; Foucher, 2023; Magrin, 2016). Three key facts are beyond doubt. First, variations in rainfall and pressure on natural resources create less predictable food security. Several years of drought in the area have made agricultural production a less stable source of

income, and as long as more than 60% of the national population relies on agriculture as their main source of income, climate variation has immediate and severe effects. Even if the total amount of rain shows only minor variations from a long-term perspective, heavy rains over short periods have caused flooding several times in the last two decades.

Second, deforestation, which has been a slow process related to population growth across the Sahel belt, has increased because of rapid population growth and a lack of technological development. Traditional cooking is still performed with wood fires, and it has become increasingly difficult to find wood without cutting down living trees. Electricity is scarce in the region; whereas 71% of the population in Cameroon has access to electricity,⁷ it is estimated that less than 20% of the population in the Far North region has access to regular electric power. Gas is expensive and hardly available outside the big cities. Solar energy is slowly gaining traction, but so far it is insufficient for power-intensive cooking and is mostly used for lighting and charging mobile phones.

Third, this human struggle for resources has social and political consequences that make life less predictable. The conflict between farmers and the cattle-owning population is a well-known dispute across the Sahel, and with unstable rains and a growing population, these conflicts escalate. The yearly and seasonal changes that affect the water level in Lake Chad lead to clashes between farmers and fishermen, who need to vary their activities to survive and seek to cultivate land on the former shores of the lake. When farmers, fishermen, and cattle owners are additionally looted by Boko Haram and other terrorists and criminals who frequently raid the area from their hideouts on the Nigerian side of the border, the situation becomes even more complex.

The overall consequence of what might be labelled “the environmental crises” is, first and foremost, that the UN-based World Food Programme, together with several non-governmental organisations (NGOs), has increased its activities in the region, providing annual reports on the variation in food production, political instability, and poverty rates. Secondly, a steady flow of people, often whole villages, is leaving the Far

7 ESMAP [18 December 2024] <https://trackingsdg7.esmap.org/country/cameroon>

North behind to settle further south, where the land is more fertile and less populated. The fieldwork on which the current chapter is based took place in December 2023 and January 2024 and will provide insight into the social and religious changes that developments in the Far North have brought about in the Adamawa region, with a particular focus on the city of Ngaoundéré and its surrounding areas.

5. Theological Approaches

With a weak governmental administration unable to provide social security for these migrants, individuals and civil society face challenges in integrating newcomers into villages and towns where resources are already scarce (Assana, 2023). In the following sections, we analyse the approach of selected Protestant churches in northern Cameroon and examine how their distinct theological and social perspectives shape their engagement with migrants.

5.1 Full Gospel Mission – the guesthouse approach

The FGM was established in Cameroon in 1961 by the German missionary couple Helga and Hermann Knorr. They began their work in Mutenge on the southern coast and established the Yoke-River mission station in 1963. From there, their efforts gradually expanded, and in 1969 the church, known as Full Gospel Mission (*Mission du plein évangile*), received government authorisation - making it one of the very few Pentecostal churches officially recognised in Cameroon at that time. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the church continued its nationwide expansion, and by the time Pastor Njemo succeeded Knorr as Mission Superintendent in 1979, the church had established a presence in most regions of Cameroon (Akoko, 2004; Drønen, 2013:110-113).⁸ In 1985, Bouba Emmanuel, then a government employee, began hosting meetings as the first step towards establishing an FGM congregation in Ngaoundéré, in the Adamawa region. Establishing a Pentecostal church in a predominantly Muslim city in Cameroon during the late 1980s was complicated, and the church was forced to relocate several times before finally building its current impressive

8 Full Gospel Mission Homepage [18 December 2024] *Home - Full Gospel Mission*

church and headquarters in the Bali quarter of Ngaoundéré in 2013. From this centre, the church has established congregations in 20 different towns and villages in Adamawa, with four congregations each in Ngaoundéré and Meiganga. Across Cameroon, there are now approximately 1,000 FGM congregations.

When I ask Bouba Emmanuel, founder of the Ngaoundéré congregation and now pastor in Meiganga, about the success of the church, he smiles and states that the strength and the weakness of the church is that it has become a church for passers-by. After some reflection, he adds:

Yes, that's it, like a guesthouse. Some come, and at some point they leave, and others come too. So that's the work we're redoing. Every time we do it, and we do it again. Well, by the grace of God, we continue to preach so that the locals will believe and that they themselves take matters into their own hands. Because others come, and they leave. So, we need the locals. Well, we pray to the Lord because there are some who are also behind the pastors. We need tourism so that others come too, so that it is stable.

Studies on the arrival of Pentecostalism in the region (Drønen, 2013) show that what Bouba refers to is a well-established pattern amongst these churches. They are often founded by clerks employed either in government or private companies, and in this way, Pentecostalism has spread from the city centres in the South and from cities in the Southwest, where Nigerian Pentecostal influence is particularly strong. Over time, this has fostered a certain light-footedness that has shaped the practical organisation of the church and its theology. Pastors, like Bouba, are constantly on the lookout for new opportunities. In his own town of Meiganga, where the church was only recently established, there are already four congregations. Bouba has recently acquired a new plot of land near the public high school and is now seeking ways to finance the construction of a new church building - a process that may take time, as FGM churches follow a recognisable architectural style across the country.

The guesthouse approach also influences how weekly services are conducted. While most Protestant churches in Cameroon include a brief segment during announcements for newcomers to introduce themselves, in the FGM this part of the service is especially emphasised. Newcomers are

warmly welcomed and are consistently followed up by the pastor, elders, and members of the congregation responsible for Bible groups and other church activities.

Bouba notes that migrants frequently attend their churches in the Adamawa region. There are occasional refugees from conflict-affected countries such as Gabon and Congo, but the majority come from Nigeria and the CAR. In relation to the broader concerns of this chapter, Bouba explains that it is primarily political unrest - stemming from rebel activity in the CAR and Muslim extremist violence in Nigeria - that has affected their church communities. Several members of their congregation in Amchidé, near the Nigerian border in the Far North, were killed during a Boko Haram attack. Along with another church in the area, the Amchidé congregation has since been abandoned following the destruction of its buildings by terrorists. The continuous influx of migrants into Ngaoundéré caused by these conflicts has reinforced the importance of the guesthouse approach in the church's everyday ministry.

One example of this approach is the church's engagement with migrants and refugees through its work in hospitals and health centres. Most refugees from the CAR are Muslims from the Mbororo ethnic group - a semi-nomadic people of the Fulbe origin, for whom Islam is a central part of their cultural identity, known as *pulaako*. To reach these communities effectively, Bouba explains that it is essential to understand their language and culture. Only pastors and evangelists who speak their language are equipped to carry out this work.

Well, it's true that we have that in our action plan. And since we have health centres, we tried, especially in Garoua, Ngong, Toubourou, we tried to do what we call chaplaincy. So, when these people come, the pastor who speaks well, in Fulfulde or Hausa, we can take them aside. We try to talk to them and so on. And while we're doing that, those who believe, we're following them. In peace, in secrecy. Because if others find out, they will be threatened. We bless God because there is one of the mbororo who believed, who is even a pastor today. And there is also another hausa, the pastor, who is [responsible of] the chaplaincy. And there is also another hospital in Garoua.

Through this work, one of the Muslim converts is now serving as a pastor and leads the evangelism team connected to the health centres. As public conversion is highly sensitive amongst the Mbororo, Bouba explains that this ministry is carried out discreetly. Many refugees involved in this initiative have formed a support network that helps them to begin new lives as farmers in Cameroon, having been forced to leave their cattle behind when fleeing from the CAR.

As a small church with limited resources, Bouba expresses a desire to do more in collaboration with other Pentecostal churches that meet regularly through the Corps de Christ network. These are churches that share the FGM's guesthouse model - places where travellers, passers-by, migrants, and refugees can find rest and are welcomed.

What is most surprising by the FGM's approach towards Muslim migrants is the theological and missiological reflections shared by Bouba Emmanuel. Studies on Pentecostalism in Africa (Gukurume & Taru, 2021) show that the dominant approach to mission is often framed in terms of spiritual warfare, where the analogy of a crusade is frequently invoked. Examples from neighbouring Nigeria reveal that such aggressive attitudes amongst Pentecostal missionaries have led to tensions with Muslim communities - sometimes resulting in violent conflict and casualties (Onapajo & Usman, 2015).

Why, then, this shift in attitude amongst FGM evangelists? Bouba Emmanuel explains:

No, but the relationship with Muslims, well, maybe at the beginning we could see them as enemies, or we could say that they don't understand. But we have changed the attitude towards them. These are people that God has created. They need the truth. They need to understand. So, our attitude and our gospel toward them has changed. We're not going to say, "you sinner", you don't know God. No, that's not the case anymore. We are all created by God, we are children of God. ... And with this wisdom, we commune with them. Because when we do ceremonies here, when we invite the Lamido, he comes. He sends his representative, even to Meiganga, the Lamido comes. Even the imam of the great mosque, we are together, we share. That's kind of it, without touching on the problems there are between them and us.

In my earlier work on the development of Christian-Muslim relations in Cameroon (Drønen, 2013:69-84), I demonstrated how a political culture - initiated by the French colonial administration and continued under the Ahidjo and Biya governments - has shaped the country's religious landscape. The colonial administration imposed strict limitations on Christian and Muslim missionary activity, favouring moderate religious institutions such as the Tijāniyyah Sufi order and the mainline Protestant and Catholic churches. In contrast, radical Islamist groups and various Pentecostal churches were denied official recognition, ostensibly in the interest of maintaining public order. It was only in the early 1990s, driven by the World Bank's push for democratisation, that civil society organisations - including religious groups - were granted the freedom to gain official recognition from the state. This political culture has significantly influenced Christian churches and Muslim communities, contributing to more peaceful Christian-Muslim relations in Cameroon than in many neighbouring countries in Central and West Africa.

During our repeated fieldwork amongst Pentecostal churches in 2008 to 2009 and again in 2023 to 2024, our research team did not observe any public preaching against Islam across the nearly 60 Pentecostal services that we attended. These findings align with two key observations in Haustein and Wilkinson's edited volume *The Pentecostal World*. The first concerns the importance of local contextual factors in shaping Pentecostal practice globally - in this case, the role of political culture in Cameroon. The second is the increasingly fluid and diverse nature of Pentecostalism itself, to the extent that the term has arguably lost much of its definitional precision.

My own experience, tracing the development of Pentecostalism in northern Cameroon from 1996 to the present, supports this perspective. Pentecostalism has moved from being regarded as a "sect" by mainline churches to becoming part of the religious establishment. Today, Pentecostal pastors are invited to speak at mainline church events, government receptions, and even Muslim celebrations.⁹

At the same time, many mainline churches - including the Catholic Church - have experienced waves of Pentecostalisation, particularly amongst the

9 Own observations, interviews with Bouba Emmanuel and Iya Moussa.

younger generation (Akoko, 2004; 2007). The FGM's approach towards Muslim migrants, therefore, appears more closely aligned with a Catholic theology of inculturation - where conversion from Islam to Christianity is encouraged as a discreet, non-public process - than with traditional Pentecostal crusade-style missions, which often frame religious opponents as spiritual adversaries.

5.2 *The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon (EELC): An eco-theological approach*

As the largest Protestant church in the region - with nearly 4,000 congregations across Cameroon, the majority located in the northern part of the country - the EELC has a strong presence in many small communities affected by waves of migration from the Far North and the CAR. Consequently, the church has been responding to migrant-related challenges for over two decades and has developed various diaconal approaches to welcoming newcomers.

In the eastern part of the Adamawa region, more than 250,000 refugees from the CAR have entered areas where the EELC maintains a substantial presence, including numerous congregations, two hospitals, several primary and secondary schools, and its theological college. This influx of migrants attracted global attention, and as early as 2003, the UNHCR and Doctors Without Borders began operations in the area, establishing camps to house refugees (Minfegue, 2019). However, in addition to the most vulnerable refugees who registered in the camps, many others have settled outside of them, seeking support from the local population. Given that the majority of these refugees belong to the Gbaya and Fulbe ethnic groups - whose languages are widely spoken amongst EELC members - it has been natural for the church to take an active role in relief efforts directed towards these communities. As explained by Baïguele Jean, the national bishop of the EELC:

Yes, the Church has done a lot in this area. It must be said that the Christian villages welcomed the migrants. Yes. There are Christian families who have even opened their homes to those who have arrived. And given them plots of fields to cultivate. There was also the Lutheran World Federation ... which started to give away

manioc seeds, they shared it with the refugees, who made large fields. Now, these refugees have become traders. You see, people have made hectares of manioc fields, hectares of corn fields. They started investing, building houses and settling permanently... And it also means that the communities have experienced great growth.¹⁰

According to the bishop, the key to the success of the relief work lies in the minimal cultural barriers between the local population and the migrants. They share a common language and similar traditions related to agriculture, religion, and other ethnic cultural practices. After twenty years of continuous migratory waves, it has become difficult to distinguish between migrants and autochthonous residents in the area.

The support of various NGOs - amongst them the Lutheran World Federation - which have provided financial assistance in the form of seeds and other agricultural inputs, has also been crucial in easing the burden on local communities. Like the FGM, the EELC has utilised its hospitals to assist migrants, while also using these health facilities as points of contact with people from non-Christian backgrounds.

With the integration of migrants, the Garoua-Boulai hospital has contributed a lot. Especially teenagers, infants, babies, have had a special price of care. Children and migrants were taken care of. There's a fund ... it is given by an NGO ... It is a fund for orphans. So, with this money, when the hospital receives it, this means that it compensates for the care we give free of charge to the children of migrants. And that's why it's an additional help that also helps them integrate into the church.¹¹

In recent years, other EELC congregations have been challenged by new waves of migration, as insecurity in the Far North region - caused by climate change and Boko Haram attacks has forced entire villages to relocate to the Adamawa region. In the subdivision of Mbé, which had an estimated population of around 43,000 in 2017, more than 20,000 migrants have arrived in recent years (Assana, 2023:481).

