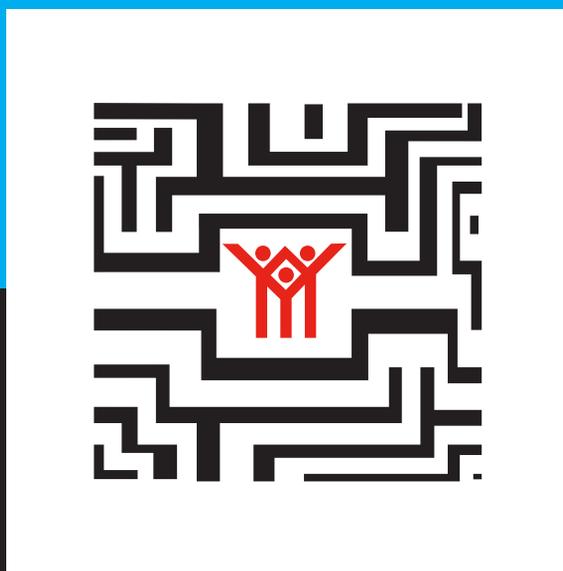


# The South African Baptist Journal of Theology



**Diaspora, Hybridity and the *Missio Dei***

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# **The South African Baptist Journal of Theology**

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**EDITORIAL NOTE**

In 2018, according to the United Nations, there were over 68 million forcibly displaced people in the world. The present refugee crisis has catapulted immigration into major social, legal and theological deliberations. This present displacement of people which the world has never experienced before has significantly shaped and will continue to shape the future far beyond our own imaginations. Religious persecution and refugee movements "have been strategic inflection points in the history of Christianity and the current refugee displacement will shape the future of Christianity in many ways" (S. George in *Refugee Diaspora: Missions Amid the Greatest Humanitarian Crises*). Therefore, God seems to be doing a new thing in and through refugees world-wide. God is sovereign over human dispersion, regardless of the motive, because displaced people are forced to question underlying assumptions about their existence, more specifically their understanding of God. Most displaced people tend to become Christians or embrace Christianity after migrating to foreign countries. Andrew Walls correctly observed in lecture delivered at the University of Edinburgh in 2003 that "Migration is a more significant factor in Christian history than the reformation itself". This movement will reshape Christianity as we know it. This is attested to how refugees injected freshness and growth to the church in Europe and parts of Africa, more specifically South Africa. South Africa is said to have the largest refugee population in the world, and unlike other countries, South Africa tries to integrate the refugee communities into mainline society.

Like Jesus and his family that fled Egypt under the persecution of Herod the Great, the people of Egypt welcomed and cared for this family. How then must church locally and globally respond to this greatest of humanitarian crises? How do we stir the collective conscience of the church, to move from fear to compassion towards these scattered people? Thus, enabling the church to be on mission with a moving God who moves among people. Thank you to the following authors for their scholarly contribution to the theme *Diaspora, Refugees and the Missio Dei*.

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To God be the Glory

Prof. Dr. Godfrey Harold

Editor

## Potential or Threat?: Adopting Cultural Hybridity as a Concept for Diaspora Missiology

*Peter T Lee, PhD Student at Trinity International Divinity School and Godfrey Harold, Senior Academic at Cape Town Baptist Seminary, Associate Researcher, Stellenbosch University*

### **Abstract**

*This paper reflects on the growing interest of hybridity within certain mission circles and post-colonial studies and argues that it may provide a robust framework through which we can interpret complex social and cultural processes involved in Christian mission. However, there is also a danger that the hybridity concept might merely replace old jargons and become a new one that quickly loses its relevance or persuasion. It would be necessary, therefore, for mission scholars to challenge any attempts to reduce the hybridity concept to an easy, simplistic ministry model or any misuse of the concept that could create a harmful pseudo-racial category that privileges a particular grouping of people*

## SECTION A: HYBRIDITY

### **1. Introduction**

There has been a growing interest in postcolonial theories in recent years among theologians and missiologists. Among them, cultural hybridity has intrigued scholars for its potential for opening new ways of pursuing theological and phenomenological studies. For theologians, their engagement with the hybridity theory has been deliberate. Cultural hybridity, a concept developed in the terrains of postcolonial thinking, provides a stimulating space for new theological conversations. With the development of a Christianity that is truly global, there is indeed a growing need for theologies from the majority world perspective which deal with globalising realities. It is thus not surprising that cultural hybridity, with its potential to constructively address current social realities within the church, is being used in theological disciplines as a conversation partner for theologising in a postcolonial, post-Christendom world.<sup>1</sup>

Mission scholars, however, have been slow to engage with cultural hybridity theory. They did recognise the increasing challenge of interpreting complicated social phenomena under accelerated globalisation which has been unfolding in virtually all missionary contexts in the world, including “the West.” New global realities were posing new questions for Christian mission around the world. Past culture models based on rigid and static sociocultural notions were increasingly their limitations. It was clear that

new paradigms for understanding these complex, globally-connected sociocultural realities were needed. It is in this context of the current decade in which mission scholars began to explore cultural hybridity as a missiological framework.

Indeed, there is a tremendous potential in the concept of cultural hybridity for missiology. It may provide a robust framework through which we can interpret complex social and cultural processes involved in Christian mission. However, there is also a danger that the hybridity concept might merely replace old jargons and become a new one that quickly loses its relevance or persuasion. It would be important, therefore, for mission scholars to challenge any attempts to reduce the hybridity concept to an easy, simplistic ministry model or any misuse of the concept that could possibly create a harmful pseudo-racial category that privileges a particular grouping of people. It is crucial that Christian leaders and theologians remain discerning and put the concept to appropriate missiological uses. Cultural hybridity can be a powerful tool when properly used as a lens through which to look at global social phenomena in all their diverse and dynamic nature for the purpose of faithful participation in *missio Dei*.

## 2. Concerns for Incorporating Cultural Hybridity in Missiology

The theory of cultural hybridity can be beneficial to mission theory and practise because it provides innovative interpretations of what happens during cultural processes in the context of unequal powers stemming from recent colonial history. It can help develop creative missiological thinking by providing tools for interpreting complex social phenomena in rapidly globalising, urbanising, and migrating communities and societies. Although it has not been much utilized in mission studies to date, it is gaining more traction as some scholars are utilizing the theory in their missiological research as a way to frame their discussions of ethnic and/or religious identities and syncretism (See Uytanlet 2016; Shaw 2018; Shaw and Burrows 2018).<sup>2</sup>

Among mission scholars and practitioners, however, there seem to be myriad reactions to this concept of cultural hybridity. Some are overtly enthusiastic as they see cultural hybridity as a trope that solves their difficult intercultural issues. Diaspora missiology, in particular, tends to view hybridity as a notion that has much potential for exploring migration and diaspora communities. There also seems to be some reluctance among evangelicals to incorporate postcolonial, postmodern thinking in their theology and missiology. There are also some signs that

show misunderstandings within evangelical mission circles about the nature, potential, and limit of the concept. These misunderstandings can potentially lead to misuse and even abuse in implementing this concept in mission contexts. It should be remembered that as in any theory borrowed and adapted from another academic discipline for use in mission theory and practice, there are also potential and danger, benefits and limits. Thus, at this pioneering juncture in exploring this new concept, a more careful missiological approach is needed.

Hybridity, as a biological term, represents “a making of one of two distinct things” or “a disruption and forcing together of any unlike living things” (Young 1995:25). When this idea is adapted for social realms, hybridity implies “the mixing of cultures” that creates “new, sometimes unique, hybrid cultures” and provides a way to understand conflicting social phenomena in the world (Axford, 2013:103–104). Its conceptual development took place in the 1980s and 1990s in the field of postcolonial theory (Young 1995; Kraidy 2005; Axford 2013). Homi K. Bhabha’s analyses of colonial relationships were influential in the advancement of the current theory of cultural hybridity (Huddart, 2006).

Hybridity is, however, not at all a settled concept within postcolonial scholarship (Papastergiadis 2015:274). With criticisms from scholars in multiple disciplines in humanities and social sciences, the notion of hybridity was put to trial during its developing years as it went through fierce scholarly debates (Burke 2009). Mission scholars may benefit from reviewing some of these past critiques made against cultural hybridity theory; it may inform them in the theoretical contours of postcolonial studies and enable them to interact with the theory to constructively adapt it for missiological purposes. We see that there are three main concerns on how cultural hybridity is viewed currently in Christian mission circles. These points relate to the way the notion of hybridity is used as a static term, the mistake of associating cultural hybridity with biracial or multi-ethnic persons, and the peril of creating a new hierarchy that privileges diasporic experiences. In the subsequent sections, we will articulate these three points in the form of questions.

## 3. Is Hybridity a Stable or Static Notion?

The first concern with the use of hybridity in missiology is the fact that the term “hybridity” too often is left in the form of a noun. This can potentially create a misconception that hybridity is a settled end-product for certain individuals or a stable standard by which certain groups of people can be

appraised. This can be problematic. In discussing hybridity, it is important to look at its processual nature and perhaps think of it as an actionable verb, “hybridize.” The notion of hybridity does not imply a static, unchanging, or immutable quality as the result of “mixing”; it rather points toward its flowing, changing, and moving nature. This is the main reason that hybridity when it is used as a static notion, would not have much impact or help us understand today’s complex global phenomena. It becomes a powerful analytical tool only when it is used as a lens through which we see the social world. It is an interpretive tool that can help us learn more about complex sociocultural processes (Ang, 2001; García Canclini, 2005). As Néstor García Canclini (2000:43) points out when we study cultural phenomena the focus needs to be on the processes of hybridisation instead of the static concept of hybridity. It indicates that hybridity is not the final product since people, societies, and cultures continually change as they go through hybridising processes. Missiological research needs to reflect this understanding of the processes of hybridisation; that hybridity happens at any given point in time, but it does not stay the same. These are what we need to focus on when we study migrant people who move across cultural, ethnic, and national boundaries, not merely the fixed state of hybridity of certain groups of people.

It is important to note that leading scholars of cultural hybridity are not so fixated on the term hybridity as a definitive concept. Instead, they use it as a perspective, a framework through which they analyze processes of social interactions, mixing of cultural elements that travel from and to various places, and how each element in these encounters affect and change one another (See Bhabha 2004; García Canclini 2005, 1995; Nederveen Pieterse 2015; Papastergiadis 2015). By definition, *diaspora* implies dispersion of people; *migration* means the movement of people. Today’s diasporic people live in connectedness to their former homes and their current homes. Their lives are continually on the move, if not literally, then imaginatively, as they occupy the liminal, interstitial space between their past and the present. In a sense, they are defined better by their *routes* rather than *roots* (Ang 2018:4). Dynamic movement inherently is embedded in the migrant diasporic life.

One of the main concerns about hybridity is that the concept is too ambiguous and yet loaded with too many different ideas that its usage, if not careful, can easily become inconsistent and contradictory (Hutnyk 2015, 2005; Kraidy 2005, 2002; van der Veer 2015). It means that hybridity if covering too many angles at once, can become what John Hutnyk

(2005:79–80) calls “a usefully slippery category” which is conveniently invoked to be an easy answer for all kinds of social and cultural situations. For example, if we state that everything is hybridised and everyone is hybrid, we are making the term lose much of its currency as a tool for social analysis. The same mistake can be made in missions if we conclude that certain religious traditions or cultural practices are hybrid without looking at particularities of the specific hybrid phenomenon and how it differs from other hybrids and why it may be different. Such an approach entails paying closer attention to the processual and flexible nature of ethnic groups and nations (Ang 2014:1194). By inquiring the ways in which a religious and/or ethnic community accepts, rejects, adapts, or blends various elements in cultural and religious traditions and practices, we may be able to gain an insight into the process by which social groups and their cultures go through changes.

#### 4. Is Hybridity about Biracial Persons?

Another *concern* about hybridity, when used as a missiological concept, is that in some Christian circles, hybridity is emphasised as a process by which God mixes ethnicities and cultures, thus producing biracial or “mixed race” persons. There is, however, a scholarly consensus that hybridisation is a social and/or cultural process in which people blend various forms of cultures, religions, and identities. This process is often mediated by the dynamics of power, social relationships, or self-interests. In other words, hybridity can include, more often than we would like to admit, consequences of self-centred human actions based on self-interest. Thus, it may not be theologically sound to state that hybridity is the process which God uses to mix cultures or ethnicities.

We do not hold a negative view of those who are biracial or “mixed-race” persons. Our point here is that all of us are in a sense mixed-race people; all of us may be part of sinful desires found in the history of racial mixing, which discredits the idea that God uses hybridity to mix ethnicities. From Scripture, we understand and believe that God leads people in various ways and God acts in human history, but we also learn that there is sin in the world that affects how people behave and make choices. God may as well choose to use human processes of hybridisation for his purposes, but he may not always do so. Rather, humans often choose sinful actions which God chooses to redeem and restore. Current racial categories, which are often used in racist ideologies, are not immutable, unchanging and fixed categories; these classifications are socially constructed, and often politically motivated, and they change over time. It may be argued

that these racial categorisations are arbitrary or at least temporary. Still, some people use these racial categories to create classes to exclude and discriminate others.

If we were able to trace people's ancestry through history, we may more clearly see that there is no pure race, and every race to a certain degree is mixed. The point here is that we humans often make choices marred by sin. Postcolonial scholar and historian Robert J. C. Young (1995) documents and makes a convincing argument that at the heart of the 19th-century racial theory is a perverted desire and obsession by British colonists for interracial sex and hybridity.

Linking racially "mixed people" or biracial persons to cultural hybridity as we use it for missiological purposes, therefore, potentially brings back the connotation of the old racial theory that still partially remains a part of the hybridity concept. A common criticism of cultural hybridity theory is on its origin in biology and the nineteenth-century racial theory, which deemed "biracial" persons as inferior to those who have "pure blood" (Friedman 1999:234; García Canclini 2005: xxvi; Hutnyk 1999:39; Lewellen 2002:99; Young 1995:6). While entirely discredited in scholarly discussions of race and ethnicity, we are seeing in the current century that it is all too easy for a previously discarded racial thinking to return in some form in today's identity politics and increasing nationalist sentiments around the world. This is one reason that making the association between hybridity and racially mixed persons is not only inappropriate but also dangerous for Christian mission.

It is neither fair nor helpful to use the hybridity concept for children of ethnically mixed marriages and interracial families because all humans, in a sense, are ethnic and racial "hybrids." This is the reason that cultural hybridity theory must only be focused on cultural processes and intercultural social interactions that alter and reshape the lives of those involved, not on racial or ethnic mixing or intermarriage, which could lead to creating an essentialized racial category. Just as one cannot claim purity, no one can claim hybridity. For example, although Peter Lee, one of the co-authors of this article, is of Korean heritage, was born and raised in Korea, and self-identifies as an ethnic Korean, he cannot claim to be a "pure-bred" or of "100% pure Korean blood" since it is virtually impossible to draw a boundary around who pure-blood Koreans are. Such thinking ignores the historical development of modern nation-states, falsely assumes complete purity in one's ancestral lineage, and excludes

those who do not have the physical appearance of belonging in the current Korean society. Likewise, someone whose father is a black African and mother a white Anglo American such as, for example, the former U. S. President Barack Obama, cannot claim to be a "hybrid" since such view also falsely assumes racial purity of both of his parents and exaggerates his hybridity although social perceptions may define him as such.

This is what anthropologist Jonathan Friedman (2015:78–79) argues in his critique of some of the misuses of cultural hybridity theory and leads him to allege, "Hybridity is founded on the metaphor of purity. The notion of pure hybridity is a self-contradiction" (Friedman, 2015: 82–83). A better way to think about hybridity is to say that Lee, a person with seemingly pure ethnicity and Obama, a person who is seemingly an ethnic hybrid, are both culturally hybrid just as everyone else on the earth. However, the way each of them experienced hybridisation may be quite different. The question here then should not be whether one is hybrid or not; the questions to ask here are:

*In what ways is a person hybridised and hybridising? How does one perceive one's hybridity or purity, and why? How does a person's hybridity differ from another person's? How does one situation of hybridisation diverge from others?*

Mission scholars and leaders would be wise not to associate racial meanings with the notion of cultural hybridity. It may even be dangerous to treat hybridity as purity for there is no such thing as "pure hybridity" or "hybrid purity." They need to avoid simplistic and naive explanations that could cause unnecessary misunderstandings and further divisions along racial lines within the church. This point then leads us to our third point, which argues against the notion of "hybrid people."

### **5. Are Diasporic "Hybrid People" Culturally Superior?**

There seems to be an assumption among some diaspora mission circles that people in the diaspora are culturally superior due to their hybrid nature. The phrase "hybrid people" is sometimes invoked to define immigrants who live in the diaspora. It may be true that international migrants and their children usually go through cultural adaptations and changes in their social behaviours as they accept and blend new cultural forms in their everyday life. They often learn a new language or two to live in a new society. This does not mean, however, that they should be referred to as "hybrid people" while others are not. This new label for people in the

diaspora, while it seems fitting for those who have had intense experiences of cultural adoption and adaptation, is misleading to the point of being harmful that we must avoid using it.

As we discussed previously, theorists of cultural hybridity are clear that everyone in the world is, though at varying degrees, hybridised and hybridising. We emphasise that no one can claim cultural hybridity just as no one can claim cultural purity. Since everyone draws from what existed before – and also those that existed before drew from what existed before them – no one can exclusively claim hybridity. Thus, as we already argued, the most significant question becomes, “In what ways and why are people hybridising and hybridised?” When we use a phrase such as “hybrid people” that implies that there are certain people who are hybrids and others who are not, we are creating a new kind of prejudice that artificially divides people and excludes those who do not fit this category. There is a real danger that we may end up privileging so-called “hybrid people” while considering “non-hybrid people” as inferior. This is essentially what racism does with different races.

One of the strongest criticisms against proponents of cultural hybridity theory was that they were speaking from a position of special privilege and power (Ahmad 1992, 1995; Dirlík 1994; Hutnyk 2005, 2015). Being elevated to a new level of admiration, transnational postcolonial scholars such as Edward Said, Stuart Hall, and Homi K. Bhabha have been accused of accumulating scholarly currency and creating a powerful intellectual hegemony against which no ordinary scholar could dare to stand. These criticisms against diasporic intellectuals should serve as a warning to diaspora missiologists who may also have a desire to elevate the profile of certain diasporic people by calling them “hybrid people” as if endowing them with intercultural superiority.

Although some people in the diaspora may have a greater capacity for cultural adaptation, it is not helpful to see certain people as hybrids and others not. The fact is that many immigrant diasporic people who live in advanced economies of the world are marginalised, barely surviving at the fringes of society. Immigrant churches often find themselves struggling to maintain cultural and spiritual identity. As their second- and third-generation children grow up, cultural differences and secular influences tend to tear them apart. In that setting, awakening diasporic people of God to his mission would be a considerable challenge. Recognising intercultural advantages of Christians in the diaspora, especially the 1.5-

and second-generation and beyond, can be a powerful motivator that leads these churches to get more deeply committed in global mission. However, we should not make appealing to their intercultural capacity a priority; rather, their calling as God’s people on mission must always be at the forefront of any recruitment for Christian mission. Hybridity is a useful concept, but it should not be misused inappropriately to define some people as hybrids and others not. The unintended consequences of such appeal can be damaging for the church as Christians would be led to draw yet another line between those who are so-called “hybrid people” and those who are not, creating new classes of division.

## **6. Conclusion**

As the theory of cultural hybridity can articulate nuances of power dynamics in a postcolonial world and intricate interpretations of complex intercultural social processes, there remains little doubt that the concept has an enormous potential to open new ways of understanding complex global contexts and to help guide the mission of the global church in the twenty-first century. As we have argued throughout this paper, there needs to be a greater caution before taking the concept into mission theory and practice.