10 Interview, Baïguele Jean, Ngaoundéré, 4 January 2024.

11 Interview, Baïguele Jean, Ngaoundéré, 4 January 2024.

In the absence of a coherent state policy for receiving IDPs, the responsibility for integration is effectively shared between the local government administration (headed by the *préfet* and *sous-préfet*), traditional chiefs, and a range of civil society organisations - predominantly churches and mosques. When asked to comment on the situation in the Mbé region, Baïguele Jean responds as follows:

The last ten years, we have had a lot of concerns. Migration is causing us a lot of problems. When you take the corridor that leaves Chad as far as Ngaoundéré, in reality, I often have worries, fears. Because the immigrants who come, come to settle in our villages. Because there is drought in the far north. When they arrive, they are welcomed by the community. But then tensions begin. Because habits change, they cut down trees, but we have to share the same land. What is problematic is that those who have moved, have been in one way or another, with Islam, in contact with radical or fundamentalist Islam ... and so begins the intolerance towards Christians. To the point where the Christians who welcomed the migrants in their villages are starting to get into friction. I went to see the area with a pastor the other day... and we saw, didn't we, it's like a whole new village there. It was the people of the Far North who came to settle there. Quite simply, on the whole plain.

The same concerns are shared by Thérèse Nocke, who is responsible for the environmental projects within the EELC, though her perspective adopts a slightly different focus. The project that she leads is grounded in principles already outlined in the church's revised constitution of 1996, which affirmed the Christian responsibility to "care for the whole of creation". However, little concrete action followed at the time, apart from an initiative by the church's women's organisation, Femmes pour Christ, which launched a tree-planting campaign aiming to plant 10,000 trees - a project that yielded limited results.

It was not until 2014 that the church received funding from the Norwegian Mission Society to launch the current environmental project. Since then, Thérèse has been able to study the region's environmental challenges more closely (Tomren, 2021). What began primarily as an effort to combat deforestation gained significant momentum when Thérèse realised that

raising awareness amongst women was the key to shifting local attitudes. The initiative gained traction quickly as women embraced the introduction of environmentally friendly cooking stoves. Thérèse explains:

So, women were taught how to build these at home. And it really saves 70% of the wood they consume on a daily basis. That's where we had more results. Because women feel more concerned. Because the problem of climate change affects women much more. Because they have to travel miles to get wood to cook ... and especially young girls too, maybe they don't go to school much anymore. Or they will quit school because they have to fetch water first, fetch wood. The fact that we now show them how we can save wood has really reduced a lot of costs. ... Because they were travelling five kilometres to get the wood. And it was every two days. Well, now, when they were taught how to use the stoves, how to build and how to use the improved stoves, they fetch wood only once a week. So, you see that really helped.¹²

Projects related to reforestation, however, proved less successful. As a voluntary-based civil society institution, the EELC sought to mobilise its members and residents of villages where the church had influence to participate in tree-planting initiatives. Yet, the effort collapsed, ironically, because the government had secured external funding to pay people further north for the same work - undermining the church's unpaid volunteer model. Interestingly, it was the attitude of arriving migrants from the Far North that ultimately shifted local perceptions.

Studies on internal migration in Cameroon (Mberu & Pongou, 2016; Assana, 2023; Minfegue, 2019) have thus far failed to provide sufficient insight into how internal migration is managed by the government. According to Thérèse, there exists "formal" and "informal" migration. The first wave of newcomers was organised in the following way:

So, in fact, it seems that the president of the National Assembly, who comes from the area where there have been many conflicts, there was this problem of Boko Haram, the population could no longer live there. The population had to be moved. So, he came to an agreement with the Lamido [the traditional chief] of Mbé. He asked the lamido

12 Interview with Thérèse Nocke, Ngaoundéré, 17 January 2024.

of Mbé, was it possible to accommodate 500 families in the district of Mbé? The lamido agreed. The lamido summoned all the other village chiefs to tell them that, well, here is the president of the National Assembly who wants to move his population here. And you are the owners of the villages, so, who is ready to welcome the newcomers? Each leader proposed the number he could accommodate.

Even the formal policy of internal migration in Cameroon is, as the citation shows, based on personal initiatives amongst the elites rather than on government policy. Most village chiefs were interested in population growth because it could also affect their rank in the regional hierarchy, which in turn influences the chiefs' economic support from the government. However, the chiefs were unprepared for the conflicts that would follow the first wave of migrants. Thérèse explains:

But after that, it didn't go as it should. When the first people arrived and settled, they really found that it was, I don't know what term we can use, if you understand the word, Eldorado. That is to say, it was truly a very blessed land. They had good harvests. And that's how they went to get the brothers now. "Come on, we've found a good space here". But they no longer went through the chiefs. And that's when conflicts emerged. Conflicts over land, conflicts over natural resources. Because with their [the migrant's] presence, they were cutting down so many trees. Their culture wants them to have no trees. So, when they arrived, they started to devastate all the forests. And it started to create conflicts with those who were there.

Thérèse Nocke and Baïguele Jean both highlight the ecumenical challenges which they encountered in this project. The newcomers were either Muslims or Christians from other denominations who were initially sceptical of the Lutheran church. The environmental project thus evolved into one with significant theological implications - aiming to foster Christian unity on the one hand, and interreligious dialogue with Islam on the other.

The migrants had fled regions rendered uninhabitable by climate change and terrorism, while local government structures lacked the resources to respond adequately. In this context, the EELC's environmental project was reinterpreted in light of the church's constitutional emphasis on evangelisation as the promotion of God's sovereignty over creation, and of

the Gospel as a message for the whole of creation - body, soul, and spirit. Faced with the realities of migration from the Far North, this theological framework compelled the church to step in and actively seek solutions in the midst of escalating conflict.

The scale of the crisis suggests an urgent need for government intervention. The village of Wack, originally home to about 500 residents, has received several times that number in incoming migrants, who have settled on the plains a few kilometres away - and the flow continues. Yet, even in this situation, Thérèse believes that the church still has a vital role to play, as people's attitudes are beginning to shift in response to the growing tensions and the visible disappearance of the surrounding trees.

But more and more, individually, people are much more interested. Because people want... They have large fields that they want to protect at the same time. Because they have understood that the tree is a way of protecting the land. It's like a land title. When you come to find a plot of land with trees, you can't come and touch this land. And many have understood this. ... So, whenever someone needs them, they come, I give them plants. But in a collective way. Because we prefer people to work in groups.

The church's engagement with environmental issues has, over time, developed into a project where theological reflection intersects with practical diakonia, becoming integral to the very core of the church's mission.

6. Concluding remarks

Migration and forced displacement have significant social impacts on any community experiencing such shifts, whether as host or as recipient. As we have seen throughout this chapter, this has certainly been the case in northern Cameroon. Because of political unrest, terrorist attacks, and climate change, the region has undergone profound demographic changes. These developments have caused considerable suffering amongst displaced populations and placed host communities under immense strain.

In the absence of a strong state response and with limited support from the international community, much of the burden has fallen on local populations and the civil society organisations active in the area. In the

Adamawa region, we have observed that Protestant churches have played a proactive role in receiving and integrating migrants and forcibly displaced people. At the same time, it has become evident that their approaches to the newcomers are shaped by the specific context of each church - particularly in relation to size, institutional capacity, and theological orientation. In the growing literature on migration and religion, in Africa and beyond (Frederiks & Nagy, 2016; Haug, 2018; Eriksen, 2021; Maxwell & Burlăcioiu, 2022), it is increasingly evident that churches play a vital role as civil society actors, taking on broad responsibilities in creating a sense of home for people on the move. Through our examination of the daily activities of the FGM and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Adamawa region, we have seen that welcoming newcomers, offering healthcare, resolving disputes, and promoting eco-sustainable awareness are amongst the key ways in which these churches engage migrants and IDPs.

These glimpses contribute to our understanding of the relationship between the state and civil society organisations in sub-Saharan Africa, and they shed light on the multifaceted role of religious communities in conflict-affected regions. Through the FGM's guesthouse approach and the Lutheran Church's eco-theological strategy, we have examined how religious institutions operating at the micro level of society have emerged as significant civil society actors in contexts of displacement and social transformation.

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Chapter 9

Reverse mission: Pentecostals in the Diaspora – Altering or enforcing the dependency syndrome?

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1. Introduction

This chapter explores the relationship between colonialism and missionary activity, along with the legacies that continue to shape Christian mission today. One such enduring legacy is the distinction between “mother” churches and “daughter” churches - with the Global North (represented by North America and Europe) and the Global South (Asia, Africa, and Latin America) - which still defines ecumenical relations. The chapter interrogates how the “dependency syndrome” continues to shape this relationship and remains evident in Pentecostal Christianity, in the Diaspora and in home countries. It further explores how this dynamic is framed within the context of “reverse mission”, arguing for the decolonisation of mission and theology and considering the implications for ecumenical diakonia. By aligning the decolonisation of mission with the *missio Dei* concept, the chapter offers a framework for contextualising Pentecostal mission in a way that can foster glocal missional transformation.

2. The legacy of the older–younger churches

Mission has been understood in various ways throughout history, and Bosch (2011) distinguishes between several key emphases. He highlights, in soteriological terms, the former focus on saving individuals from eternal damnation; in cultural terms, the emphasis on introducing people from the East and the South to the blessings and privileges of the Christian West; in ecclesiastical terms, the priority given to the expansion of the church; and in salvation-historical terms, the understanding of mission as the process by which the world will be transformed into the kingdom of God.

What concerns us in this chapter is primarily, though not exclusively, the cultural language that has described the original movement of the gospel from the West to the rest, and how the “older–younger” concept of mission emerged to define and shape the relationship between churches on both sides of the East/South–West divide. Additionally, we examine how the other terms intersect with these cultural categories, contributing to the concept of “reverse mission” and its implications for ecumenical diakonia.

At the Jerusalem Conference (1928) of the International Missionary Council (IMC), the relationship between the “older” and “younger” churches was placed firmly on the mission agenda, and this theological exploration was further advanced at Tambaram (1938). There, the distinction between Christian and non-Christian countries was abandoned, and Europe and North America were also recognised as mission fields. Bosch (2011) describes the evolving relationship between the older and younger established churches as one of partnership, where missionaries from the older churches are welcomed and tolerated, though no longer central to the life and future of the younger churches. The prevailing understanding today is that the Christian church is missionary by its very nature and that the concept and practice of mission remain indispensable.

What is needed, is for the church to repent from the mistakes from the past and rediscover the essence of its missionary nature and calling. Bosch (2011) explains that

repentance has to begin with a bold recognition of the fact that the church-in-mission is today facing a world fundamentally different from anything it faced before.

It is a period of transition, a paradigm shift, a time of crisis where danger and opportunity meet. A paradigm shift means continuity and change that involve faithfulness to the past and a boldness to engage the future, and includes constancy and contingency, tradition and transformation (Bosch, 2011).

3. Missio Dei: Missionary by nature, rooted in the Triune God

At the Willingen Conference (1952), the concept of the *missio Dei* was embraced, whereby the church was no longer regarded as the starting point or goal of mission - but God. The church now shifted from being the sender to being the one sent by God, and during the Ghana Assembly of the IMC (1958), the home base of mission was no longer seen as the West, but everywhere. Mission was understood as mission in partnership, marking the end of guardianship by one church over another (Bosch, 2011). A distinction emerged between the missionary dimension and the missionary intention of the church. The missionary dimension is expressed when the church worships as a community with open doors to outsiders, equipping its members for their calling and service in the world. The church's missionary intention, by contrast, is expressed when it moves beyond its walls to become intentionally and directly engaged in the world.

Bosch (2011) describes Karl Barth as the first Protestant missiologist to speak of the “gathering, upbuilding, and sending” of the church, based on John 20:21: “As my Father has sent me, so I send you”. The questions posed by Newbigin about the Western church becoming a missionary church have also become significant, since its context has itself become a mission field (Reppenhagen & Guder, 2011). In 1962, Johannes Blauw used the imagery of centripetal and centrifugal to describe the missional pilgrimage of God's people in his study of congregations in mission for the WCC. *Centripetal* describes the inward pull - from the centred vocation of Israel in the Holy Land, Holy City, Holy Place, and Holy of Holies - while *centrifugal* describes the outward vocation of the New Testament communities, whose mission was to witness to God's love in Christ throughout the world (Reppenhagen & Guder, 2011).

The congregation as a missional community reflects this same dynamic: radiating God's love outward through witness and practising the hospitality of God's love (centrifugal), while gathering for worship, encouragement, and correction, which in turn leads to being sent out again (centripetal).

The church, as a contrast or alternative community in various contexts, implies a critical tension with those contexts. The missional church, as a public companion, continues the creative work of the triune God in civil society, demonstrating compassionate commitment to the institutions of society - working to create and strengthen the fabric of society, not alienating, but transforming the world (Reppenhagen & Guder, 2011). The missional church should concentrate on the threefold call to follow, to witness, and to serve, as marks of faithful discipleship and as part of its mandate in a post-everything world.

Prinsloo and Dreyer (2024) review the different periods of church engagement with poverty in South Africa, showing how churches transitioned from a focus on charity and paternalistic attitudes to a stronger advocacy for social justice and systemic transformation. They argue for a missional ecclesiology focused on a comprehensive and transformative approach to address the complexities of poverty. In a missional ecclesiology, the emphasis is placed on the church's participation in God's mission to the world, adopting a holistic understanding that integrates spiritual, social, and material dimensions - tackling immediate needs and underlying causes (Prinsloo & Dreyer, 2024:5). A missional ecclesiology can provide a guiding framework for shared commitment to holistic mission and community empowerment.

The church is called and mandated by the triune God to participate in God's mission to the world, which forms the basis for the diaconal nature of the church (WCC, 2014:47). This is not an optional function; it is realised through the gifts of the local church, which becomes a sign and servant of God's design for the world as a missional church. Every Christian shares the mandate to serve (discipleship), not as an instrument for proselytising or furthering the church's own agenda, but unconditionally, with the aim of proclaiming God's reign and goodwill for all creation, our common home. What should be kept in mind is that diaconal action, in the past and still today, has been accompanied by the exercise of personal and structural

power, which in most cases has been abused through the dependency relationship between older and younger churches, a legacy that urgently needs to be broken (WCC, 2014:51).

Diakonia holds together what the church is and does, and its Trinitarian basis represents a turning point or paradigm shift, that can be described as faith- and rights-based action (Nordstokke, 2022:38). The Trinitarian basis of diakonia is described as: faith in God as Creator and Lord over creation, granting dignity to all; following Jesus the Saviour through discipleship, showing what it means to be called and sent; and the Holy Spirit, who energises, inspires, transforms, and empowers the followers (Nordstokke, 2022:41). Knoetze (2022) similarly finds in the Trinitarian basis the foundation for a missional diaconate, whose purpose is to honour the presence of God in the world and to worship God (doxology).

It is through the sending of the Spirit by the Father and the Son that the church is created and becomes a window of the kingdom to the world. The equipping of the church through the charismata benefits the church internally and the world externally. The missional diaconate finds expression in *koinonia* (experiencing love, forgiveness, and empowerment), *diakonia* (deeds), and *kerygma* (words). In the *missio Dei*, the missional and diaconal natures are rooted in the Trinity.

4. Decolonising missional Christianity

Mission is a product of various encounters between indigenous communities and missionaries, alongside colonial traders and administrators (Mpofu, 2022:88). The Eurocentric approach to mission, which undermined indigenous knowledge systems (epistemicide) and disregarded local spiritualities (spiriticide), led to an understanding of conversion in Christianity as equivalent to Westernisation (Seroto, 2018:4).

The result was that African Christians lived a double life or had a double allegiance, on the one hand being Christian meant denouncing their culture as a form of paganism and becoming Western European or white. Conversion meant totally denouncing culture. On the other hand, although Africans, dressed, behave and acted like the missionaries, they still practiced their African culture (White, 2017:1). This is what Resane (2025) describes

as a dubious faith or ‘double faith’ that continues until today, given the multi-religious context in which African Christians find themselves. In response, African Christian theologians have explored the indigenisation of Christianity through inculturation theology - an attempt to decolonise Western-centred mission theology and embrace an inclusive African approach that focuses on African identity and values (Mpofu, 2022:88).

Mission is carried out in context; therefore, the sociopolitical, economic, and religious realities that define the African context - such as the legacies of colonialism and apartheid - must be considered, especially in terms of how the oppression, domination, and exclusion of Africans by Western nations and churches have shaped that context. Mpofu (2022) regards thinking contextually as a way of decolonising theology and mission that stimulates theologies from below, informed by the voices of the poor and marginalised. Given the lack of effort by early missionaries to understand local indigenous knowledges and practices, there remains an ongoing need to interrogate the influence of Western culture on indigenous communities, including the symbols of Christian mission and Western civilisation itself (Mpofu, 2022:96).

5. Dependency syndrome – A legacy accompanying Christianity

With the rediscovery of the local church as the church-in-mission, the idea is portrayed that no local church should stand in a position of authority over another local church - a principle aligned with the New Testament conception of the church (Bosch, 2011). The “three-self” formula of *self-government*, *self-support*, and *self-propagation* has, in theory, equalised the relationship between older and younger churches. However, Bosch (2011) argues that this has not truly changed; younger churches are still often viewed as immature and dependent on the wisdom, experience, and help of the older churches. In such a relationship, independence can be seen as pedagogical, where the self-appointed guardian decides when “home rule” should be granted. A New Testament understanding of the church, by contrast, sees the universal church finding expression in the local church, evident in its martyrria, leitourgia, koinonia, and diakonia. Bosch (2011) emphasises that although the rediscovery of the local church as the primary agent of mission has led to new interpretations of mission, the reality is that

a donor syndrome is still very much in evidence in the affluent churches of the West and a ‘dependency syndrome in the churches of the Third World.

Evidence describing this relationship is found in several recent contributions. Mashau (2020) argues that the relationship between empire and Christianity is not only historical but has become a present reality. Tracing the deceptive and domineering powers of empire back to early Christianity, Mashau (2020) calls for a “liberative praxis of engagement” to transform encounters between empire and Christianity in Africa, identifying how empire is manifested and operates. It can be described as domineering, enslaving, and divisive in its approach, perpetuating an inferiority complex amongst black people, enslaving, and creating a dependency syndrome. Empire is also manifested through dominant systems or hegemonies, is anti-life, and uses the culture of greed to further impoverish Africans.

Some of the ways in which empire is reflected in Christianity in Africa, according to Mashau (2020), include denominationalism that has turned African churches into sites of struggle, creating a divided faith with a divided mission. Prinsloo and Dreyer (2024) advocate for a united mission that transcends denominational boundaries and aims to create a more cohesive approach to combatting systemic poverty. Another feature is the lack of contextualisation, which has failed to foster meaningful conversation between African culture and religiosity, leaving Christianity as “a faith covered by a Western coat”. This has contributed to a form of Christianity shaped by the spirit of consumerism, marked by spiritual blindness, and lacking the capacity for self-critique and self-correction. It continues to marginalise, dominate, and confine women to roles of childbearing and domesticity. Most critically for this chapter, it perpetuates a dependency syndrome - described by Mashau (2020) as a culture of begging and reliance on Western funding - which reinforces paternalism by the Western church.

Kim (2019) views paternalism as a danger stemming from cross-cultural missions, producing a culture of dependency in the indigenous church. Part of the legacy of paternalism lies in the Western military conquest and economic, cultural, and intellectual superiority complexes that shaped the partnership between younger and older churches in mission. Financial

paternalism can hinder church growth; therefore, mission agencies should consider the danger of dependency when supporting churches or pastors financially (Kim, 2019). A culture of dependency between Afrikaans-speaking (older) churches and Tswana-speaking (younger) churches in the Reformed Church (*Gereformeerde Kerk*) developed. The Afrikaans churches adopt a superior attitude, instead of a loving servant leadership style, towards the Tswana churches. Meanwhile, Tswana churches often exhibit a receiving mentality, which should be replaced with responsible stewardship and entrepreneurship for their churches to become financially sustainable. Kim (2019) proposes a holistic transformational model of missions to help overcome paternalistic and dependency tendencies.

In their study of township congregations, Pali and Schoeman (2020) report that the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA) has long existed as a product of the mission history of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC), shaped by the apartheid-era ideology of paternalism and segregation. The father-child relations that described the paternalistic relationship between the white DRC and black DRCA churches were further exacerbated by the dependency leadership style followed by the DRC. In the process, African culture was undermined, while low self-esteem, and spiritual and cultural confusion were cultivated amongst African Christians. Pali and Schoeman (2020) further argue that the withdrawal of financial and human resource support by the DRC missionaries from the DRCA resulted in increased conflict and the decline of finances, mission, and diaconal ministry. A prophetic and missional ecclesiology is needed to break free from the dependency syndrome and create an African Christianity that is publicly engaged and seeks justice for all.

Afrane-Twum (2024) describes how the dependency relationship continues today, in his study on the relationship between African immigrant churches in the British context and their home countries. The Church of the Pentecost (COP) in Ghana supports the planting of churches in Britain but remains in control of the running of these churches. Although the COP churches in Britain are not centrally controlled by the international headquarters in Ghana, the headquarters plays a supervisory role and intervenes where appropriate (Afrane-Twum, 2024:89). The COP offers African members a place of worship where they can discover a sense of

identity, respect, and belonging. The second generation of immigrants holds the possibility of cross-cultural mission, maintaining their identity, family, culture, and Christian beliefs while at the same time adapting to the culture of the host country (Afrane-Twum, 2024:122).

6. Reverse mission: A misnomer or a move of the spirit?

The story of Abraham and his family migrating to Egypt is an example of how crucial the phenomenon of migration is to the human story - and, importantly, the story of faith (Agbiji & Etukumana, 2015:200). Reflecting on this migration story, the declaration, “A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien”, are drawn from Deuteronomy 26:5. This raises questions such as whether Abraham and his children had the proper documents to stay in Egypt, whether the children had the appropriate Egyptian social security credentials, and whether they could speak the Egyptian language. It touches on the sociopolitical and economic factors involved in issues of migration and xenophobia. This is also the story of Christian mission; for centuries, there has been this sending-receiving dynamic, host-home relationships, and the resulting fear and stereotyping of the ‘other’.

The world has become increasingly borderless, with people migrating for economic, social, and religious reasons throughout the 20th century (Adedibu, 2015:172). For migrants, this means facing discontinuities at various levels, and because of the push-and-pull factors of their host communities, they must find a way to acculturate in that context. Migration is driven by push-and-pull factors, with push factors referring to unsatisfactory conditions such as economic, religious, sociopolitical, and educational challenges on the African continent, and pull factors including good education and economic opportunities in the American context (Sackey-Ansah, 2020:68). The paradigm shifts in Christianity over the last century reflect the shift in the gravity of Christianity from the churches in the North to those in the South; the rise of Africa as an influential hub for Christianity; and, lastly, the development of reverse mission, making Africans an influential wave within global Christianity.

The world is witnessing the greatest movement of humanity today, which present the church of Jesus Christ with marvellous opportunities to join in solidarity with strangers in all parts of the world (Van Engen, 2018:1). The immigrant or stranger should not merely be seen as someone else, but also as part of ‘us’ according to Scripture, which calls for care and compassion towards them. Although there are many perspectives on the stranger - as an enemy of the people of God; as someone who should obey the same norms and keep the same commandments as the people of God; and as someone who should not only be treated fairly and equitably but also be cared for - this care is not optional. The stranger also has an instrumental role in God’s mission (Van Engen, 2018:5).

The oversimplification of the “reverse mission” model, which assumes that Southern Christians (from the Global South, specifically Ghana, Africa) come to Europe (Belgium) to “re-Christianise” them, are also critiqued, finding that such an intention is largely absent from the missionary activities of these churches (Oppong-Konadu, 2023:130). Reflecting on the African Pentecostal planting of churches in the Canadian context, Jerimade (2017) finds that certain plantings by the Redeemed Christian Church of God cannot be regarded as “reverse mission”. Eriksen (2019:2), reflecting on discovering a charismatic Spanish church in his neighbourhood in Norway, concludes that

the mere presence of the church gave a clue that religion may be essential to migrants and that some migrants are Christians with needs to meet in multicultural, multilingual, Pentecostal-charismatic, and mission-minded churches like this.

Migrant churches can become powerful forces to restore faith, and they not only bring mission back onto the agenda of the church but also generate a reverse flow (from the Global South to the Global North) of spirituality, theology, and energy for mission - a shift that now includes everyone in the conversation (Biehl, 2022). Calling migration the DNA of Christian mission, with its roots already visible in Acts 2 on the Day of Pentecost, when people from all over the earth heard the gospel message in their own language, Biehl (2022) asserts that the Christian church today is a global gathering of men and women, serving as a model of and for cross-cultural mission.

Congregations of African immigrant churches in Britain are organised along ethnic lines - a structure that, while notable, is necessary to support the integration of recently arrived immigrants (Afrane-Twum, 2024:2). There is a huge need for more effective cross-cultural collaboration between white majority churches and African migrant churches, for the Great Commission to be fulfilled in Britain (Afrane-Twum, 2024:4). Sackey-Ansah (2020:66), mindful of the push-and-pull factors accompanying the migration of Africans to the West, specifically to America, observes that these African immigrants brought with them skills, talents, academic potential, and religious beliefs. They have impacted their spheres of influence by raising churches, forming prayer groups, preaching the gospel, and creating mission fields in their host countries.

International migration can be appreciated as a God-given opportunity to spread the gospel, with Christianity declining in Britain, North America, and Western Europe. The influx of Christian migrants can serve as “a providential means for reaching out to the host,” and in order to achieve this, white majority churches and black immigrant churches will need to “combat mission ignorance and apathy that has over the years affected the work of the ministry in the country” (Afrane-Twum, 2024:133). Migration is seen as the will of God, with all people created by God and deserving of respect. Währisch-Oblau (2006:32) calls this “spontaneous forms of mission” that did not die with early Christianity but continue today through migration movements from the South to the North and from the East to the West.

Migrants are not simply like all of us, although we are all migrants as a people on the move; rather, migrants and refugees are people who were forced unduly and unjustly to leave their countries, and their struggle to realise their human rights and dignity is real. Bautista (2022:417) describes their experiences as a tragic consequence of the push-and-pull factors, with push factors playing a greater role in migration. This aligns with Dube (2016), who finds in the migration stories of Abraham and Jesus how the push-and-pull factors contribute to a migration perspective that allows for a dialectical interaction between the biblical world and the reader.

Romanticising or idealising migration is also not helpful for the migration debate. Stenschke (2016) derives from the biblical accounts, especially from the Book of Acts, that the movements of the early Christians, whether voluntary or forced, opened new opportunities for the gospel and may remain relevant for the church today. Stenschke (2016:146) identifies in Luke's writings a dynamic and mobile community of followers of Jesus, a distinctive trait not as a judgement but as obedience in following Jesus. He notes that there is a significant responsibility on the church to support those who emigrate, including the provision of basic necessities, assistance with integration, pastoral care, and using its influence to engage governments and communities where immigrants encounter xenophobia (Stenschke, 2016:147).

Migration carries the church into geographical areas that were once closed and introduces Christians from other continents into secular Europe. It also relocates people who have not been witnessed to or ministered to into countries where they are more easily reached by Christians whom they encounter. Afrane-Twum (2024:140) notes that in countries where government stances on Christianity make mission work difficult and complicated, embracing migrants and equipping them to return and evangelise in their home countries can serve as one of the most effective mission strategies.

Reverse mission, however, is a misnomer if it remains focused only on one's own kind within the host country, as it may appear to be "more of a global extension of their Christian faith than a new expression of faith in their host country" (Afrane-Twum, 2024:137). In some cases, the involvement of Africans in mainline churches resembles more a "Macedonia call" for help than genuine reverse mission, making the concept more a work in progress than an established reality. Asamoah-Gyadu (2012) disagrees with the notion that

those from the underside of history use Christianity simply to make up for the shortfalls of uprootedness and alienation in hostile foreign lands.