Mission scholars and leaders must clear the confusion caused by associating ethnic and/or racial connotations with cultural hybridity by focusing on cultural aspects of hybridity, not racial or ethnic aspects that could lead us back to the old racial theory. There remains a danger of hybridity becoming a new slogan for quick and easy mission practices, a new kind of the old Eurocentric colonial thinking based on faulty theological and sociological assumptions, which may create divisions in Christian mission.

Again, we would like to emphasise the importance of a dynamic concept of cultural hybridisation, not a static notion of hybridity, as an analytical lens to view, understand, and interpret complex and entangled sociological phenomena in a globalising world in which we live and where Christ calls us to be faithful witnesses to him. In missiological research framed around the notion, this very understanding of the processual nature of hybridisation must be incorporated.

It is important to understand what cultural hybridity theory does, what its limits are, and what its potential, as well as its danger, are for theological and missiological reflections and applications. We need to keep in mind that social theories adapted by mission scholars and practitioners tend to

develop a life of their own. They often depart from their original meanings and end up in theoretical black holes from which no new light is emitted, and no new insights are drawn. Let us hope and pray that it will not be the case for cultural hybridity.

## 7. Notes

1. The growing interest in cultural hybridity among mission scholars and leaders is evident in the fact that conferences are being organized around this theme. For example, “Hybridity, Diaspora, and *missio Dei*: Exploring New Horizons Consultation” sponsored by the Lausanne Movement was held in Manila, Philippines in June 2018. It brought together around 100 missiologists and mission leaders from around the world to discuss various aspects of hybridity in relation to diaspora communities and global mission. Also, American Society of Missiology announced that the theme for the annual conference in 2020 would be “Hybridity in Mission: Mixed and Multiple Identities in the *missio Dei*.”

2. While there are a number of theologians who engage postcolonial theory, for the purpose of this paper and in relation to the theme of hybridity, diaspora and *mission Dei*, we would like to recognize here contributions of the book *Heart of the Cross: A Postcolonial Christology* written by Wonhee Anne Joh (2006) for engaging the hybridity theory to explore a theology with an emphasis on immigrant, ethnic minority, and diasporic experiences, and also *Evangelical Postcolonial Conversations: Global Awakenings in Theology and Praxis* edited by Kay Higuera Smith, Jayachitra Lalitha and L. Daniel Hawk (2014) for initiating evangelical discussions for postcolonial theologies.

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#### **Authors' Declaration**

The authors declare that there is no financial gain or personal relationship(s) that inappropriately influenced them in the writing of this article.

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## Hybridity, Diaspora, and Missio Dei

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### Abstract

*This paper shows that hybridity of colonial discourse reverses the structures of domination in the colonial situation. Hybridity describes a process in which the single voice of colonial authority undermines the operation of colonial power by inscribing and disclosing the trace of the other so that it reveals itself as double-voiced. Hybridity describes people who are racially mixed or biracial or multiracial people all around the postcolonial world. Divergences can be subcategorised into hybridities of racial, linguistic, literacy, cultural, and religious.*

*Africans in the Diasporas were made look to Africa, to their past, and even to their skin colour in shame and discomfort because before black Africans could begin to see themselves as a free and independent people, they had to clear from their minds the stigma that anything African was inherently inferior and degraded. This scenario calls for proposed direction for Missio Dei, which are multiculturalism, inculturation and migration from private theology to public theology.*

### 1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to point out the impact of hybridity and Diaspora into *missio Dei*, as practised by ecclesiastical community. These two population dynamics are inevitable and they necessitate re-direction and re-position of missional methods in order to make *missio Dei* relevant to people involved in these dynamics.

According to Bhabha, if cultural difference is accepted to exist, it becomes a site of “contestation, abuse, insult, and discrimination” and “something that challenges power or authority.” This paper shows that hybridity of colonial discourse reverses the structures of domination in the colonial situation. Hybridity describes a process in which the single voice of colonial authority undermines the operation of colonial power by inscribing and disclosing the trace of the other so that it reveals itself as double-voiced.

Africans in the Diasporas were made to look to Africa, to their past, and even to their skin colour in shame and discomfort because before black

Africans could begin to see themselves as a free and independent people, they had to clear from their minds the stigma that anything African was inherently inferior and degraded. Therefore, they ended up searching their roots by engaging political, cultural, literary and emotional involvement with Africa. Africans in diaspora compare themselves to the new settlers in the Promised Land, just as the Israelites remembered what they left behind in Egypt, they do not let go of some cultural elements of their homeland.

When a people’s past is erased, people become rootless. The long period of stay in the Diaspora has made the person rootless. His/her culture has, for a long time, been suppressed. Gareth Griffiths in “The Myth of Authenticity” adds that “the result of the deliberate suppression of the precolonial cultures, and the displacement of their people in a policy of assimilation was the creation of hybridized conditions of the colonised society” (Tiffin and Lawson 1994: 75).

### 2. Hybridity

In a postcolonial era, hybridity refers to any mixing of eastern and western cultures. It is any kind of cultural mixing or mingling between East and West. The colonial and postcolonial literature refers to it as subjects from Asia or Africa who have found a balance between eastern and western cultural attributes. However, in Homi Bhabha’s initial usage of the term in his audio interview, he clearly thought of hybridity as a subversive tool whereby colonised people might challenge various forms of oppression. Bhabha’s example cites the British missionaries’ imposition of the Bible in rural India during the nineteenth century.

Bhabha plays around with the definition of the contact zone that precipitates the production of hybrid cultures using other different terminologies such as stairwell, in-between space, split-space, Third Space and liminal space. These terminologies are based on different functions of the contact zone. For instance, Bhabha (1994:4) argues that “the stairwell as a liminal space, in-between the designations of identity, becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, black and white”. Bhabha argues that hybridity includes forms of counter-authority called a ‘Third Space’, a form of cultural difference itself. Bhabha identifies the Third Space as an imaginary zone of cultural interaction or exchange – an interplay which leads to the production of a hybrid culture.

One awkward meaning of hybridity describes people who are racially mixed, or biracial or multiracial people all around the postcolonial world. It can describe how western cultures can be inflected by African elements. There is a possibility of different registers of hybridity, from slight mixing to very aggressive instances of culture-clash. Divergences can be subcategorized into hybridities of racial, linguistic, literacy, cultural, and religious.

In reference to racial hybridity, one needs to note that the term “hybridity” derives from biology, where hybrids are defined as reflecting the merger of two genetic streams, so it might seem logical to talk about hybridity in terms of race. Most formerly colonial societies have their very specific, localized words to describe people of mixed-race ancestry, and the term “hybrid” is generally not used in the context of race. In fact, using this term this way might be offensive to people of mixed ancestry. It is culturally inappropriate to actually apply it to biracial or multiracial humans. The irreversible reality is that people are getting racially mixed, especially in North America, Africa, and Western Europe. Although there are some cultures that still resist racial mixing, the fact is “millions of men and women fall in love regardless of ‘racial borders’, marry and have children, and leave no one to define the borders of race” (Schirmacher 2012:38-39). Demographics changes bring change of colour, which for many, still plays an essential role in many discussions of intermarriages. The conservatives or right-wingers struggle to be realistic because the reality remains that racial divisions based on anthropological and scientific distinctions are unclear, they resort to outward characteristics where the colour becomes a primary issue (Prinzing 1991:49). This is the battle that will never be won. It is the mentality of trying to drive the vehicle with a right foot on the accelerator paddle while the left foot is simultaneously on the brake paddle.

The production of hybrid cultures seems to be an endless process. This assertion is based on what happens in the contact zones during moments of political panic. Bhabha (1994:207) reveals:

The margin of hybridity, where cultural differences ‘contingently’ and conflictually touch, becomes the moment of [political] panic which reveals the borderline experiences. It resists the binary opposition of racial and cultural groups.

Here in South Africa, there is a curious symbiosis which has developed between the Afrikaner and the black cultures of South Africa, an encounter

which has already led to richly syncretic amalgamations. This went contrary to the racial ideals propagated by architects of apartheid such as H.F Verwoerd, who promoted the ideology of the ‘pure’ volk. Verwoerd encouraged a view of the Afrikaner’s history in Africa as having taken place in isolation from other cultural influences (Krueger 2010:48). This was a fallacy that tried to nullify the reality of hybridity

South Africa has a section of society known as Coloureds. Like many racial groups around the world, numerous stereotypes and stigmas accompany their existence. The latest writing on these people is Ruben Richards’ *Bastards or Humans*). In Part two of this extensive monograph, he (2017:30-31) asks:

What comes to mind when anyone thinks about coloured people? What we have been exposed to are the stereotypes - the proverbial congenial, humorous, smiling and hospitable people who entertain tourists. What we are not exposed to is the counterpoint, that these are the progeny of the oldest indigenous ancestors of South Africa and also living proof that non-racialism is an attainable ideal for any society plagued by the deep wounds and legacy of institutional and legalised racism.

Richards debates the depth of pain and trauma attached to the identity of the so-called Coloured. The reality is that coloured people are a prominent product of colonial society (2017:218). The colonial society rejected the mixed end-product. Reading this monograph points out that racial hybridity has been historically rubbished as a product of refuse and rejection.

Instead of welcoming and embracing an aspect of their own flesh and blood, Europeans chose to marginalise, reject and bastardise that which they, in part, helped to create namely large numbers of people of colour (2017:219).

Linguistic hybridity refers to elements from foreign languages that enter into a given language, such as the adoption of English words into African languages, or the advent of African words into English. Today, words like “bundus,” ubuntu” and “lapa” are often used without an awareness that they derive from African languages. This convergence or confluence of languages is an inevitable assimilation “as believers absorb the faith by translating its ideas into intelligible terms” (Jenkins 2002:112). When two languages meet, whether one seems to be superior to the other, the product

is a hybrid culture. In this case, the colonizing culture is influenced by the colonised culture and vice versa. Therefore, there is no culture that is pure. Hybridity leads to cultural impurity, which seems to negate a definite identity.

The postcolonial literature also speaks of literary hybridity, which uses experimental modes of narration, such as “magic realism.” The African writer, Ben Okri (*The Famished Road, 1991*) have experimented with modes of storytelling that blend local traditions and folk culture with experimental (postmodernist) ideas. The cultural clash comes with linguistic and political hybridization. Due to the clash of cultures, the people caught in-between the two cultures display ambivalent traits. These people exhibit political, cultural and linguistic hybridity. Culture, defined in terms of art, music, fashion, cuisine, and so on, might be the broadest and perhaps also the easiest place to think about hybridity. Cultural hybridity is also extremely widespread today, as one sees a proliferation of fusion cuisine, fusion cuisine, and fusion musical forms. Postcolonial era witnesses cultural hybridity in major metropolitan centres, in the west as in Africa and the third world. It has become more neutral — possibly a creative way of expressing cosmopolitanism or eclecticism. Many people celebrate cultural hybridity as a way of creating new artistic forms and developing new ideas. Cultures that stay still too long, many artists and musicians would argue, ossify and die.

South Africa’s linguistic varieties effects code-switching, which is an aspect of hybridity. In *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*, Jack C. Richards, John Platt and Heidi Platt explain (1992:58) the term code-switching as follows:

Code-switching involves a change by the speaker (or writer) from one language or language variety to another one. Code-switching can take place in a conversation when one speaker uses one language and the other speaker answers in a different language. A person may start speaking one language and then change to another one in the middle of their speech, or sometimes even in the middle of a sentence.

Another feature of linguistic hybridity includes code-mixing, which “involves mixing two languages usually without changing the topic” (Richards *et al* 1992:57). Whether authors use code-switching or code-mixing, both practices promote coexistence of two different languages in a

literary text. Appel and Muysken (2005:118-9) give reasons for switching codes:

Switching can serve the referential function because it often involves lack of knowledge of one language or lack of facility in that language on a certain subject... Switching often serves a directive function in that it involves the hearer directly... Poplack (1980) in particular has stressed the expressive function of code switching. Speakers emphasize a mixed identity through the use of two languages in the same discourse.

The final sub-category is religious hybridity. Religious conversion is such a widespread theme in colonial and postcolonial literature. The concern in thinking about religious hybridity is usually not whether or not someone converts to a foreign or imposed religious belief system, but how different belief systems interact with traditional and local cultural-religious frameworks. Hybridity naturally creates demographic changes. These changes have some religious consequences “since the new immigrant groups follow cultural patterns more akin to their home societies than to the host nations” (Jenkins 2002:97). There is a surge of churches in South Africa originating from other African countries such as Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, Zimbabwe, Ethiopia and the like. Closer examination of these churches reveals the religious patterns (church order, polity, liturgy, language, etc.) of their countries of origin.

Hybridity is, therefore, an intertwined phenomenon that permeates the borderlines of different races, languages and cultures, thereby subverting traditionally privileged positions. The discussion above illustrates that hybridity affects both the colonised and the coloniser politically, linguistically, socially, and culturally. The convergence of cultures creates diverse dogmatic outlooks, where Bible doctrines’ understanding become diversified. The concepts of God, Christ, Holy Spirit etc. take a new understanding as multi-religious people interface with each other.

In Christianity, the doctrine that suffers the most in this regard is Christology. Christ in African world-view is deemed as an ancestor. The notable African scholar in this regard is Charles Nyamiti. His argument is expounded in his famous monograph, titled *Christ as our Ancestor* (1984). He argues that African ecclesiology presupposes African Christology because the Church is the prolongation of the mysteries of the incarnation and redemption in human Communities. In another place, for him, the

Church is Christ's ancestral mediation (1990:129). The other African scholar who came out with alternative Africa Christology is Benezet Bujo. In his work, titled *African Theology in its Social Context* (1992), Bujo advocates the Christology of Proto-Ancestor, though he maintains that Jesus is the master of initiation who ushers humanity into a life-long relationship with God and ancestors (Kaoma 2015:48). The contribution of Bujo to this discussion on hybridity and diaspora is that Christ as the Proto-Ancestor has some socio-political moral implications; for just as Jesus, the Proto-Ancestor defended the weak and the oppressed and identified with outcasts. Therefore, his living descendants ought to do the same. "The Proto-Ancestor Christology demands solidarity with the poor and the oppressed" (1992:95). How people in diaspora deem, Christ is vital for the packaging of the gospel so that without any compromise, the Bible remains solid in matters regarding its authenticity, relevancy, and authority.

Major works, such as Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, (1958) or more recently, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, (2003) centrally feature the issue of religious conversion. For Achebe's Okonkwo, his son Nwoye's conversion to Christianity is seen as a loss and as a form of subservience to foreign cultural values. Analogously, Kambili's father, in *Purple Hibiscus*, is seen as imposing a rigid kind of Christianity on his family, at the expense of personal loyalty or familial love. But the novel argues that it is possible to be a "religious hybrid," that is to say, an African Christian, without giving up entirely on what makes one uniquely African, or in this case, Nigerian.

### 3. Diaspora

This is the postcolonial phenomenon that has affected the world – east or west. It is the old human migration even during the Bible times, especially in the New Testament times. It was a decisive step at the outset of early Christianity to cross the borders that had divided Jews and Gentiles (Koch 2005:209). The walls of hostility based on race, religion, culture, and social standing were jumped over by faith in Christ. Pauline dictum of the abolishment of the dividing walls is audibly echoed in Ephesians 2:11-22. The first epistle of Peter is written to the people in the diaspora – scattered to the other parts of the world after the Roman Empire unleashed the persecution of Christians.

In our era, different nationalities are in diaspora due to political intolerance, economic meltdown or austerity, social transience, and religious

persecution. In many places, wars result in community displacement and flee into diaspora, becoming refugees or asylum seekers. "Refugees are those people forced to move by war, famine or persecution" (Bakke 1987:34). Refugees are an age-old problem, and their migration exerts enormous pressure on the host countries.

This article aims to point out that hybridity and diaspora are the cultural inevitabilities of the twenty-first century. This confluence creates multicultural societies, out of which multicultural churches result. This calls for repositioning of how to do *missio Dei*. Evangelism, discipleship, liturgy and kerygma of the gospel must change. This scenario calls for proposed direction for *missio Dei*, which are multiculturalism, inculturation and migration from private theology to public theology. These are discussed towards the end of the paper.

### 4. *Missio Dei*

South Africa has always been and will always be increasingly culturally diverse, with many nationalities migrating into its landscape. Hybridity is an inevitable convergence leading to bicultural marriages and multicultural family conglomerates. One of the precious legacies South Africa has left for the world is in the person of David Bosch- one of the leading missiologists of the twentieth century. In his famous monograph, *Transforming Mission*, David Bosch outlines the various paradigms of mission and sketches the parameters of the emerging ecumenical paradigm. He speaks of mission as indefinable and approximations (1991:9). His *missio Dei* is based on his famous *Witness to the World* (1980), where he calls for the recognition that Christian witness (*martyria*) may be expressed through the proclamation (*kerygma*), service (*diakonia*), fellowship (*koinonia*) and worship (*liturgia*) of Christian communities. Within the South African context of hybridity and diaspora, "Our mission must be multidimensional in order to be credible and faithful to its origins and character" (1991:512). The world in which mission takes place is complex and diverse; hence, missional approach should investigate how to wisely be relevant to this context. In this day and age of hybridity and diaspora, context is changing constantly and rapidly. Therefore, missional approach should treat context with insight. "Failing to appreciate the complexity and invisibility of what is going on can result in the drawing of incorrect conclusions" (Harries 2016:38). Apart from that: "Context shapes the theological questions as well as the theological response" (Roberts 1987:15).

Hybridity and diaspora are in varied instances, the outcomes of socio-political incidences. This calls for missional activities that are holistic and inclusive in many ways. There is no place for a dichotomy between evangelisation and socio-political responsibility. Missions in the diaspora is done with a social conscience because the gospel of Christ is meant to affect the totality of life on both a personal and a social level. “Social responsibility is exercised with an evangelistic conscience because the good works that are done are carried out in Jesus’ name as visible signs of the kingdom of God that was brought into history by Jesus Christ” (Padilla 2010:43).

*Missio Dei* is all about Christian community in action. It is human action out of love. However, one needs to note that “Human action does not take place in a vacuum. It affects others, either directly or indirectly (Van Aarde 2016:160). Human instrumentality is still pivotal to missional incarnation. Without people, no mission. These people are God’s instruments regardless of their race, ethnic, or social background. All who believe in the God of the Bible avail themselves to serve God and his people. Parsley (2007:211) is correct that “We are placed on this earth for this fleeting wisp of time not to be comfortable, but to comfort; not to be served, but to serve; to bring glory to God, not ourselves”.

World Christianity is today made up of some humans who cross the national and continental borders. This migration enhances hybridity and diaspora significantly. The scenario challenges the broader ecclesiastical involvement in *missio Dei*. The ecclesial community should strive to be geared to the times while always anchoring to the rock. In other words, the church’s missional endeavours must re-align the missional methods, while *kerygma* still remains couched in the Bible. The diverse contexts that are fluid and transient calls for mission to re-position itself in order to meet the exigencies of present history. Ilo (2017:37) argues:

This requires reading the signs of the times and paying attention to the inner enrichment of particular and universal contexts of faith. It also calls on theologians to become radically open to the surprises of the Holy Spirit and adopt theological humility before the mysteries of God, especially in the actual faith and everyday experiences of God’s people in Africa.

*Missio Dei* in the context referred to in this paper should be multicultural in composition, public in operation, and incultural in context. This calls for a

paradigm shift in missiological understanding. I agree with Plueddemann (2009:22) that:

World mission must be multicultural because the gospel is for everyone, and the Great Commission is for all believers. But being an effective multicultural leader is not easy, especially when false expectations and hidden assumptions exist about what it means to be a leader or follower.