Citing two examples from African pastors in the Pentecostal-Charismatic tradition, Asamoah-Gyadu (2012) demonstrates how they successfully planted churches in Kyiv, Ukraine (the Church of the Embassy of the

Blessed Kingdom of God for All Nations), and in London, England (Kingsway International Christian Centre). The major difference between the two is that the one in Ukraine consists mostly of Eastern Europeans and is led by an African immigrant, while the one in England mainly attracts African immigrants and black members. The shared denominator between them is how lives are transformed through their born-again message (conversion) and their emphasis on experiencing the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Afrane-Twum (2024) confirms that African immigrant churches from the Pentecostal-Charismatic tradition believe that their God-given task cannot be fulfilled without the operation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Just as the baptism of the Holy Spirit was crucial for Christians in the first century, it remains vital in the twentieth century to empower believers with the gifts for ministry. Afrane-Twum (2024) offers a thorough biblical understanding, a missiological foundation, and a Spirit-led theological framework to foster partnership between African immigrant churches and white majority churches.

7. Ecumenical diakonia: Dispelling the dependency syndrome in service together

The ACT Alliance (Action by Churches Together) and the WCC held an international consultation in Malawi in 2014, where they conceptualised “ecumenical diakonia” from two perspectives. First, it is understood theologically as the diaconal church being an integral dimension of the church’s nature and mission - a core expression of what churches are and what they do. Second, it refers to how churches engage in diaconal action across confessional and geographical boundaries. The vision is for the church, ecumenically, to assist all people in need and to work for a better world for all (WCC, 2014:10). A key part of the vision is to change the development paradigm - moving beyond simply offering aid to developing countries by integrating other critical dimensions. One of the dimensions mentioned in the document *Ecumenical Diakonia* is forced migration, described as the large numbers of people leaving their home countries in search of better opportunities, often facing uncertainty and a lack of rights in the process (WCC, 2014:18). This aspect of the church’s diaconal service

is also the focus of this chapter, which proposes ecumenical diakonia as an opportunity to challenge the entrenched dichotomy between older and younger churches and to break the legacy of the “dependency syndrome” that has long shaped their relationships

Push factors, which can be defined as the forced movement of people in conditions of dispersal, displacement, and dislocation in migration, undermines the human dignity of migrants and refugees, who, like all other human beings, are also carriers of the divine gift of God’s likeness (Bautista, 2022:418). Migrants are also bearers of the Good News of God’s justice and liberation - not just in the traditional sense of being diaconally understood as recipients of aid, but as people with voice and agency. Bautista (2022:419) reports on the work of Churches Witnessing with Migrants (CWWM) and presents the tripartite model of partnership amongst migrants and refugees, migrant- and refugee-serving institutions, and faith and religious bodies. The partnership models “a radical koinonia of equals (in a tripartite framework) and a contextual and prophetic diakonia”. It makes possible a koinonia of equals between the different parties involved, fostering a diakonia of shared thinking and doing, shared knowledge, and material resources. The tripartite framework of being, knowing, and doing can be a unique platform that works for the salvation and liberation of everyone involved in the process.

Dikova-Osthus (2022) explores the concept of the “liturgy after the liturgy” within the Orthodox tradition, which is also embraced by the ecumenical church. In the Eucharist, the cosmos becomes the church and includes all aspects of human life, so that the liturgy is not an escape from the world but a constant transformation of the individual and the community, who are then sent out into the world. The personal sacrifices made on behalf of those in need become a diaconal behaviour from which everyone draws strength through the Eucharist, prepares for conscious participation in it, and becomes transformed through its celebration (Dikova-Osthus, 2022:413). It is a service to God and others using our gifts. The heterogeneity of the Orthodox community in Germany has resulted in diverse community pastoral care, offering a spiritual and social home to its members in the Diaspora through neighbourhood assistance that has grown into a community-organised diakonia.

An important observation by Dikova-Osthus (2022:416) centres on the vitality for ecumenism offered by involvement in the diaconal field, connecting Christian churches in theory and practice, and filling the ecumenical community with life. Klaasen (2020) argues for the centrality of diakonia in the liturgy of the church but also extends it to include the cosmos in his understanding of the mark of catholicity of the church. As he aptly states, diakonia as whole-making bridges the gap between service and liturgy. Ecumenical diakonia affirms the dignity and power of those who work for it and the beneficiaries of its practices - “a diaconal application of the Pentecostal gift of experiencing ‘God’s deeds of power’ in one’s own language... rooted in local contexts of life and gifts” (WCC, 2014:47).

Migrant churches have given Christianity in the Netherlands a comeback, as it had almost disappeared over the last 30 years (Van Laar, 2006). It offered the West unique opportunities to meet the world church on their own ground, where “... unfamiliar African, Korean, Brazilian, and Chinese shapes of Christianity give rainbow colour to multi-ethnic cities like Rotterdam, Madrid, and London”. After being challenged by the Conference on World Mission and Evangelism and the WCC, the Netherlands Missionary Council, together with the Evangelical Missionary Alliance and the Roman Catholic Mission Council, held a consultation in 1998 to bring together Christian leaders from across the spectrum in the Netherlands. The aim was to develop a new vision for cooperation and unity in the mission of God (*missio Dei*) and to create a framework for a common missionary strategy for the 21st century (Van Laar, 2006:11).

The Missionary Quarterly Council, representing Christian leaders from Ecumenical, Evangelical, Charismatic, and Pentecostal traditions in the Netherlands, has met over the last two decades to engage in conversations around the relationship between Pentecostalism and Western Christianity, Ecumenical, Reformed, and Pentecostal Christians. The focus has largely been on how they work together against xenophobia, which seems more powerful than tolerance and hospitality, and on how old and new churches can work together and overcome past brokenness through healing. The outcomes of these consultations are helpful for the discussion in this chapter on how an ecumenical diakonia centred on the *missio Dei* can reshape the

relationship between older and younger churches, refute the legacy of the dependency syndrome, and allow the Spirit to lead us in new and fresh ways in a time such as ours.

8. “The Spirit blows where it wants”: Following the Spirit’s leading

Most immigrant churches in Britain, Europe, and America discern the involvement of the Spirit in their calling and sending within their host countries. Währisch-Oblau (2006) prefers the term “New Mission Churches” over the term “migrant churches” because these churches see their role in the host countries as a form of missionary outreach. Even amongst Pentecostal and Charismatic churches,

they see themselves as missionaries within the European context—they will give testimony that God has sent them here with the Gospel, and they start new churches without asking anyone for permission (Währisch-Oblau, 2006:32).

Anderson (2006) argues that Pentecostals should come to grips with the freedom of the Spirit that allows them to formulate a theology meaningful for people in different life situations. Theology, he suggests, is more than just its written or academic form; it is also found in the preaching, rituals, and practices of a contextualised Christianity - what he calls an “enacted theology” or “theology in practice” (Anderson, 2006:31).

Some of the challenges that Pentecostalism poses to older churches come through this form of Christianity that appeals to ordinary people, identifies with an identity of being separated, promotes an egalitarian community, and offers democratic access to spiritual power. Pentecostals witness to the world in the power of the Spirit, see themselves as a born-again people of God, emphasise a conversion experience, encourage the availability and use of the gifts of the Spirit, and uphold a holistic dimension of salvation - most importantly, one that should be experienced in the here and now. Anderson (2006:31) states that

the experience of the power of the Spirit is potentially a unifying factor in a deeply divided church and world; the motivation for social and political engagement; and the catalyst for change in the hope of a new and better world.

The New Mission Churches discuss mission and evangelism in a structural way, and Währisch-Oblau (2006:45) questions whether their flexible organisation is much more appropriate to the *missio Dei*, the movement of God's Spirit in the world, than the bureaucratic structures of the established churches. Mainline Protestant churches are changing towards New Mission Churches as they throw off their roles as clients and receivers of pastoral-diaconal care, accusing the newcomers of being "sheep stealers" and of "sectarianism". Instead of mission being only the task of all churches, it is also a happening that confronts them - namely, the *missio Dei*, how the Holy Spirit is at work in the world outside the confines of their own denominations.

In his investigation of migrant churches, Van der Laan (2006) identifies churches from the ecumenical mainstream (Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant), reverse mission churches (Church of Pentecost, Kimbanguist), independent migrant churches (Everlasting Salvation Ministries, House of Fellowship International), and denominational migrant churches (Assemblies of God, United Pentecostal, and Gospel Assemblies). Van der Laan (2006:60) opines that these churches are prevalent in Dutch society and exist for various reasons. Migrants come to the Netherlands hoping to find green pastures in a land of milk and honey, knocking on heaven's doors, but are usually disappointed by its harsh, secularised Western world. Migrant churches become, for these migrants, places of belonging and islands of hope where they can cry out to God for their needs.

The primary mission of Pentecostalism is to renew the meaning of Pentecost for the whole church (Johns, 2006:94) Four signs of Pentecost are inherent in Pentecostalism: it is an ongoing festival, functioning as an epistemological key, as a festival of deconstruction and reconstruction, and as a marginal festival. Johns (2006:98) warns against efforts to tame or domesticate the power of the Holy Spirit to fit our agendas and our liturgical and ecclesiastical structures. Attempts to control the power of the Holy Spirit are fruitless; therefore, it is mostly experienced within marginal contexts.

While the church often aims to be mainline and have a voice in the centres of power, “Pentecost calls us to relinquish this desire for centrality ... calls us to its own core, its own center of power and authority”, uniting people from all around the world in a new form of human community (Johns, 2006:99).

Pentecost offers a transformational vision for the cosmopolitan future of the world, highlighting “the radical hospitality of God towards the other, incarnated in the community of faith via the agency of the Holy Spirit” (Augustine, 2011). Through the agency of the Holy Spirit, Christ is made present in the community of faith, turning His followers into Christ-bearers, making possible an embodied gospel realised in humanity and the entire cosmos. As a royal priesthood and a prophethood of believers, they become a prophetic Pentecost community that is truth-embodiment and truth-proclaiming through the Spirit as the agent, engine, and navigator (Augustine, 2011:206). Augustine (2011:208) is critical of Western multiculturalism, which outwardly displays an attitude of tolerance and respect for local cultures but persists in its own cultural superiority and self-justifies its privileged status (Augustine, 2011).

Augustine (2011:213) proposes an unconditional hospitality that is an act of taking the place of the stranger in one’s own home, handing over the keys to the other, and letting them abide by their own terms and conditions. The unconditional hospitality of God is also offered and received by the other through the agency of the Holy Spirit, inviting all humanity into the inter-sociality of the Trinity, initiating dialogue by respacing oneself and creating conditions for inclusion. It is in the prophesying community of faith at Pentecost that the radical hospitality of God is articulated, providing a vision of a democratic society where radical emancipation and inclusivity extend across all socio-economic strata, embracing the other and the different - all as outcomes of the work of the Spirit (Augustine, 2011:218).

The Pentecost community continues the ministry of hospitality to a destitute humanity, displaying the nature of the triune God who welcomes the stranger, the wanderer, the marginalised, and the displaced in an embrace of divine hospitality (Augustine, 2011:219). Dube (2013), responding to the crisis of landlessness and homelessness in biblical and current times, finds in the nascent Jesus community a locus of hospitality and equality. Contrasting the economic system outside the house (the

hierarchical Roman economy) with the system inside the house (the alternative system of Jesus that welcomes the homeless, the landless, and the poor), Dube (2013) portrays how Jesus entrenches a radical status reversal of the Kingdom - a radical reordering of space, power, and belonging. Indeed, it is this radical hospitality, embodied in an ecumenical diakonia, that can assist migrant churches and their host countries to dispel the older-younger church dichotomy and break the legacy of the dependency syndrome, creating a welcoming common home.

9. Conclusion

This chapter focused mainly on migration and reverse mission, interrogating how an ecumenical diakonia centred on the *missio Dei* can equalise the relationship between older and younger churches, refute the legacy of the dependency syndrome, and allow the Spirit to lead us in new and fresh ways in a time such as ours.

The relationship between older churches, with their centres of origin in the West and the Global North (Western Europe and North America), and younger churches in the Global South (Africa, Asia, and Latin America), has historically been marked by dependency. Although colonialism and its symbiotic relationship with missionary Christianity have ended, the legacy of dependency still exists in many forms today.

The New Mission Churches (migrant churches) that emerged through migration and reverse mission hold the potential to alter this dependency syndrome, though various forms of it are still reinforced in host and home countries. An ecumenical diakonia, rooted in the *missio Dei*, offers significant potential and presents compelling opportunities for older and younger churches to follow the leading of the Spirit. It fosters a transformed society that is tolerant and hospitable towards the other

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Chapter 10

South African, Church of Norway and Church of Sweden pushing for just peace in Israel and Palestine by naming Israel's policies apartheid: World Council of Churches' 2025 decision

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1. Introduction

Parallel to the strong involvement of the South African government in upholding international law, South African churches have allied with other churches in promoting a just peace in response to the human-made catastrophes in the Middle East. Numerous international law provisions are violated by all the parties - and Israel's inadequate efforts to prevent and prosecute violent settlers is also a violation of international law and Jewish ethics (Cramer, 2025; ToI Staff, 2025a). Table 1's figures over deaths speak for themselves. The number of injured persons and displaced persons are higher. Hundreds of persons in Syria, Iran and Yemen are also killed.

Following the 7 October 2023 terror that involved several militant Palestinian actors, an escalation of the Israel–Hezbollah conflict began on

8 October 2023. It formally ended with a ceasefire on 27 November 2024, with ongoing attacks in 2025.¹

The Israeli– Hamas ceasefire lasted from 19 January to 18 March 2025; and on 16 May 2025, the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) started a huge ground offensive, termed Gideon’s Chariots, in Gaza. Moreover, the closure or restrictions of humanitarian aid - going on for years and escalating since March 2025 - has resulted in hundreds of starvation deaths, in blatant violation of IV Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War of 12 August 1949.

When reading Table 1, it is important to note that the use of 7 October 2023 as the starting point for these figures does *not* imply that the conflict began on that day; rather, it marks a significant escalation.