#### 4.1. Multiculturalism

The post-apartheid South Africa has become a beacon of hope to run to for shelter and better life for survivors of war from West and East Africa and economic depreciation of Southern Africa. The arrival of these foreign nationals affected the human ecological imbalance that was for centuries built on racial segregation. Kiaziku (2009:115) alludes to the fact that “societies today are almost all multicultural as well as multi-religious.” Soal and Henry (2018:2) reinforces this that “Culture is also dynamic. The diversity between cultures is the norm and, unfortunately, the main issue triggering conflict.” Cities and town are the boiling pot of multicultural dynamics.

Multiculturalism is a dynamic process within the evolving cultures. It is a massive challenge for South African demographic dynamics due to our history of racial compartmentalisation.

Expressions of intolerance, experiences of discrimination, and our inability to embrace those who are different have plagued us for centuries (Winings 2018:353)

The white flight from the city centres is often justified by preconceived ideas that people of colour are more prone to crime. This means, if many blacks move into the neighbourhood, crime will escalate, property values will depreciate, and of course, the neighbourhood will deteriorate (Diangelo 2018:62). The cultural convergence threatens white identity and self-determination. Withdrawal and isolation by South Africans, especially the white population, had become the defense mechanism for preservation of racial or ethnic identity and purity. The white flight from the city centres affect the church. Former ‘Whites Only’ church buildings and religious fervour became redundant. Prejudice against other races reigned supreme. Many people across the colour bars are reserved when coming to multicultural interactions. The places of worship had become

such a sacred space for some people, never to be shared with others of different hybrid or race.

This is due to failure to comprehend that “The church in a multicultural world means receiving a new identity, whose basis can be God alone” (Rhodes 1998:44). South Africa of today comprises of divergent nationalities, races, ethnic groups etc. In this situation multiculturalism has become a defensible reaction against ethnocentrism imported from Europe by the colonialists. Although South Africa is classified as Anglophone linguistically, it remains a multicultural country with different cultural components to reckon with. It is a country that has become a melting pot of citizens, people in diaspora, people of diverse hybridities etc. To some certain extent, people of different hybridities and those in diaspora end up in developing some sort of culture that is learned and shared as per dictates of the new context in which they find themselves. Their world-view in a new context evolves into a system of solutions to common human problems of survival (Stallter 2009:545).

#### 4.2. Inculturation

This is one of the central concepts in the theologies of liberation. The mainstream theology had in the past three decades encapsulated it in the discussions about culturally relevant theology or what is always termed ‘contextualisation.’ In a nutshell, it means ‘interpreting the Christian proclamation in a form appropriate for particular cultures, usually with the implication of non-Western cultures’ (Jenkins 2002:240). Resane (2018:5) captures it correctly that “Inculturation theology is a form of contextualization. The context into which the Gospel is placed in this case is usually the traditional African culture.” Inculturation is a process of acculturation i.e. learning from other people’s cultures (Luzbetak 1988:65). Pobe (1992:34-44) expresses inculturation as a dynamic process involving translation, assimilation, and transformation in order to confront new norms and forms of life.

The people in the diaspora need the message of hope through gospel activities. This message must be packaged in such a cultural context that will be relevant and appealing to them. Inculturation is making the gospel message appropriate and attractive to the listeners. When inculturation is applied in preaching, people in diaspora will accept that though the Bible has come to Africa as part of the missionary colonial imperialistic package, the Bible itself has ‘good news’ for Africa, and/or Africa is able to

illuminate the biblical message in a way that Western biblical scholarship has not been able to do. So an attitude of trust towards the Bible itself is a feature of inculturation hermeneutics, alongside its oppositional stance towards colonialism.

#### 4.3. From Private to Public Theology

People affected by hybridity and diaspora should see that Christianity has moved out of the *church basement to the public pavement*. I take this expression from Patricia Haggler’s article in the latest *Religious Education Journal* (Oct-Dec 2018). Public theology is always public, speaking in public places, addressing the public issues for the sake or benefit of the public interest. Public theology prophetically addresses discrimination based on race, colour, sexuality, and ethnicism. Since people in diaspora always feel crushed and vulnerable, public theology creates and usher in an ideal ambience where these people can feel safe and embraced. The role of public theology in the South African context is highlighted and captured by Kusmierz’s (2016:5) definition of it as:

Public theology critically and constructively attempts to engage with current socio-political issues in the public domain from a theological point of view. On a meta-theoretical level it critically reflects upon the public role of churches in a democratic society. It explores potential contributions of churches to the enhancement of democracy and common life and considers methods, conditions and limitations of such involvement in a democratic, secular and at the same time multi-religious, multicultural context. It presupposes that this engagement with the secular forms an essential part of Christian faith and theology.

This is a broader understanding of public theology. It is well captured by Thiemann (1991:21) that:

Public theology is faith seeking to understand the relation between Christian convictions and the broader social and cultural context within which the Christian community lives.

It is activism of taking the gospel to the marginalised people in the diaspora to re-affirm their worth as substantiated by *imago Dei* they carry. The image of God they carry authenticates them as living beings with sacredness, equality and sanctity of life. They have the same rights irrespective of their religion, sex, political persuasion or social, economic status (White 2017:121). However, this activism is not ordinary. Haggler

(2018:474) puts it correctly, and I believe this is succinctly relevant for South Africa:

The activism moves from the basement to the pavement and does not operate in a Christian vacuum but is ecumenical, dialogical, racially/ethnically diverse, collaborative, and inclusive.

This activism is *missio Dei*. It is when God involves himself with creation through his church. *Missio Dei* goes beyond culture. It is not limited by any human invention or population dynamics. Culture and language are used as a scapegoat for multiracialism in obeying Christ for the formation of the new community. Rhodes (1998:51) challenges this notion that “If we were to form a ministry directed toward new immigrants from Africa, we would have to form a multicultural, multitribal, English-speaking African ministry”.

There is a need for what Kgatla (2016:69) calls the missiology of radical discipleship. This involves expanding one’s space of life unconditionally to embrace the other (the poor) in such a way that the “haves” could see it as hating oneself. It is a missiology grounded in the theory of radical interactionality, interconnectedness, interdependence, relationality, and Ubuntu and it is thus a theology of reciprocity and mutuality (2016:70). The radical missiology promotes a dialogue that views people as the highest form of wealth and crest of God’s creation (Aristide 1993:178).

## 5. Conclusion

As I have argued in this paper, hybridity has been used as a cultural designation to shifting identities. Aspects of hybridity such as racial, linguistic, cultural, and religious hybridity. Normally, hybridity involves “the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization” (Ashcroft *et al* 2000:118).

*Missio Dei* is called upon to create new grounds in the melting pot of civilisations. When new grounds have been created, a totally different culture is born. Bhabha (1994) argues that this culture belongs to the “in-between” spaces. The desire to set post-colonial cultures free of the control of Eurocentric influences leads to the creation of hybrid cultures.

Hybridity, according to the discussion in this paper, would automatically lead to cultural diversity with an emphasis on respect for all cultures and languages. Hybridity promotes intertextuality and multiculturalism, which lead to cultural diversity.

When two languages and/or cultures meet, there is no one that triumphs over the other; instead, a hybrid variety is developed. When such a neutral language or culture emerges, it undermines the authority of not only the colonised culture but also the colonising one. The “in-between” cultures that are formed in the liminal spaces act as a solution to the identity crisis because it bridges the gap between the coloniser and the colonised. The hybrid culture is neutral and incorporates features from both foreign and native cultures.

Africans in Diaspora serve both as mission agents and mission targets in the turfs they occupy, which is the mission field in need of unique appropriation of God’s mission. As settlers in the different communities, their influence as Christians should be felt. When they are on the new shores, they need to hear of the gospel.

The mission of God in diverse contexts needs to be multiracial, incultural, and move out of the basement onto the pavement. The apostolic dictum remains:

*To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law (1Cor 9:20 NIV).*

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#### **Author's Declaration**

The author declares that there is no financial gain or personal relationship(s) that inappropriately influenced him in the writing of this article.

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## **SECTION B: DIASPORA**

## The Church in a Globalised Johannesburg Inner City of South Africa: Towards a Theological and Ministry Framework

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### Abstract

*In this article, the researcher argued for a thoughtful, reflexive and integrated theological praxis befitting the ever-changing globalised inner-city context of Johannesburg. In relation to mission, he highlighted an evolving threefold contextual issue, i.e. demographic explosion, religious plurality and expansion of poverty to contend with in Johannesburg inner city and also highlighted that these very contextual issues present us with both challenges and opportunities for urban mission and missiology. Hence, he proposed a paradigm for the city based on Jeremiah 29 and a framework made of six tenets for developing inner-city missional congregations. These tenets are ecumenical, contextual, based on interactive and shared process, integrated and holistic, engaging different sources which inspire praxis and transformation. These tenets put together in a paradigm and as a framework, will assist inner congregations towards developing a face of urban ministry and missiology, which could be relevant and appropriate in globalised inner cities such as Johannesburg.*

### 1. Introduction

The church in mission with God has no other option but to move with the people. In this day and age, this move is predominantly towards globalised cities, specifically inner cities, of the world including cities of South Africa. Nations have converged in inner cities of South Africa. As a result, it is almost impossible to see a congregation in the inner cities of South Africa, which is still mono-cultural, mono-ethnic, mono-national, mono-lingual, mono-racial or even mono-social class. A church that tends to take this phenomenon less seriously will fail in implementing the Great Commission<sup>i</sup> and the Great Commandment<sup>ii</sup> in the global cities we find ourselves. If a congregation opts for escapism, it will hurt itself. Separatist tendencies will make the church less genuine in its witness to Christ in these globalised cities. Opting for any of the usual mission praxis shortcuts such as “political activism”<sup>iii</sup>, “ivory tower”<sup>iv</sup>, “missionary activism”<sup>v</sup> and “conversionist option”<sup>vi</sup> alone will lend themselves to reductionism which is detrimental to the development of a meaningful praxis of mission in these globalised cities.