Table 1: Figures on number of dead and taken hostage, as of 20 January 2025

Gaza (civilians & Hamas and other militant groups) (Al -Jazeera, 2025; (others report higher figures)	Israeli security forces (Gaza + Lebanon + West Bank) (Fabian, 2025; United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [UN OCHA], 2025)	Lebanese (civilians & militants) + Israeli (civilians & security forces) (Ali, 2025; Daoud, 2025 has daily updates; Tol Staff, 2025b; Reuters, 2024)	West Bank (Palestinians + Israeli civilians/ settlers) (UN OCHA, 2025)	7 Oct 2023 terror: Killed + taken hostage + Israelis killed in Israel since attack (Human Rights Watch [HRW], 2024)
62 614 + indirect deaths	968 + 87 + 23	More than 4100 + 127 (Nov-24)	999 + 12	1 195 + 251 + 17

The three main armed actors have, in various ways and at different times, expressed their objectives. Hezbollah has not revised its 2009 anti-Israeli manifesto (reprinted in Alagha, 2011). Hamas (2017:20) revised its original charter, accepting a Palestinian state “along the lines of the 4th

1 For violations of the ceasefire agreement, see Daoud (2025), with daily updates.

of June 1967...” – although much of its other rhetoric contradicts this formulation. Israel’s current government has expressed four objectives: to eliminate, destroy or defeat Hamas; to release all hostages captured on 7 October 2023; to ensure that Gaza is no longer a threat to Israel; and to secure the safe return of all residents to the northern border area (Lis, 2024, quoting Prime Minister Netanyahu). To this can be added another objective: territorial expansion (Washington Post, 2024; UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights [UN OHCHR], 2024), which has happened gradually. In 2024 and 2025, a large majority in the Israeli Knesset said no to the establishment of a Palestinian state and supported full annexation of the West Bank, respectively (Knesset, 2024; Sokol, 2025).

Against the backdrop of these catastrophes, this chapter analyses how churches and church-related organisations (CROs) have called for new perceptions of the ongoing tragedy in Israel and Palestine by using the term ‘apartheid’. Such terminology may also prompt stronger measures by the international community. The chapter places particular emphasis on the process leading up to the 2022 World Council of Churches (WCC) General Assembly, which adopted the statement *Seeking Justice and Peace for All in the Middle East* (WCC General Assembly, 2022), and the subsequent decision by the WCC Central Committee (2025) to actually apply the term. The article also presents the resolution by the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) World Council (YMCA, 2022a; 2022b), titled *Just Peace for All – A World Free from Occupation*, which employed more explicit language. The chapter applies the conceptual framework of *vocatio*, *ad-vocatio*, and *pro-vocatio* (Nordstokke, 2021:237; WCC & Action by Churches Together [ACT] Alliance, 2022:8, 15).

The method used is a review of relevant church and CRO decisions over the last 15 years. In addition to the conceptual framework, I apply Lukes’ theory of power (1974) and Mott’s outline of core Christian ethics (2011) in the analysis.

Before outlining the conceptual framework - which Nordstokke refers to as a ‘claim’ - an overview of the Palestinian Christian context is provided, as this context is essential for understanding the efforts of the international ecumenical movement. As a tool for analysing the 2022 resolutions, it is

also necessary to review various sources' positions on the use of the term 'apartheid' in relation to Israeli policies. The main discussion identifies the particular context of Christian actors engaging in advocacy to influence the State of Israel, asking whether such advocacy is provocative or effective.

2. The Palestinian Christian Protestant context

As this chapter analyses efforts by Protestant churches, the Christian context in Palestine will focus on the Protestant denominations, acknowledging that their membership is considerably smaller than that of the Catholic ('Latin'), Orthodox, and Greek Catholic ('Melkite') churches (Haugen, 2015:111, 120, n. 7). Two Protestant churches are recognised amongst the so-called Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem: the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem (2024a), with 27 congregations in five countries and 7,000 members; and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) (ELCJHL, 2024), with six congregations - one of them in Amman - and approximately 3,000 members² (Lutheran World Federation [LWF], 2018). The Lutheran presence is further supported by the LWF's property and activities at the top of the Mount of Olives, including the Augusta Victoria Hospital (AVH) and the Church of the Ascension (LWF, s.a.).

Widening the perspective, smaller Protestant churches in the West Bank are members of the Council of Local Evangelical Churches in the Holy Land, which was recognised by the Palestinian Authority (PA) in 2019. Individuals from these churches have, since 1979, been involved in the founding of Bethlehem Bible College, which has given rise to two affiliated institutions: Nazareth Evangelical College and the Gaza Study Centre. World Vision has been an important financial contributor, including to the Christ at the Checkpoint (CATC) conferences, held biennially since 2010; the Secretary-General of the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) has spoken at several CATC conferences, and the Lausanne Movement has also endorsed CATC (Isaac & Su, 2014).

With support from churches and other CROs, the Episcopal Diocese and the ELCJHL are involved in a wide range of diaconal efforts. The Episcopal

2 The current figure is likely lower.

Diocese owns two hospitals - Al Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza and St Luke's Hospital in Nablus - two clinics (Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem, 2024b), and 20 educational institutions (Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem, 2024c). The ELCJHL owns four schools and one preschool (ELCJHL, 2024), and vocational schools in Jerusalem are owned by the LWF. Another vocational school, in Gaza, is owned by the ecumenical organisation Near East Council of Churches Committee for Refugee Work, established in 1952 to serve Palestinian refugees.

From these descriptions, three crucial insights can be drawn. First, Palestinian churches play a societal role and wield influence that far exceeds what their limited membership might suggest.

Second, their relationship with churches and CROs around the world are strong and long-standing. Even denominations without sister churches in Israel or Palestine operate wide-ranging programmes - for example, the (Presbyterian) Church of Scotland. Presbyterian churches have been present in Syria and Lebanon since the mid-19th century, alongside the (initially) joint Lutheran / Anglican presence further south. For many CROs - such as Norwegian Church Aid (NCA), which is owned by most Protestant churches in Norway - their partnership with Palestinian churches represent their longest-standing relationships, some dating back to the early 1950s.

Third, the ELCJHL and the Episcopal Diocese have their head offices in East Jerusalem. East Jerusalem is considered by the vast majority of countries to be under Israeli occupation, most recently affirmed by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) (ICJ, 2024). However, as Israel exercises jurisdiction over (greater) East Jerusalem, all permits are issued by Israel's Religious Communities Department (RCD). It is important to maintain a proper relationship with the Israeli authorities, particularly the RCD. This relationship with Israeli authorities is especially significant for churches and CROs operating from Jerusalem, more so than for those based in West Bank cities.

Three CROs are particularly important in this study. First, YMCA East Jerusalem (s.a.) was established in Jericho in 1949. In addition to its main office, YMCA East Jerusalem operates in ten towns across the West Bank. It is relevant that YMCA Jerusalem was established in 1878, and what is

now named Jerusalem International YMCA, located in West Jerusalem, is *not* affiliated with the Global YMCA. Second, Sabeel (based in Jerusalem and Nazareth) is listed as a partner of the Church of Sweden (CoS) (CoS, 2024). Third, Kairos Palestine (based in Bethlehem) was, along with Sabeel, previously identified as an ‘important partner’ by the Church of Norway (CoN) Council on Ecumenical and International Relations (2021:7). In its 2024–2026 strategy, the term ‘closer cooperation’ is applied for Sabeel and Kairos Palestine (CoN Council on Ecumenical and International Relations, 2024:5).

Palestine and Israel are addressed in a unique way through the WCC Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI), which operates under the local patronage of the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches. The governments of Norway and Sweden have been major funders of the EAPPI, with Sweden ending its funding from 2025, and churches in these countries have recruited a significant share of its participants. This stands in contrast to Germany, which has been reported as stating that “the German government... does not directly or indirectly fund the World Council of Churches” (ToI Staff, 2015, quoting Channel 2).

This claim is incorrect. In fact, Germany has allocated “substantial grants” to the WCC (WCC Finance Committee, 2022:4). The same source also inaccurately claims that the WCC “backs BDS” (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions – a campaign targeting Israel and Israeli institutions). This is not true. What is accurate is that the WCC Central Committee (2005; 2014; 2025; see also WCC Programmes, 2005) has called for economic measures targeting products from Israeli settlements and companies operating in those settlements, which, under international law, are considered occupied territory. The 2025 decision also included “targeted sanctions, ... and arms embargoes...” against Israel. In European Union (EU) terminology, divesting from and avoiding trade with actors contributing to the occupation is referred to as differentiation (Haugen, 2024).

This example illustrates that any action taken concerning Palestine and Israel is at risk of being misinterpreted, especially by those who view with suspicion any effort to hold Israel accountable for its policies.

3. The essence of vocatio, ad-vocatio, and pro-vocatio

The 2022 study document *Called to Transformation. Ecumenical Diakonia* (WCC & ACT Alliance, 2022:15, italics in original), reads:

To reflect on diakonia is therefore an invitation to give new expression to the vocation to be part of God's mission to the world, and to understand this call (vocatio) as advocacy (ad-vocatio) and if necessary provocation (pro-vocatio); the first affirming the situation and the wellbeing of the other as fundamental for how discipleship is performed, the other acknowledging that this way of doing diakonia will provoke resistance and contradiction, however always convinced that it will be transformative...

These are considered “new expressions”. Moreover, there is an acknowledgment that both *ad-vocatio* and *pro-vocatio* will provoke resistance and contradiction.

Given that the Orthodox member churches of the WCC hold to the concept of symphonia as part of their ecclesiology - implying mutual legitimisation between the autocephalous (self-administered, national) Orthodox churches and state authorities - this explicit emphasis on a vocal role for the churches is surprising.

It is too early to assess whether any church has fully adopted this conceptual framework. The term ‘prophetic diakonia’ does, however, have a longer history (LWF, 2002), and the fact that the LWF was an early proponent of the term is noteworthy. Historically, Lutheran churches legitimised and supported state authorities in various kingdoms and principalities across Northern Europe following the Reformation. They lacked genuine independence and often functioned as instruments of public policy - though some priests showed courageous resistance.

Today, the situation is quite different for the Lutheran majority churches, such as the CoN, CoS, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Finland (ELCF). The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark (ELCD), however, deviates from the others in that it lacks a national church council or synod and does not have the same tradition of church leaders speaking publicly on issues perceived as political.

4. Views on the term 'apartheid' as applied to Israeli policies

It is common to hear that the term 'apartheid' is inappropriate when applied to Israel, because of significant differences between the South African apartheid regime (1948–1994) and South West Africa (now Namibia, 1948–1990). These differences include constitutional structures, ideological support, and demographic realities - in South Africa, for instance, a white minority dominated a black majority. On the other hand, there are at least two similarities between Israel's present policies and South Africa pre-1994: the religious justification for the policies and the spatial expression of the occupation, with surveillance and movement restrictions.

Moreover, the term 'apartheid' has outlived the South African regime. It is now defined in international law, including as a crime against humanity under Article 7(2)(h) of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), adopted in 1998 - four years after the fall of apartheid. Therefore, applying the term 'apartheid' is not about drawing comparisons with South Africa, but about referring to relevant international legal frameworks: the ICC Statute, the Apartheid Convention, and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD).

Four perspectives on the use of the term 'apartheid' will now be introduced. It is notable that the term is not mentioned in the (controversial) list of examples accompanying the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism. Nonetheless, an increasing number of public and private actors have adopted the definition and its example list. Example 7 reads (IHRA, 2016): "Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor". Characterising a state as "a racist endeavor" moves in the same conceptual direction as the term 'apartheid'.

The first view is expressed by Naim Ateek, Episcopal priest and founder of Sabeel in the early 1990s. He referred to an Israeli form of apartheid, drawing on the Hebrew terms *hafrada* (separation) and *nishool* (dispossession), in reflection on the title of a 2008 conference in Boston, USA (Ateek, 2008). He cited an interview with Israeli Senior Advisor Alon and Jimmy Carter's book *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, although he did

not reference the statement by former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, who said: “Israel risks apartheid-like struggle if two-state solution fails” (McCarthy, 2007, quoting Olmert, Israeli PM 2006–2009). Since 2010, former Prime Minister Ehud Barak (1999–2001) has also used the term ‘apartheid’ on at least two occasions when discussing Israel’s future.

The second view is expressed by the *Cry for Hope* (Kairos Palestine, 2020:3):

As followers of Jesus, our response to ideologies of exclusivity and apartheid is to uphold a vision of inclusivity and equality for all peoples of the land and to persistently struggle to bring this about. ... we stand against the theology of Empire, a global order of domination manifesting in racial, economic, cultural, and ecological oppression that threatens humanity and all of creation.

The linking of the State of Israel with Empire was not new to *Cry for Hope*, but the wording was more explicit than previously seen. The term ‘apartheid’ does not appear in Kairos Palestine (2009), which used the term ‘racism’ only once (Kairos Palestine, 2009:section 6.3).

The third view comes from the Jerusalem Declaration on anti-Semitism (JDA) (Abicht et al., 2021). It was authored by scholars in the fields of antisemitism, Holocaust, and Jewish studies, who found the IHRA working definition - particularly its list of examples - too expansive. I am aware that the term ‘Semite’ encompasses Jews and Arabs; however, the term ‘antisemitism’ is applied for hostile or “negative attitudes towards and actions against Jews or what is perceived as Jewish...” (Moe, 2023:17). Section 13 of the JDA (Abicht et al., 2021:section 13, extract) states:

It is not antisemitic to point out systematic racial discrimination. In general, the same norms of debate that apply to other states and to other conflicts over national self-determination apply in the case of Israel and Palestine. Thus, even if contentious, it is not antisemitic, in and of itself, to compare Israel with other historical cases, including settler-colonialism or apartheid.

The JDA emphasises the context when considering a specific expression:

Context can include the intention behind an utterance, or a pattern of speech over time, or even the identity of the speaker, especially when the subject is Israel or Zionism (Abicht et al., 2021, preambular para 6).

The fourth view is expressed by a Commission operating under the mandate from the CoN, which submitted its report in 2024. I served as a member of this Commission and was actively involved in formulating its wording (CoN Commission, 2024:131; own translation):

Even those who find it appropriate to use the concept [apartheid] on Israeli policies, acknowledge the danger that the term can be misused in general anti-Israeli and anti-Jewish rhetoric. Although several of the Commission members are strong opponents of applying the term ‘apartheid’ to Israeli policies, the members of the Commission agree that it must be the context and the justification that determines whether the possible use of the term can be said to be anti-Semitic or not (see the JDA).

Hence, the Commission takes a similar position to that of the 350 scholars behind the JDA (one Commission member is a JDA signatory), implying that a specific and nuanced description of Israeli policies - concluding that these policies amount to apartheid - is not antisemitic. The term ‘apartheid’ remains controversial, as the following examples will demonstrate.