What is required of the church in these globalised cities is a thoughtful,

reflexive and integrated theological praxis befitting the ever-changing globalised inner-city context. The church is not expected only to think deeply about things happening in their context but also to learn to reflect on the actions she is involved in and more so in the process of interaction between their actions and reflection. Further, most importantly, on the change happening to the church in globalised cities of the world, including South Africa.

In this article, I sketch a practical theological framework for mission and ministry in the inner city of Johannesburg especially on how local churches should attempt to embrace and integrate the push emanating from the reality of globalisation including migration associated with various humanitarian crises in their doorstep. How could local inner-city congregations, for the sake of mission, embrace the globalised reality associated with migration crises in Johannesburg inner city is the question central to this research.

In response to this question, I propose a paradigm for the city based on Jeremiah 29 and a framework made of six tenets I deem important for developing inner-city missional congregations. These tenets are ecumenical, contextual, based on interactive and shared process, integrated and holistic, engaging different sources which inspire praxis and transformation. These tenets put together in a paradigm and as a framework, will assist inner congregations towards developing a face of urban ministry and missiology, which could be relevant and appropriate in globalised inner cities such as Johannesburg.

### 2. The Context: Keys to Understanding Johannesburg Inner-city

I begin by painting a threefold contextual picture of Johannesburg inner city, i.e. demographic explosion, religious plurality and expansion of poverty. I believe these three contextual changes, taken together, give us hints about what has been happening in Johannesburg inner city.

#### 2.1 Ever Changing Demographics

One of the global trends to watch in mission is international migration. Mandryk (2010:14) quantifies it by stating that “there are now 200 – 250 million people living outside the land of their birth”<sup>vii</sup>. There are various reasons for this global migration. Mandryk (2010:14) name among others; “increasing gaps, internationally, in quality of life, population growth, climate change and ecological ruin, financial, educational and social opportunities, and upheaval, conflict and persecution”. In Africa, for

example, large scale migration to South Africa is evident, and it seems as if it will continue to increase regardless of the barriers raised or law passed.

Johannesburg inner city is one such area in South Africa, which is affected by this large scale and uncontrollable migration, which started in the past three decades or so. This large migration has drastically reconfigured the demographics of Johannesburg inner city. Morris (1999:670 - 671) elaborates:

Hillbrow [for example] has historically been viewed as one of the most densely populated localities in South Africa. An inner-city neighbourhood of approximately one kilometre square in extent, it is constituted primarily by high-rise apartment blocks and is situated about a kilometre from Johannesburg's central business district. (...) Historically, a large proportion of Hillbrow's residents have been young and single, newly married couples or retired lower-middle to middle-class people. The high density and predominance of young people, many of them single, meant that it has always been a lively neighbourhood with a bustling night-life.

Bremner (2000:186) elucidates; "further demographic shifts have occurred during the second half of the 1990s as Africans from countries further north, mainly Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of Congo, have arrived in the inner city [of Johannesburg]" (see also Kadima and Kalombo 1995 and Morris 1996). Rogerson and Rogerson (1997:86) correlate this to a process of "de-racialisation of space" in the City of Johannesburg which began in the mid-1980s. "The de-racialising of space in Johannesburg has occurred amidst an ailing inner-city economy" (Rogerson & Rogerson, 1997:86).

Other contributing factors that favoured the move of local black Africans to inner-city from the second half of 1980s include "the spiralling of political violence in the townships, the scrapping of influx control, the worsening housing shortage, the growing realization that Group Areas Act prosecutions were unlikely and the increasing willingness of landlords to allow African tenants to move into Hillbrow apartments which were left vacant by 'white flight'" (Morris 1999:671). These factors contributed to thousands of Africans making their homes in the inner city of Johannesburg and earn their living in whichever way possible.

As a result, today, the formal and informal economy of the inner

city is mostly run by Africans with foreigners in the majority. Yet, the African foreign population groups have been subjected to high levels of persecution from South Africans (Dhlomo 1997). They are blamed for the overcrowded informal trading sector, the growth of the narcotics trade and deterioration of the physical environment (Simone, 1998). Increasing xenophobia, assaults and conflicts over space and access "have been a common reaction" by citizens (Mandryk 2010:14).

The Church and ministries that have remained in the inner city are active in various ways ministering to some extent to the immigrants. However, I concur with Falk (1979:426) that "churches...have failed to recognise fully the tremendous needs of the multitudes who left their homes and went to the cities". These multitudes represent a threat as well as a mission opportunity. Mandryk (2010:14) contends; "the "threat" of immigration could also be a great opportunity for Christian ministry – many migrants come less-evangelised lands, and many others come as vibrant, witnessing Christians". Some of these Christians have joined inner-city churches, especially of the same denomination to those of their countries of origin, and others have started their own churches and independent ministries of various persuasions and doctrines. Hence, the "mushrooming" of all sorts of churches in Johannesburg inner city and other major cities of South Africa started and led by foreign Africans. Religious plurality in Johannesburg inner city has, therefore, become an everyday contextual reality.

## **2.2 Religious Plurality**

Given the diversity and the nature of cities, religious plurality in cities is not a new phenomenon. Athens, during the time of Apostle Paul, is one such example (Ac 17:16-34). Paul was distressed to see this great city full of idols because he knew that 'the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God' (1Cor 10:20). The religious plurality and expressions of various faiths thrived in Athens because it remained, even after the Romans 'conquest of Greece, a free city, democratic, multicultural, and open to different ideologies and religions (*cf.* v21). Religious plurality, in my view, thrives in this democratic, multicultural and multinational space. Hence I submit, there are some similarities between the old Athens and contemporary cities of South Africa such as Johannesburg under the new democratic dispensation. Elsewhere, I highlighted <sup>viii</sup> these similarities:

1. Our contemporary cities, like Athens, are progressively becoming democratic to extremes – free cities par excellence.

Freedom and rights of all sorts are tolerated and respected. This exerts pressure and strain in the functions of institutions such as the church, government and the family.

2. Our contemporary cities, like Athens, are multicultural and multinational. Diversity enriches but can spoil too. Cities; by the very nature and structure, have always been multicultural and multinational. There is really nothing new to what has happened to Johannesburg, Durban or Cape Town in South Africa.
3. Our contemporary cities, like Athens, have resources and means to help communities. This and other factors incite the 'pull' factors – poor and vulnerable trek to cities in the hope to satisfy their desires.

Thus, in the midst of this religious plurality, God and His beauty seemed hidden in great cities of the world, such as Johannesburg. Religious plurality is one of the challenges the church faces in Johannesburg inner city. The church feels “overwhelmed and moves only slowly to face [such] urban challenges” (Conn and Ortiz 2001:79). I will come back to this point later. In Berea near Hillbrow, where I serve as the lead pastor of Berea Baptist Mission Church, we have six different religious groups in a 300-meter radius. These groups include Baptist, a Malawian Seventh Adventist, Ethiopian Orthodox, Jehovah witness and two independent Pentecostal congregations started by immigrants. If you add traditional religion practitioners and healers in this vicinity, the picture is as diverse and different as there are colours in nature. Ministry approaches and praxis of each one of these groups are different as each one aims to give a different spiritual experience to its members. Thus, inner cities such as Johannesburg have become religious 'melting pots' that attract members across society spectrums, including the poor.

### **2.3 Expansion of poverty**

The 'de-racialisation' of the space and the scrapping of influx control alluded to in section 2.1 also opened city borders for the poor to migrate to Johannesburg inner city. The poor have come for the prospect of maximising chances to access quality life and jobs since the city offers great services and infrastructure (i.e. housing, roads and transport, electricity, energy, water, sewerage, education, health, safety, communication, financial institutions, transport, governance).

Unfortunately, the majority of migrants and refugees find that they are excluded from the benefits of these services. This reality brings into focus the socio-economic gaps and class realities of cities where we found that the majority of the urban residents, specifically of Johannesburg inner city are poor. They migrated to cities to escape poverty and deprivation, yet in cities, they become poorer, even homeless. In relation to homelessness in the City of Tshwane, Mangayi (2014: 213) observes, the plight of these poor is compounded with exclusion and marginalisation. Most of them now live on the pavements of city streets while some manage to build makeshift structures known as Mikuku under bridges in municipal open spaces. Others live in backyards of some houses in the inner city. For economic survival, they resort to informal small businesses such as back yard mechanic, upholstery, sewing and selling on the pavements whatever they can find, and others sometimes resort to illicit businesses like prostitution, pushing drugs and stealing. The youth and the women are particularly affected by poverty in Johannesburg inner city. The predicament of these poor people are worsened by the fact that many of them do not benefit from government social welfare programmes for various reasons. As a result, many are forever begging at street corners with no prospects for a good future for themselves. For these poor people, cities evoke different feelings and sentiments: with joy, peace and security coupled with fear and insecurity.

The three contextual realities relative to Johannesburg inner city discussed above in section 2 present us with challenges and opportunities for urban mission and missiology.

### **3. Johannesburg Inner-city Challenges and Mission**

I reiterate that inner-city challenges are interrelated and complex. There is wisdom in recognising, as did the Church in Asia, that we need a comprehensive, clear and intelligent understanding of the complex nature of our economy, social and cultural including environment context in relation to city systems before the church in mission with God can get involved. Regardless, we need to appropriate the imperatives of the gospel of Jesus Christ which suggest that the poor, the destitute and the marginalised people, as well as the wealthy and powerful groups of people in the city, must be transformed (Conn & Ortiz 2001:23). This transformation will begin the moment the church begins to see the possibilities for 'hopeful action' in the face of these inner-city challenges and the reluctance to venture with God in the inner-city will also be overcome.

### **3.1 Church, Demographic Explosion and Mission in Johannesburg Inner-City**

Conn and Ortiz (2001:288) contend, “The church faces a Missiological challenge regarding population growth and people movements throughout the world”. This challenge emanates from the confluence of the urbanisation of the planet and the globalisation of cities. Conn and Ortiz (2001:288) see it as “a theological announcement”. They explain:

The sovereign Lord is bringing people from various countries and ethnic backgrounds together in a way never before witnessed. In our Missiological context, we meet diverse peoples not necessarily by crossing the oceans but by crossing the streets of our urban centres. All of our ministries will have to contend with this demographic situation, a pluralism impossible to escape. Our ministries, seminaries and churches will encounter a multi-ethnic, multi-socioeconomic, multi-religious challenge that calls us to stand by the truth of the Word of God without wavering.

In the same vein, Ray Bakke (1996) <sup>ix</sup> claimed that there is the divine hand behind migration and subsequent demographic explosion in cities of the world. He (1996) said God is helping the Church to fulfil the Great Commission by bringing nations closer in big cities of the world. It seems as if God has shaken the world and prompted nations to migrate to big cities. Moreover, in the Great Commission, God instructs, ‘Therefore go and teach all nations...’ (Mt 28:19). We now know that these nations have gathered in big cities of the world, such as Johannesburg. God has brought all these nations here in the big cities so that the Great Commission could be fulfilled (*cf.* Bakke 1987:28). Thus, the Church’s participation in the movement of God’s love toward the world cities and populations includes an evangelistic as well as a socio-economic responsibility (Stott 1975:23; Bosch 1991:405). Such an understanding of mission demands of the Church to embody in word and deed that Christ died and rose from the dead that he lives to transform human lives and to overcome death (*cf.* Mangayi 2016:24). However, I add, before we can embark on a transformative Missiological endeavour we need to acquaint ourselves with the use of demographic sciences in mission while unwaveringly holding on to the Great Commission and the Great Commandment as our mandate. I concur therefore with Conn and Ortiz (2001:289) that demographics will certainly assist the Church in her urban mission endeavour in three ways at least: 1) discover the shalom of God in community or the lack of it, 2) discover systemic as well as individual needs and 3) discover the reasons a church

is facing growth or decline.

In reference to Johannesburg inner-city churches such as Berea Baptist Mission Church (BBMC), demographic insights will assist towards developing mission strategies that are appropriate, transformative and biblical so that different nations and ethnic groups of this neighbourhood come to experience the Shalom of God. Since Johannesburg inner-city neighbourhoods are constantly changing, churches in them such as BBMC must remain alert in order to maintain a viable, relevant and visible presence. “Churches must avail themselves of all the tools God has made available, including demographics” (Conn and Ortiz, 2001: 307).

### **3.2 Church, Socioeconomic Inequality and Mission in Johannesburg Inner-city**

As stated in section 2, people who have moved to world inner cities such as Johannesburg have multidimensional socioeconomic needs and experience deprivation in various ways. There are for example people who have migrated to inner cities of South Africa as a result of interest and personal needs, decisions made by government powers, abrupt changes due to famine and natural disaster, the lack of municipal services, civil war and political unrest, etc. All these factors have a bearing on the direction and ministry of the church in the inner city of Johannesburg, for instance.

The church must come to understand that there is more than what meets the eye behind communities and groups plagued by poverty and injustice in the inner city. The church is therefore required to have ability and knowledge to do social analysis in order to avoid becoming insensitive to the needs of urban communities and neighbourhoods. Social sciences’ insights would be of great assistance to the church in this context as she engages in mission, and these should be taken into consideration so that thought-through and profound hermeneutics could be applied. The point is that the church should adequately understand the needs of contemporary urban society in order to communicate the gospel effectively (Engel and Norton, 1975:41). Further, Conn and Ortiz (2001:261-262) contend, “Guessing games will not do, and spiritualising the circumstances will not provide meaningful answers. Social-scientific assistance is needed when we want to plan for the future and recognise ongoing trends in immigration and urbanisation”.

Thus, the church in Johannesburg inner city on mission with God needs to use social sciences tools to pose a diagnostic, do exploration and come up

with the prescriptive process. Conn and Ortiz (2001:271) put it this way: “...we need to use the skills and sciences available to us with a certain amount of precision. Moreover, again and again, we turn to the Word of God, the eternal absolutes, to learn how we should live and serve in this needy and demanding world”.

### 3.3 Church, Public Sphere and Mission in Johannesburg Inner-city

The church in Johannesburg inner-city as it is with globalised cities of the world cannot dismiss the spiritual battles that occur within these cities. The church must bear in mind that “cities are centres of power and culture and are strategic for world impact” (Conn and Ortiz 2001:359, see also Keller 1999:2). Evil exists publicly in Johannesburg inner city, and it is manifested through violence, abuse, prostitution, sex slavery and human trafficking, drug and substance abuse and the like. These evil manifestations are associated with occultism practices and Satanism, which are accommodated as religious and spiritual expressions in the free and democratic South Africa.

The church in mission in the globalised inner city of Johannesburg cannot avoid engaging in spiritual warfare against powers and systems in the city (Eph 6:11-18). In her mission endeavour in Johannesburg inner city, I concur with Conn and Ortiz (2001:367) that “The church needs to combat the deterioration of our communities by coming back to our basic commitment to the sufficiency of the gospel for life and ministry”. While proper and profound social analysis should lead the church not to “assume that every problem [in the city] has been caused by demons” (Kraft 1992:41). Discernment is thus crucial for the church on mission with God in Johannesburg inner city.

Discerning societal and systemic injustices against the weak and poor communities of the city should also preoccupy the church in her endeavour to do mission in the city. This discernment will hopefully lead to advocacy ministry and a demonstration of God’s love to those on the margins in practical ways.

In the preceding paragraph, I have discussed and highlighted the contextual challenges and hints on possible mission opportunities in the inner city. I articulated that the church has to learn how to read the city as well as its contemporary challenges using tools from demographic and socioeconomic sciences so she can come up with appropriate Bible-based remedies befitting the mission mandate in the city. Now, I will turn my

attention towards presenting a sketch of some sort of theology of mission relative to Johannesburg inner city and the elements to be considered in the articulation of such a theology.

## 4. Shape and Face of Urban Ministry/Missiology in Johannesburg Inner-city

### 4.1 A 3P Theological Paradigm for the City

One of the cherished Biblical text concerning urban mission is Jr 29: 7 which Villafane <sup>x</sup> (1995:1) calls “The Jeremiah paradigm for the city”. Villafane (1995:2) contends:

Jeremiah’s words are instructive. They present a new challenge to God’s people in a new reality. They address the question: What is the role of the people of God in the city? Or what is the role of the church in the city today? Jeremiah’s answer is an overarching, holistic vision for the city, one that can inspire our work in urban ministry. Jeremiah paradigm stems from a theology of context (presence), a theology of mission (peace) and a theology of spirituality (prayer).

This Jeremiah paradigm for the city is a three-pillar theology for the city, that is, presence, peace and prayer as I have summarised in the table below. It is apparent that this paradigm opposes escapism. Hence, it encourages the people of God in captivity to 1) maximise their presence in the city of ancient Babylon for the sake of the kingdom of God, 2) work for peace and 3) intercede for the city.

Table 1: Jeremiah Paradigm of the city – Jeremiah 29:5 – 7

| Presence (Jr 29:5-6)   | Peace (Jr 29:7a)  | Prayer (Jr 29:7b)  |
|--|---|--|
| Jeremiah calls for ‘critical engagement’ – <u>for presence</u> | The prophet instructed them to use their influence and endeavours to promote the public <u>peace</u> ; and to pray for the welfare of the city, as the way to obtain peace to themselves. | A true urban spirituality knows the critical importance of <u>prayer</u> ; it knows that the struggle requires the nurturing and “caring of the soul”. Spiritual power encounters are indeed present in the <i>polis</i> . |

| Presence (Jr 29:5-6)   | Peace (Jr 29:7a)  | Prayer (Jr 29:7b)   |
|--|---|---|
| The church gathers to worship and to equip itself to impact the <i>polis</i> . It does not live for itself, but for the kingdom of God. The church cannot be indifferent to the human needs in the city – be they physical, political, economic, or spiritual. It does not hide; neither does it integrate falsely in society. | The church is an instrument, a servant, of peace in the city. It preaches and lives out the shalom of God. <u>See Ac 10:36.</u> | Equipped with the whole armour of God, we go out to confront the principalities and powers. |

A logical deduction from this paradigm for the city suggests, in my view, at least three-pointers in terms of what the urban church, specifically the inner city churches, should do today. Firstly, the church should ‘bloom where they are planted’. These churches find themselves in a totally unfamiliar and sinful context with so many challenges. They should settle down, apply their mind and energy in developing ministries, which will continue to impact their city. They must continue to witness to the richness of faith, hope, and love (according to 1Cor 13:13). Secondly, they should be actively involved in social and justice services, knowing that *“The church’s mission includes engaging in power encounters with sinful and evil structures”* (Villafane 1995:34). Lastly, accepting and exercising the call to redefine and re-appropriate from Scripture and from the rich heritage of the church a social spirituality that is consistent with the “following of Jesus”.

These pointers are inescapably embedded in the double focus and goal of Christian spirituality which has (1) a vertical focus – the continual transformation into the likeness of Jesus, the resurrected Lord; and (2) a horizontal focus – the following of Jesus, in similar obedience of the Father’s missional calling (Lk 4:18-19).

It is apparent from the preceding that for a local urban church to start operating within the Jeremiah paradigm with the vision of redeeming the

city must go through profound change within herself.

#### 4.2. Tenets of an Urban Theology for Johannesburg Inner-city: A Practical Theological Framework

The primary purpose of my article is not to identify the urgent issues in Johannesburg we need to analyse at this juncture in history, but to argue for a practical theological framework in which context analysis becomes an integral dimension of mission praxis. I concur with Kritzinger (2002:149) that our premise should be to integrate the “Great Commission” into a holistic biblical vision that includes the “Great Commandment” of Mt 22:34-40 and the “Great Question” of Mt 16:15. Who are we? We are pilgrims moving onwards together to learn and embrace the fullness of our own faith in this case in globalised cities of the world such as Johannesburg.