5. The process leading up to the WCC resolution

Already in 2009, a study sponsored by South Africa’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs concluded that Israel’s policies constituted apartheid (al-Haq, 2009; Du Plessis et al., 2009). In 2019, the Synod of the Anglican Church in Southern Africa (ACSA) adopted a resolution stating that the situation in Israel and Palestine is “in some respects... worse than apartheid” (ACSA, 2019:para 2e). Two years later, a CoS Synod decision titled *International Law in Israel and Palestine* was adopted by 127 votes to 103 (CoS, 2021a:49–51, 29–31), following the rejection of the original proposal (CoS, 2021b; the vote was 15–13, with one bishop abstaining). The final resolution referenced the UN Apartheid Convention and the ICC Statutes, and specified that the CoS should “bring the issue” (*lyfta frågan*) to the WCC and LWF. All bishops voted against the resolution and received a letter of complaint from ELCJHL’s Bishop Azar (2022).

More churches, such as the Presbyterian Church in the USA (PCUSA), adopted two resolutions in 2022: one was unanimous, using the term

'apartheid-like', while the other was more explicit (PCUSA, 2022) - the vote was 266–116. Other church assemblies voted down resolutions applying the term 'apartheid' to Israel's policies, most notably the General Convention of the Episcopal Church in the USA (ECUSA), which occurred twice (ECUSA, 2018; 2022).

In June 2022, two months before the start of the WCC General Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany, the General Secretary-elect, Jerry Pillay (Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa), was criticised for an article in which he concluded that comparing Israel and Palestine with apartheid South Africa was "justifiable" (Pillay, 2016). He was accused of promoting "ideological extremism" (Jenkins, 2022, quoting David Michaels from B'nai B'rith International).

On the first day of the WCC General Assembly, the acting WCC General Secretary addressed the Assembly, stating that the proposed resolution from the ACSA - which had earlier received the support of three other South/Southern African churches, as well as the CoN and the CoS - was met with considerable scepticism by church leaders in Palestine (Sauca, 2022),³ whom he had visited in July (WCC News, 2022; WCC, 2023:14). Quoting these leaders, he expressed their alleged deep concern for what would happen "if the WCC calls Israel an apartheid state" (Sauca, 2022:1:11:19-1:11:22).

At the opening of the WCC General Assembly, the number of churches expressing support for the ACSA draft resolution had increased from 5 to 16 (Kairos Palestine Solidarity Network, 2022:1, n. 2), most of them Presbyterian, with one from the Orthodox tradition: the Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch.

In addition, the hosts from the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (EKD) made several efforts to avoid the use of the term 'apartheid' in the plenary session. A young Palestinian delegate, invited to speak at the session titled *Showing God's Merciful Love for a Broken World with Special Attention to the*

3 There was no specific reference to the proposed resolution, but it is obvious from the context of the speech that this was the subject of their concern, as conveyed by the WCC Acting General Secretary. For two quotes, see Sauca, 2022:1:11:10-1:11:17 ["decisions ... threaten their very existence in the Holy Land"]; & 1:13:12-1:13:21 ["decisions ... endanger their very existence"] [sound absent 1:04:58-1:11:04].

Middle East, refused to comply with the censorship and was consequently not allowed to speak.

6. The outcome

The Public Issues Committee (PIC), convened during the WCC General Assembly, received a new draft statement from the WCC Secretariat addressing the situation across the Middle East. The PIC further developed this draft, ultimately formulating the statement titled *Seeking Justice and Peace for All in the Middle East*, which was adopted by consensus in the Plenary. One full paragraph of the statement reads as follows (WCC General Assembly, 2022:2):

Recently, numerous international, Israeli and Palestinian human rights organizations and legal bodies have published studies and reports describing the policies and actions of Israel as amounting to ‘apartheid’ under international law. Within this Assembly, some churches and delegates strongly support the utilization of this term as accurately describing the reality of the people in Palestine/Israel and the position under international law, while others find it inappropriate, unhelpful and painful. We are not of one mind on this matter. We must continue to struggle with this issue, while we continue working together on this journey of justice and peace. We pray that the WCC continues to provide a safe space for its member churches for conversation and collaboration in pursuing truth, and working for a just peace among all people of the region.

The wording of this section of the WCC statement was well received by the Kairos Palestine Conference (2022:3). Notably, there is no reference to the CoS (2021a) or PCUSA’s (2022) decisions - the latter being the most detailed. It is understandable that three human rights organisations - HRW, Amnesty International (AI), and B’Tselem - are implicitly referenced, as each has analysed Israeli policies through the lens of international law.

Subsequently, the ICJ (2024:224–229) found that Israel is in violation of Article 3 of the ICERD, which prohibits segregation and apartheid. The WCC participated in the first Global Anti-Apartheid Conference for Palestine (2024; WCC News, 2024).

To facilitate a “safe space ... conversation ... and working for a just peace”, a Working Group on Palestine and Israel (WGIP) was established by the WCC Executive Committee in 2024. In its initial report, the WGIP advised that the term ‘apartheid’ is “appropriate and prophetic to the situation...” (WCC WGIP, 2024:2; see also WCC General Secretary, 2024:23–57). The group initially comprised 21 members, including the Archbishop of the ACSA, two German EKD bishops, and five Palestinians (WCC Executive Committee, 2024). Then, the WCC Central Committee (2025) - in a unanimous decision - specified: “Naming the Reality of Apartheid: We recognize and denounce the system of apartheid imposed by Israel on the Palestinian people, in violation of international law and moral conscience.”

Remembering the controversies particularly after the CoS (2021) decision and the 2022 use of the label ‘extremism’ (Jenkins, 2022), this clear wording is remarkable.

7. YMCA

The YMCA (2022:3) calls

on YMCA movements to implement policy advocacy to mobilize support for peaceful and just resolutions of all situations of occupation, including the situation of Apartheid and occupation in the Holy Land.

By including all occupations - explicitly referencing Ukraine, Cyprus, and Western Sahara (YMCA, 2022a:2) - this resolution presents significant implementation challenges. It was proposed by the YMCAs and YWCAs of the three Scandinavian states, along with the YMCA of Sri Lanka. YMCA South Africa served as the ‘primary seconder’, representing 13 ‘supporting organisations’ (YMCA, 2022b:9–36). The resolution passed with a vote of 66-8-35 (YMCA, 2022b:10–43).

The stated objective is the “peaceful and just resolution of ... Apartheid and occupation in the Holy Land” (YMCA, 2022a:3). By applying the term “Holy Land”, the resolution refers to the entire area between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. However, the resolution is vague in two respects. First, it does not define what is meant by “occupation”, though it is reasonable to assume - based on international consensus - that this includes Gaza, the Golan Heights, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem. Second,

it does not specify where “apartheid” is said to exist. However, the use of the conjunction “and” suggests that apartheid is present at least in the areas under occupation - and possibly beyond.

In this context, it is relevant to consider that forms of separation also exist within Israel proper. First, the Israel Land Authority accommodates the policies of the Jewish National Fund (JNF) (HRW, 2020). Second, Israel contains many so-called “unrecognised villages”, primarily affecting Bedouin communities. Third, Israel allows the operation of “admissions committees”, authorised to reject non-Jewish applicants in small towns with fewer than 700 households. This affects so-called “Israeli Arabs” and Bedouins; the relevant law has been revised to broaden its scope (Summers, 2023).

The YMCA (2022) adds the phrase “to mobilize support” after the term “advocacy”, to gain support for the “just resolutions of all situations of occupation.”

How will this advocacy be received by the occupying power(s) and the international community? The reality is that the complexity of Israel’s occupation - including Gaza, the Golan Heights, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem - and relationships to neighbouring states require numerous negotiation tracks.

8. Discussion: The role of advocacy: Provocative or effective?

This section explores what the global church and the world’s largest youth movement, the YMCA, might do in response to Israel’s overall policies. It begins with a theoretical framework, identifies some of the challenges posed by a hardened debate climate, and concludes with specific reflections on what might foster change. Provocative messages or actions can instil change if they lead to greater awareness of a particular issue and increase the willingness to act and influence relevant decision-makers.

However, if the messages and actions are perceived as too provocative, they risk being seen as part of a ‘sectarian’ agenda. This may narrow their overall appeal and hinder the building of a strong and broad social movement capable of promoting change. Numerical strength is always more important for those who seek to promote change than for those who seek to resist it. Those resisting change tend to occupy positions of power. They may even

be able to shape the perceptions of those in subordinate positions, rendering them relatively complacent with the prevailing social order. This dynamic is explained by Steve Lukes (1974) through two additional forms of power: hidden power (agenda-setting - determining which topics are discussed and which are not) and invisible power (shaping internalised attitudes). These operate alongside the more widely recognised form of power: visible power, or the ability to influence others to do something that they would not otherwise do.

While not directly inspired by Lukes, Christian *social* ethics is primarily concerned with promoting change (Mott, 2011:104–107; WCC & ACT Alliance, 2022). My own position is that inclusive social development arises from broad-based movements that press for change in ways that encourage those in decision-making roles to gradually accommodate these demands - first partially, then more fully. If the powerful resist such demands and respond with harsh or violent measures, this leads to reduced inclusion, diminished innovation, increased stagnation, and, in the worst cases, spirals of violence (Haugen, 2016; 2018).

The context described above applies to relatively well-defined polities, where those making demands share citizenship with those who either accommodate or resist those demands. In such settings, there exists a single, defined *demos* - a people who can legitimately make claims on those holding political power within the entity in which they reside.

When the context differs - as in our case, where Christian global actors seek to press demands upon a state widely recognised as the world's only Jewish state - the situation becomes embedded in a web of complex relationships.

A non-exhaustive list of the particularities in this relationship offers further insight into the “provocative or effective” discussion:

- i. The history of Christian anti-Judaism (targeting the religion) and antisemitism (targeting Jews as a people) has led many Jews to be suspicious of anything associated with Christianity;
- ii. Israeli authorities see themselves as having to rely on their own military capabilities for self-defence and are generally disinclined to be told “what to do” by external actors;

- iii. Israel and its supporters are increasingly framing criticism of Israeli policies as a form of antisemitism (IHRA, 2016), sometimes by reinforcing and encouraging the notion of strong, intrinsic ties between “all Jews” globally and the State of Israel; and
- iv. Israel’s primary international supporter is the USA, where the Evangelical Right has gained significant political influence over foreign policy.

Israel’s other international relationships also form part of this broader context. Some are relatively stable across changing governments - with Hungary and the Czech Republic becoming more staunch pro-Israel supporters than Germany - while others have been strengthened under the leadership of conservative governments, including Argentina during the Milei era, Brazil during the Bolsonaro era, and India during the Modi era.⁴

At the same time, several distinctive features characterise Israel’s relationship with the global community:

- i. In its 1948 Declaration of Independence, Israel refers to the United Nations (UN) nine times, signalling that UN bodies and norms are, in principle, highly relevant for Israel;
- ii. Israel has ratified all the core international human rights and humanitarian law treaties (though not the 1907 Hague Regulations; see Israeli Supreme Court (1978:6) regarding their customary international law status);
- iii. Israel seeks recognition as a Western and democratic state, and its membership in regional intergovernmental organisations supports this image;
- iv. Israel has a culture of expressing dissent, fostering a vivid public debate - though this is sometimes tempered by self-censorship.

However, each of these four characteristics can be nuanced, presenting a more complex picture: (a) Israel disregards UN decisions (only Security Council resolutions under Chapter VII of the UN Charter are binding;

4 Argentina, Hungary and the Czech Republic were amongst the 14 states that voted against the UN General Assembly (2024) resolution specifying how to implement ICJ (2024); Brazil voted in favour, and India abstained, together with 42 other states (UN News, 2024).

most UN declarations are not); (b) Israel denies access to several UN special procedures established by the UN Human Rights Council; (c) Israel systematically discriminates even amongst its own citizens; for example, there are no voting stations in so-called 'unrecognised villages'; (d) laws such as the anti-BDS legislation have significantly constrained the climate for freedom of expression, particularly for academic staff and BDS advocates (Haugen, 2024; Stern, 2019).

Compared with the use of the term 'apartheid' to describe Israeli policies, the promotion of BDS has generated greater public debate and more extensive sanctions. This may be because of the BDS movement's longer history, the involvement of high-profile individuals, and its public communication - some of which I have critiqued (Haugen, 2024). The application of the term 'apartheid' to Israel's policies is more recent and has not (yet) triggered the same level of confrontation as that experienced by BDS promoters and advocates of differentiation.

It must be expected that this will change (Aizenberg, 2023). His critical assessment - primarily of AI and HRW's framing of apartheid as applicable to Israeli policies - appears in the *Fathom Essays*, published by the Britain Israel Communications and Research Centre (BICOM) since 2012. BICOM has successfully bridged academic publishing (Johnson, 2024) with what I term lobbying; the advocacy network *We Believe in Israel* (2024), formed following a 2011 BICOM conference, is one of its offshoots (Reut Institute, 2011:5). Even prior to this, BICOM was described as "Britain's most active pro-Israeli lobbying organisation" (Syal, 2009).

The context of Johnson (2024) warrants closer attention, being Volume 2 of Routledge's *Studies in Contemporary Antisemitism* (SCA) series (Hirsch et al., 2024). In the Preface, one of the series editors writes: "Both *Fathom* and the London Centre are responses to late 20th-century developments on the left that have contributed to a resurgence of left antisemitism" (Hirsch et al., 2024:xxi).⁵

However, studies on antisemitism have found that those who identify with "the left" are actually less antisemitic than those identifying with "the right"

5 See also page xx (Roman numerals), regarding "nurturing the Journal of Contemporary Antisemitism", published biannually since 2019 in cooperation with De Gruyter.

- in Europe (Isaksen, 2018:32; Bachner & Bevelander, 2021:83 [Sweden]; Moe, 2023:84; Hoffmann & Moe, 2017:99–100 [Norway]) and in the USA (Hersh & Royden, 2023). Comparable surveys are lacking in South Africa, but the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (Miltz, 2024) reports a relatively low level of antisemitic incidents in the past year. Globally, Jews' main fear is increased antisemitism (JNS Staff, 2025).

This rapid expansion of studies on antisemitism - eight volumes in the SCA series published between August 2023 and May 2024 - motivated primarily by a focus on a “resurgence of left antisemitism”, is on one hand impressive. On the other, the explicit bias of these publications - centred on ‘left antisemitism’ - together with the increased, and at times imprecise, use of the IHRA’s example list,⁶ raises concerns that criticisms of Israeli policies may too readily be labelled ‘antisemitism’.

Notwithstanding these developments in the United Kingdom (UK), the USA remains more important to Israel, which receives annual US support amounting to \$3.8 billion (Masters & Merrow, 2024). A final crucial factor influencing the potential success of any advocacy campaign to end Israel’s occupation is the strength of the Christian Zionist movement, particularly in the USA, which focuses on end-times theology, viewing the State of Israel as a key sign of eschatological fulfilment. In the US context, this movement is arguably the most significant force behind continued support for Israel across changing administrations. A rare exception was President George H.W. Bush, who delayed loan guarantees to Israel until it agreed to halt settlement construction and attend the 1991 Madrid peace conference (Cortellessa, 2018).

Recognising that many Christian Zionists operate within a rather rigid theological framework, two public actors could play a role in reducing the influence of this movement. The first is evangelical voices - most notably the WEA and the Lausanne Movement - who promote a theology of just peace (Haugen, 2022:38-45). While their language and rhetoric may differ from that of the YMCA (2022), a leading Evangelical Palestinian theologian, Munther Isaac, is similarly vocal in his oral presentations, and somewhat

6 See Haugen (2024) on the ‘double standard’; see also We Believe in Israel (2024).

softer in his earlier published works (Isaac, 2020; Isaac & Kohl, 2018); being more vocal recently (Isaac, 2025).

The second factor is the declining support for the State of Israel amongst younger US Jews. According to the Pew Research Centre (2021:139), 51% of US Jews aged 18 to 29 report being “not at all” attached to Israel, compared with 32% amongst those aged 65 and older.

In summary, CROs and churches should seek to build broad-based movements. Church leaders must work within their own constituencies and with policymakers in parallel. Regarding policy shifts, the most noteworthy change is the launch - in 2024 - of the Global Alliance for the Implementation of the Two-State Solution, launched by Norway, together with the EU and the Saudi Arabia, coordinated with the Ministerial Arab League/Organisation of Islamic Cooperation Contact Group on Gaza (EEAS Press Team, 2024); in 2025 more states have joined the Global Alliance. Even if the positions amongst these states differ, Norway's Minister of Foreign Affairs has emphasised that this Alliance seeks to impose a two-state solution, not permitting an Israeli veto on the outcome (Undheim, 2025, quoting Barth Eide).

It is reasonable that the much-changed situation since 2023 explains the unanimous decision by the WCC Central Committee (2025) and the growing support by numerous states for the Global Alliance for the Implementation of the Two-State Solution. Any politicians working for a two-state solution will work against two clear majority decision by Knesset (2024) and Sokol (2025). Hence, intra- and inter-church efforts, as well as inter-faith efforts will be shaped by which positions main political parties take on the issue of what is required for a just peace in Palestine and Israel.

9. Conclusion

Reflecting on the decisions by the WCC and the YMCA and awaiting member churches' responses to these decisions, it is relevant to bring in Mott's (2011:117) identification of the church as a counter-community that unmask realities, proposes alternatives, and contributes to realising those alternatives.

The JDA (Abicht et al., 2021) is a valuable tool for distinguishing between anti-Israeli expressions that may be antisemitic and those that are not. For example, it is not in itself antisemitic to assert that “the IDF targets children” or to apply the term “scholasticide” to the IDF’s destruction of schools in Gaza. Such targeting can be understood as a consequence of the Dahiyeh Doctrine, developed during the 2006 war against Lebanon, which states that civilian and densely populated areas are legitimate targets if there is credible information that armed groups are hiding in such areas. In October 2023, IDF instructions on how many civilian deaths that were “acceptable” per attack - so-called “collateral damage” - were given: 15-20; and for attack targeting senior Hamas leaders the figure was 100 (Abraham, 2024). The 2006 IDF Dahiyeh Doctrine and the 2023 IDF instruction on acceptable collateral damage are bound to create enormous human suffering. While Israel and the IDF clearly deserves harsh criticism, it is antisemitic to link this to “Jews have always gone after children”; this is a typical blood libel.

As seen above, the JDA speaks of “settler-colonialism or apartheid”. The strongest anti-Israel position is to *combine* an apartheid narrative - which might serve to delegitimise the whole state of Israel, not only its occupation policies - with a settler-colonial narrative that ignores the historical Jewish presence in and various ties to the land. Such an anti-Israel position might have strong appeal amongst many.

European churches carry a history of anti-Judaism, antisemitism, and Islamophobia, with crusades being one Christian ‘response’ (Bainton, 1961). These same churches’ communication *today* could impact how Muslims and Jews - *objectively* being a part of the national communities in their respective countries - are treated, affecting their sense of *subjective* belonging to the national communities where they live. Negative views of Jews and Muslims not only stem from those characterised by bigotry (HL-senteret, 2024). Hence, even if Jews feel very differently attached to the state of Israel - as seen in the USA (Pew Research Centre, 2021:139) - and Muslims have very different views on the different forms of Arab or Palestinian resistance - European churches bear the responsibility of conveying messages that will not make religious minorities more exposed to exclusion, bullying, harassment, and even violence. For churches on other

continents having different histories with Jews and Muslims, such caution might be less relevant (ACSA, 2023).

The JDA (Abicht et al., 2021:12) specifies that “It is not antisemitic to support arrangements that accord full equality to all inhabitants ‘between the river and the sea’, whether in two states, a binational state, unitary democratic state, federal state, or in whatever form”. Hence, it is not antisemitic to call for or explore a state structure that is more inclusive than the present state of Israel. However, declaring Israel to be an apartheid state is not about identifying such alternatives. Labelling Israel as an apartheid state is a provocation. It will likely convince Israeli hawks that Israel needs to trust its own strength, defeating militarily its real and perceived enemies, with enormous suffering.

To call for an end to “apartheid imposed by Israel on the Palestinian people...” (WCC, 2025), and “peaceful and just resolution of... Apartheid and occupation...” (YMCA, 2022a:3), denouncing “ideologies of exclusivity and apartheid...” (Kairos Palestine, 2020:3) will also be provocative. This wording is, however, accommodating, implying that the state of Israel *can* abolish apartheid and occupation as has been achieved by other states before; note that the CoN Commission (2024:247) includes a reflection on self-determination for Jews and Palestinians, implying that Zionism can be embedded in and respect international law. International law is the only way for a just solution to the tragedy, and international law must also apply to Palestinian armed actors, holding them to account for their policies and conduct.

This ideal solution will take time, and any effort to pressure Israel by applying the term ‘apartheid’ to its policies will be an uphill struggle. Regardless of this, inspiration can be found in Christian ethics (Mott, 2011) and Jesus’ blessings of the peacemakers.

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Chapter 11

Diaconia in the Anglican Church of Southern Africa: Towards a model for mission and development

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1. Introduction

Aitchison (2024:2) states that since its inception during the Reformation, the Anglican Church - originally the Church of England - has maintained the tradition of ordained ministry comprising bishops, priests, and deacons. This structure is affirmed in Article 36 of the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, which references *The Book of Consecration of Archbishops and Bishops, and Ordering of Priests and Deacons*. The same principle is reflected in clauses 77 to 82 of the Catechism in the 1989 *Anglican Prayer Book* (hereafter APB). Within this tradition, the threefold order of ordained ministry has been firmly established and continues to be upheld. A key aspect of this tradition is the belief that the diaconate originates from the events described in Acts 6:1–7. This view is reinforced by the South African Anglican lectionary, which commemorates ‘St. Stephen, deacon and martyr’ on December 26. Thus, the roots of the diaconate are traced back to this passage in the New Testament.

Latvus (2010:82-83) notes that the key role of diaconal ministry diminished during the early medieval period. In the Western Church, the ministry of deacons persisted but largely became a transitional stage leading to

priestly ordination. Meanwhile, in the Eastern Church, the role of deacons became increasingly associated with worship and church music (Latvus, 2010:82-83).

An important aspect of ministry, however, is the minister's ability to embed themselves within the community that they are called to serve. Andreassen and Norheim emphasise the importance of the local minister being "tuned in" to place and people, seeking the ideal nexus for collaborative ministry. As they argue, "we are called to love the place where we are, not to save it" (Andreassen & Norheim, 2022:117). Latvus's observations highlight how historical and cultural contexts shaped the evolution of diaconal ministry, leading to its diminished prominence in the Western Church, where it is often regarded as a lesser ministry compared to that of bishops and priests. In contrast, the Eastern Church preserved a more specialised liturgical role for deacons. Building on Andreassen and Norheim's perspective, one can argue that fostering inclusive and sustainable communities requires collaboration amongst various stakeholders, with the church playing a key role as a catalyst for mission and development.

The success of collaborative mission and development hinges on a critical examination of the role and agency of diaconia. Klaasen (2020:128) raises essential questions that highlight the tension between understanding diaconia as service or as a liturgical function - a tension that has contributed to divergences within the church. Key questions include: (i) whether diaconia should be service-oriented or liturgically focused; (ii) whether diaconal ecclesiology should include both deacons and deaconesses; (iii) whether diaconia is a function of the church or an intrinsic aspect of its identity; and (iv) whether diaconia is doctrinally grounded or ecumenical in nature.

Such research offers valuable insights that can help the church to better understand, shape, and enhance its diaconal ministry within specific cultural and contextual settings. The following section will briefly consider some of these questions.

2. A brief exploration of diaconia

At this point, I will examine two key questions: (a) whether diaconia is primarily liturgical or social in nature, and (b) whether diaconia is historically and contextually substantive and/or purposive. This analysis will provide deeper insight into the role of diaconia and its relationship with the community.

2.1 *The two-pronged diaconia of liturgy and social responsibility*

The liturgy and social responsibility reflect the dual role of the church, addressing the spiritual and material needs of people. This approach emphasises the interconnectedness between the spiritual nourishment provided by the liturgy and the motivation that it offers believers to engage in acts of social responsibility - living out the gospel imperative of loving one's neighbour as oneself (Matthew 22:39).

It is important to note that engaging in acts of social responsibility extends beyond humble service and care for those in need. According to Nordstokke (2014), this concept is rooted in the Australian scholar John N. Collins's reinterpretation of social responsibility, offering a broader perspective on its significance and application.

Collins's reinterpretation of diaconia is the designation of an honourable task, with vital information, entrusted to a person, spokesperson, or a go-between - or a person given a commission on behalf of someone in authority and fulfilling a vital task (Nordstokke, 2014:57).

Nordstokke (2014) asserts that diaconia is far more than humble service to people in need, emphasising that "its biblical background presents it as a bold action that announces good news for the poor". He further argues that diaconia cannot be confined to professional work; rather, it is part of the mandate given by the triune God to the church as an integral aspect of its mission. This reinterpretation of diaconia has reaffirmed its ecclesiological and missiological nature. Its practice is modelled on the one who has given the diaconal mandate, as seen in John 20:21: "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you..." (Nordstokke, 2014:87–88). This gospel imperative of "sending out" is grounded in the belief that the liturgy is transformative and

that sharing the gospel in word and deed is a privilege and a responsibility for all believers, to all people, everywhere.

The next dimension to consider is whether diaconia is historically and contextually substantive and/or purposive.

2.2 *Is diaconia historically and contextually substantive and or purposive?*

Historically, diaconia held substantive and purposive significance within Christian traditions, particularly in relation to concrete acts of service to others. In the New Testament, the role of deacons was primarily supportive and liturgical, assisting the bishop in ministry. They cared for the poor, sick, orphans, and widows - living out core values of service and care within the religious community and the broader society, embodying the relationship between liturgy and social responsibility. According to Christensen (2019:41), in the early church, diaconia was closely associated with 'service' and 'ministry'. Early Christian congregations were focused on serving the sick and the poor. For the early church, the office of the deacon gained meaning through its function, as the church developed a language that reflected its way of life. Thus, diaconia has also been understood as purposive - a sense of mission or purpose within the Christian faith, guided by the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18–20,

And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age (New Revised Standard Version [NRSV] 1989).

Christensen argues that there is no clear historical consensus on whether diaconia is the responsibility of a specific office or how it has been taken up and refashioned throughout church history. She observes a shift within the Reformation churches of the 16th century and further noted 20th-century innovations regarding the concept of diaconia, whereby it came to be understood as the responsibility of all church members (Christensen, 2019:41). Whether substantive or purposive, diaconia has evolved over

time, shaped by contextual environments - by people living and acting within specific settings. According to Nordstokke (2009:12), reading the context is never an end in itself for diaconal action. Instead, its purpose is to initiate and ensure that such action is contextual and well-considered for the benefit of those in need. This process helps to set priorities, formulate objectives for collective action, and identify effective work methods rooted in diaconal values. Thus, substantive acts of service are supported and guided by diaconal action, inspired by the sense of purpose and mission shared by all people of the Christian faith.

Christian denominations such as the Roman Catholic, Anglican, and certain Lutheran churches have retained the diaconate as a ministerial calling within the threefold order of bishops, priests, and deacons. However, denominations like the New Apostolic Church, the Dutch Reformed Church, and many Pentecostal and Charismatic traditions have not maintained this threefold structure. In the Anglican Church of Southern Africa (ACSA), diaconia forms part of the ordained order, either as a distinctive deacon or a transitional deacon. Distinctive deacons typically remain in diaconal ministry permanently, whereas transitional deacons serve as deacons for a time before being ordained to the priesthood. In the Church of Norway, professionals and volunteers are invited to participate in diaconia, which is understood as “the gospel in action expressed through loving your neighbour, creating inclusive communities, caring for creation, and struggling for justice” (Korslien, 2014:203). From this perspective, diaconia not only expands the scope of those who benefit from its ministry, but it also invites a broader group of individuals to engage in mission and ministry.

These are crucial questions for consideration that touch upon various aspects such as the nature of diaconia, its theological structure, its role within the church, and its relationship with broader social and developmental issues that are key for mission and development. It is therefore not surprising that there are many variants of the nature and character of the diaconal ministry across the world.

3. Various perspectives on the concept of diaconia

Swart suggests that participants in the broad ecumenical movement have, in recent times, felt the need to reassess and correct the traditional understanding and practice of diaconia within the Christian tradition. This has given rise to a growing movement that no longer views diaconia as simply humble and silent service to the poor and sick. Informed by new theological insights and a renewed reading of the Bible, this movement now sees diaconia as something much deeper - an expression of service capable of becoming a more compelling means of transformation in support of God's transformative mission (Swart, 2021:62). The shift in perspective that Swart refers to is evident in the views of several theologians and practitioners who argue that diaconia should not be limited to simple acts of service. Instead, it should be understood as a profound and dynamic expression of the church's mission. This shift has been driven by new theological insights and a re-reading of Scripture, which together have led to a broader and more transformative understanding of diaconia.

White (2002:n.p.) describes diaconia as the "responsible service of the gospel by deeds and words performed by Christians in response to the needs of people". She argues that this service is rooted in and modelled after Christ's own service and teachings. This understanding emphasises that diaconia is not merely about charitable actions; rather, it is deeply anchored in the gospel message. It suggests that diaconia is a physical and a spiritual ministry, where Christians, inspired by Christ's example, serve others by meeting their needs in ways that reflect God's love and justice.

International gatherings have increasingly called for greater attention to the diaconal ministry of the church and its relevance in theological training and ministerial formation. The General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Rev Martin Junge, described the LWF's understanding of mission as holistic, encompassing proclamation, service (diaconia), and advocacy. He emphasised the necessity of adopting a comprehensive approach to theological training (Junge, 2017:4). Rev Junge's focus on a holistic approach to theological education highlights the need for the church to be equipped not only in traditional theological disciplines (such as biblical studies, theology, and pastoral care) but also in the practical and ethical aspects of diaconal ministry. Serving marginalised communities,

advocating for justice, and integrating faith with action reflect the church's holistic mission.

In recent years, the contemporary ecumenical understanding of diaconia has evolved from being seen as insignificant to a position of great importance. In theological academic discussions on the relationship between theory and praxis, diaconia is increasingly recognised as the social ministry of the church and an academic discipline within practical theology. Diaconia must be approached in an interdisciplinary manner, integrating knowledge from theological and social sciences (Dietrich, 2014:1-2). This perspective shifts diaconia from merely a practical activity to a theoretical exploration, where theological insights on justice, service, and human dignity are applied to address social challenges.

Professor Isabel Apawo Phiri, in a plenary presentation at the 11th All Africa Conference of Churches Assembly in Kigali, Rwanda, on 5 July 2018, stated that diaconia is an essential dimension of being the church. Phiri argued that the vision and practice of diaconia, as outlined in scripture passages such as John 10:10, Luke 4:16-21, and Matthew 25:31-46, present diaconia as a model for churches that embody “God’s reign to come”, marked by the promise of life, justice, and peace. These passages highlight God’s preferential option for the poor, which serves as a theological and ethical framework guiding the church’s mission and actions for the future (Phiri, 2018:35-64). The notions and approaches to diaconia presented by White, Junge, and Phiri draw attention to the active, service-driven role that the church must play in embodying and advancing Christ’s mission in the world. Their perspectives complement one another in exploring the theological, theoretical, and ethical importance of diaconia. White focuses on mission expressed through actions and words, addressing human needs, whilst Junge highlights that diaconia is a holistic approach and places emphasis on theological training as a key aspect. Phiri emphasises the importance of diaconia by highlighting it as a core aspect of the church’s identity and mission.

Dietrich and Thiani (2021) assert that from the very beginning, being a member of the Christian church and a follower of Jesus Christ has entailed a commitment to serving one another, the community, and the world. They argue that caring for each other’s well-being, especially in times of hardship,

has always been central to Christian identity and the identity of the church. As a result, the church's diaconal identity and ministry played a crucial role in its growth during the Early Church and has remained integral to its essence ever since.

Although the theological language and terminology may vary across traditions, Dietrich and Thiani (2021) maintain that the Christian church, regardless of denomination, is united by a shared call to live out faith through action - an essential mission that should be collectively articulated. Thus, diaconia, understood as service to one another, the community, and the world, is a God-given mission to serve humanity and creation in accordance with God's will, reflecting the church's participation in God's broader mission (Dietrich & Thiani, 2021:81-82). These understandings position diaconal ministry as a foundational element of the threefold ministerial order - bishops, priests, and deacons - highlighting the essential role of service (diaconia) in the life and mission of the church. Furthermore, diaconia is critically presented as the practical expression of the second commandment in Matthew 22:39, which states, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (NRSV, 1989). This commandment, central to the Christian ethos, finds its lived expression in the practice of diaconal ministry.

When examining a comprehensive understanding of diaconia, Deifelt and Hofmann (2021) argue that its scope has expanded, particularly with the inclusion of themes like mercy and justice. Drawing from various contexts, they assert that mercy and justice are not limited to feeding those in need but also encompasses education and political action. Furthermore, they propose that,

These changes in the concept and scope of diaconia stem from an epistemological shift and entail an ongoing learning process. This process draws from the knowledge and wisdom of individuals and groups who, for too long, were perceived as recipients of charity, such as communities from the Global South, inner-city dwellers, or at-risk populations. It also reveals a more holistic understanding of diaconia from the perspective of development agencies and mission organisations, realising that their best intentions are potentially fraught with toxic dependence. As a result, diaconia expanded its

scope by moving from charity to a theory-praxis that addresses human dignity in a comprehensive manner, including care, transformation, empowerment, advocacy and conviviality (Deifelt & Hofmann, 2021:53).

Furthermore, while extending compassion and care to those suffering from physical, mental, and spiritual afflictions was seen as a way of embodying the teachings of Jesus - there is consensus on the necessity of this act of service and the ways in which it is carried out vary significantly. Since diaconia emerged as a theological discipline reflecting on the church's long-standing tradition of service, it has developed and diversified across different parts of the world. The term is often associated with charitable activities undertaken by individuals linked to the Protestant church, though similar initiatives exist within other Christian traditions, as well as in various world religions and philosophies of life (Deifelt & Hofmann, 2021:53-54).

Aitchison (2024:25) argues that a renewed understanding of diaconia has led many churches to move away from viewing the diaconate as a lesser order focused solely on social welfare, freeing other ministries for more 'spiritual' work. Instead, the diaconate is increasingly recognised as a full, equal, and distinctive order dedicated to the ministry of diaconia under the guidance of bishops and presbyters (priests). This threefold ministry, which combines liturgy, proclamation, and service to the world, reflects the practice of the early church and remains especially vital in times of crisis in modern society.

From these contemporary ecumenical perspectives on diaconia (a term rooted in the Greek word for service), the diaconate should be understood as a central ministerial order within the church's mission and ministry. These perspectives emphasise the role of deacons as intermediaries between the church and the world, embodying Christ's call to serve others - particularly the poor, vulnerable, and oppressed, the marginalised of society.

4. The ministerial order of the deacon in the ACSA

The New Testament attests to ministers responsible for apostolic oversight, pastoral care, and service, which, by the 2nd century, evolved into a threefold ministry consisting of bishops, priests, and deacons. This structure, with

some adaptations to address local needs and customs, remained largely unchanged for fourteen hundred years. During the Reformation, the Church of England - from which the Anglican Communion originates - intentionally preserved this threefold ministry, a tradition reflected in its ordination services (ACSA, 1989:571).

In the ACSA, a province within the Anglican Communion, the threefold order of bishops, priests, and deacons remains the ministerial structure for those who are ordained. Terms such as 'permanent diaconate' or 'distinctive diaconate' are used to describe individuals ordained as deacons who have little or no intention of pursuing ordination to the priesthood.

The Catechism of the APB (ACSA, 1989) states that ministers in the Anglican Church include lay persons, deacons, priests, and bishops. It further specifies that regarding the ordained:

The ministry of bishops is to represent Christ and his church, particularly as apostle, chief priest, and pastor of a diocese; to guard the faith, unity, and discipline of the whole Church; to proclaim the word of God; to act in Christ's name for the reconciliation of the world and the building up of the Church; and to ordain others to continue Christ's ministry (:433).

The ministry of a priest is to represent Christ and his Church, particularly as a pastor to the people; to share with the bishop in overseeing of the Church; to proclaim the gospel; to administer the sacraments; and to bless and declare pardon in the name of God (:433-434).

The ministry of a deacon is to represent Christ and his Church, particularly as a servant of those in need; and to assist bishops and priests in the proclamation of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments (:434).

The catechism presents the threefold ministerial order of bishops, priests, and deacons, highlighting their respective roles and responsibilities. In the ordination service for deacons and priests, the social responsibility of the diaconate is particularly emphasised in the 'deacon's charge', which emphasises the important foundational ministry of deacons in mission, development, and transformation.

By your word and example, you are to make Christ and his redemptive love known to those among whom you live and work and worship. You are to interpret to the Church the needs, the concerns and hopes of the world. You are to assist the Bishops and priests in public worship and in the administration of God's word and sacraments and you are to carry out other duties assigned to you from time to time (ACSA, 1989:583).

By this proclamation, the distinctive diaconate within the ACSA implicitly mandates a model of ministry focused on nurturing and facilitating mission and development within the community. The reimagining of the diaconate in the ACSA has gained significant attention, with a strong focus on the value of contextual diaconia. The shift from viewing diaconia merely as a service to the poor and vulnerable (charity) to a more holistic approach that prioritises care, transformation, and empowerment is now widely accepted. There has been a marked transition from the notion of diaconia as a transitional role (from deacon to priest) to recognising it as a permanent and distinctive order of ministry. This evolution continues to gain traction and is actively promoted within the ACSA.

In his report to the ACSA Provincial Synod in 2024, Professor John Aitchison recommended that representatives from theological training institutions and diocesan training programmes take responsibility for implementing the proposals outlined in the report, particularly in relation to curriculum development and the education and training of deacons. He stressed that the ACSA must address the necessary canonical, liturgical, and synodal changes required for the genuine restoration of the distinctive diaconate. Additionally, Aitchison highlighted the importance of supporting the development of an effective network for the diaconate, known as the Fellowship of Deacons (Aitchison, 2024:vi).

Aitchison further noted that since the 1990s, several permanent self-supporting deacons have been ordained within the ACSA, though this was initially limited to certain dioceses and gradually lost momentum. In 2012, the Highveld Deacons' Fellowship was formed, followed by the inaugural provincial conference of the ACSA Fellowship of Deacons in 2015. Subsequent provincial conferences took place in 2016 and 2018. In September 2018, a Provincial Standing Committee resolution called

on Archbishop Thabo Makgoba to establish a commission to examine the ministry of the distinctive and permanent diaconate and report its findings to the Provincial Synod in 2019. The resolution affirmed that “ACSA recognises that the ordained ministry of the church is a three-fold ministry of deacons, priests, and bishops”. However, no action was taken following the initial resolution, leading the Provincial Standing Committee to pass a new resolution in 2022. This resolution urged Archbishop Makgoba to revisit and implement the 2018 Provincial Standing Committee resolution. In response, the Archbishop’s Commission on the Ministry of the Distinctive and Permanent Diaconate was established. The Commission’s final report on this ministry was presented at the Provincial Synod in September 2024 (Aitchison, 2024:13).

At the 2024 session of the Provincial Synod - the highest decision-making body in the ACSA - delegates unanimously agreed that the

ACSA should endeavour to deal with the inevitable changes that a true restoration of the distinctive diaconate would require canonical, liturgical, and synodal, and the support needed to develop an effective network for the diaconate (Aitchison, 2024:86).

Some of the recommendations from the report of the Archbishop’s Commission on the Ministry of the Distinctive and Permanent Diaconate to the Provincial Synod 2024 include: i) the need for the ACSA to clarify the distinctiveness of the ministry of deacons, in relation to the other two ministerial orders and in light of the crises facing our times, where we believe God is calling us to renew the diaconal order; ii) a call to re-examine the ACSA’s commitment to diaconia, recognising the vital role of deacons in galvanising this ministry; iii) a recommendation that the Commission, or an alternative body, continue the work initiated by the current Commission. This body should include representatives from theological training institutions and diocesan diaconal training programmes, with the task of developing recommendations for a curriculum and programme dedicated to the education and training of deacons (Aitchison, 2024:86). These recommendations signal a clear understanding within the ACSA of the crucial role diaconia plays in the mission and ministry of the church.

5. Conclusion

The ecumenical and global diaconal discourse presented in this chapter reinforces the understanding that diaconia is not merely a supportive ministerial order but a distinct and essential expression of the church's mission. Deacons are seen as agents of transformation, addressing social injustices, advocating for the vulnerable, and fostering reconciliation. Diaconia has evolved from being a response to immediate needs to an engagement with systemic issues, challenging unjust structures, and working towards social and spiritual renewal and development. This renewed understanding of diaconia embodies transformative care, empowering individuals and communities towards self-development. It reflects the church's commitment to living out the gospel in practical and visible ways, engaging with the pressing issues of the contemporary world. Critically, this understanding draws on a re-reading of biblical texts and explores the relationship between theory, context, and praxis as integral components of the whole.

Within the threefold ministry of deacons, priests, and bishops, the diaconate not only serves as the foundational stage for the priesthood and episcopacy; it also embodies the mission and ministry of the church, reflecting the very essence of Christ's ministry and His calling for His followers to serve.

Mark 10:45 reads, "For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many" (NRSV, 1989). Diaconia is a service that reflects God's desire for a holistic transformation of the world, engaging with the complexities of human life and society and seeking to bring about meaningful, lasting change - fulfilling its calling as the body of Christ in the world.

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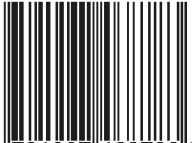


UJ Press

This book arises from a long-standing collaboration between institutions of higher learning in South Africa and Norway. In this volume numerous ideas, insights, and perspectives are shared on church mission and development. Research visits, sabbaticals, and institutional cooperation have offered valuable experiences and critical reflections that have enriched academic debate. This publication invited scholars from both countries to engage with the editors in exploring how mission and development, when viewed from diverse worldviews, need not be mutually exclusive or antagonistic.

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ISBN 978-1-997468-78-3



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