In tandem with the Jeremiah paradigm for the city, there are in my view, six theological tenets to be considered which could not only support and inform the praxis for urban theology but could also give us the face of this theology. These six tenets are ecumenical, contextual, interactive and shared process, integrated and holistic, engagement of different sources that inform the praxis and transformation.

##### 4.2.1 Ecumenical

Ecumenical is about cooperating with others of different denominations and theological persuasions within the Christian faith. It is a collective trajectory with people seeking to understand what the nature of the city is and the way God asks us to demonstrate his love and justice in the city. The ecumenical theology of the city will emerge naturally as a result of collective reflection. Co-operation also means learning to live with our differences in the hope that a theology will emerge that takes the city seriously but also reflects cultural as well as theological tones.

Inner-city challenges are too big for one church to tackle alone. In relation to the United States of America, Thomas and Blake cited in Ramsay (1998:606) found that “growing inequalities, middle-class flight, and social and cultural fragmentation...increasingly characterise metropolitan areas generally. This has again and again driven congregations into ecumenical coalitions and para-congregational groupings ... so that the assets and resources of the church might be made accessible to those most in need”. Greater, city-wide and thought-through ecumenical cooperation is what the church in Johannesburg needs in her endeavour to do church and mission in the city.

#### **4.2.2 Contextual Analysis**

Kritzinger (2002:193) posits:

...If a theology wishes to make a difference in a particular context, it has to understand that context thoroughly. And in order to understand a context, you need to analyse it consciously and intentionally. It is dangerous to assume that you know what is going on around you, because cultures and situations are constantly changing, and new developments often take place under our noses without us being fully aware of the implications.

This is true particularly of urban contexts such as Johannesburg inner city, where there is a great deal of diversity and mutual influencing between different groups of people, as well as rapid social change. Thus, emphasis on the contextual approach is about wondering how God expects the church to relate to this inner-city context and on how the church could develop appropriate ministries in the inner city. Ministries that seek to address contextual issues relative to the inner city in concrete ways must develop a contextual approach to theology and ministry in the inner city. Kritzinger (2017:24) explains “It is a theology that deliberately and systematically analyses its life-world, in order to understand what is going among the people and in the community at large”.

#### **4.2.3 Interactive and Shared Process**

The theological framework we propose here should bear in mind the notion that theology/mission is not static but rather a continuous and dynamic process of collective and mutual learning. This process requires that we engage the scriptures, the context and the others creatively. It is an ongoing dialogue with oneself, the scriptures, the world and the other ones. This process believes in the priesthood of all believers and invites and welcome contributions from groups in the church. It must make use of the untapped potential of lay people for ministry in the inner city. The nature of your mission project will certainly determine the composition of the group. The church should choose people who will be most helpful as advisers, supporters and critical discussion partners.

Further, through this process the church groups are going to explore what it means to think critically, to be creative, and to integrate insights from different disciplines in addressing the issues they are faced within the inner city. The creativity required here means not to keep on repeating what others have said, or not to repeat it in exactly the same way they have been saying it. It is to see new things, or to see old things in new ways; to

connect issues that were not connected before; to approach old problems from new angles or with new “tools”.

#### **4.2.4 Integrated and Holistic**

To integrate is to connect, combine, include and unify, thus producing a situation that is integer, a Latin word that means “whole” or “together”. The church in mission with God in the inner city needs to demonstrate that it can combine (integrate) insights from theology, the Bible and doctrine into a unified vision that can lead to transformative action in the inner city.

We often tend to do ministry in the city in a fragmented way, dealing with an aspect of isolation from others. In order to redress this fragmentation, it is desirable to adopt a total and integrated approach to urban ministry. It is required of the urban theologian/missionary/ missiologist to integrate theory together with practical experience as well as personal spirituality. The total and integrated approach also assumes the integration of knowledge from different theological disciplines in the process of dispensing ministry in the inner city. Servants of God are expected to exhibit wisdom and maturity, as they integrate their theological insights and bring them to bear on a pressing community problem in the inner city.

#### **4.2.5 Engaging Different Sources which Inspire Praxis**

Theology is not a simple process, it is not enough, for example, to refer to biblical verses and hope that all is well. Theology must engage the different sources that inspire praxis. We must indeed be aware of different sources that influence our praxis, clarifying at the same time our intentions in the theological process. In my case, as an evangelical urban missiologist and practitioner, the process centres on the interpretation of the Bible and the evangelical tradition in which I stand. This interpretation of the Bible is concrete and contextual, in which the “signs of the times” that were identified during contextual analysis (and the understanding of the lives of the people around me) are consciously “brought to” the Bible, to see what happens when text and context meet at a deep level. I aim to find images, impulses, ideas, stories, patterns of action in the Bible that could give light, guidance and direction to me and ministry team in a local situation, particularly as it relates to the community problem that I have identified in the inner city where I minister.

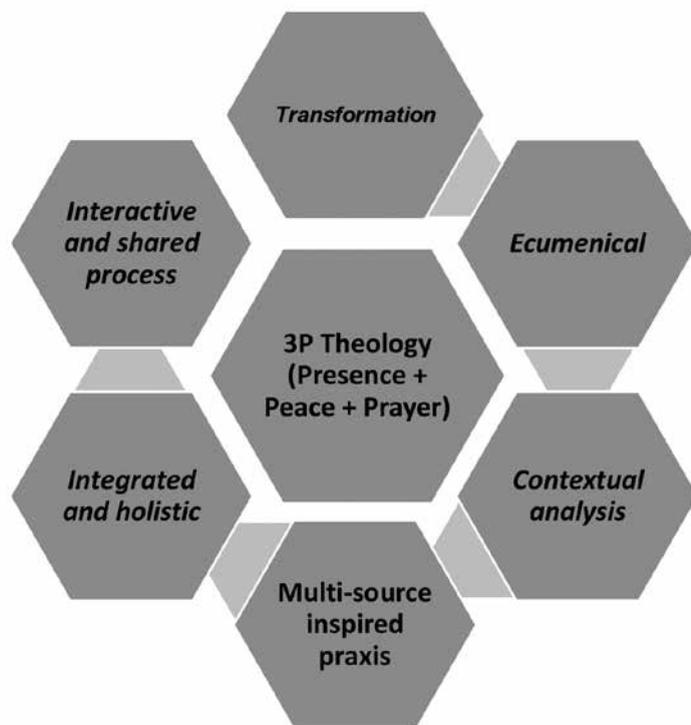
#### **4.2.6 Transformation**

Kritzinger (2002:148) contends, “One of the key features of the Christian tradition – in its better moments – is its world-formative and world-

transformative power”. The church needs to understand that involvement in *missio Dei* in the inner city includes the fact that mission as an “activist streak” in the life of the church and this is embedded in – and is an expression of – the mission of the triune God in history.

Urban theology/mission has to aim for the transformation of urban communities. It is not enough to understand and analyse the city and its dynamics. After analysis and reflection come transformative actions. Transformation of the urban missionary/theologian should happen before we can hope for transformation to happen in urban communities.

A graphical summary of the framework for the church in Johannesburg inner city includes as epicentre the 3P theology and the six tenets in an ongoing cycle involving action and reflection.



The 3P theology for the city proposed in this contribution integrates the six tenets of urban missiology that I highlighted previously. I submit that this 3P theology has to form part of the ecclesial vision for the inner city. For the realisation of the 3P vision, these six tenets are pursued together and are perceived all the time as a unit.

## 5. Conclusion

This article attempted to provide answers as to how could local congregations, for the sake of mission, embrace the globalised reality associated with migration crises in Johannesburg inner city. Challenges and mission opportunities relative to Johannesburg inner city were highlighted and discussed as well as biblical imperatives for mission in the inner city. A paradigm for the city based on Jeremiah 29 and a practical theological / Missiological framework which integrate six tenets, i.e. ecumenical, contextual, interactive and shared process, integrated and holistic, engaging different sources which influence Christian praxis and transformation, are presented for thinking about and doing mission in globalised inner city such as Johannesburg.

Thus, this research contributes to the discourse and the need for the search of authentic and appropriate urban mission praxis in cities such as Johannesburg.

## 6. Notes

i. Mt 28: 19-20

ii. Mt 22: 34-40

iii. “Political activist” short cut occurs when a group of Christians, working from within their faith, become so aware of the brokenness of society as they analyse the challenges facing them, that – in their attempt to change the world – they gradually neglect the dimensions of theological reflection and spirituality in their activism, thus producing a “secularised” three-point cycle consisting only of involvement, analysis and Planning.

iv. “Ivory Tower” - There are too many theologians at universities (and seminaries?) who limit their theological work to an interplay between social analysis and theological reflection, while ignoring personal involvement, spirituality (church involvement) and planning (working with others in concrete projects). Such a “short cut” is woefully inadequate to address the challenges of our time and to answer the question of Jesus in Mk 8:29.

v. “Missionary activist” option limits itself to involvement, spirituality and planning. Many Christians, with very good intentions and a huge amount of spiritual energy, ignore social analysis and theological reflection in their Christian activism, thus reducing their praxis to a spiritualising short cut. By doing so they often repeat the mistakes of earlier generations of missionaries, because they do not take the time to learn lessons from

history or to think through the ideological implications of the choices they make or the methods they employ.

vi. “Conversionist” option combines involvement, theological reflection (concentrated on Mt 28:16-20, Jn 14:6 and Acts 4:12), a narrow spirituality, and the planning of activities aimed exclusively at conversion. This approach has developed a confident theological apologetic and has strong financial backing, but the fact that it ignores (or seriously undervalues) the dimension of social analysis, makes it a short cut that lends itself more easily to an ethnocentric praxis, thus undermining holistic contextual praxis.

vii. These statistics are 7 years old, by now these numbers have most likely doubled.

viii. In **July 2006** – “Hidden God, hidden people and hidden beauty”. Paper read at the Urban Consultation. Theme: Celebrating God in the city. The Urban Consultation is an event, which engages church leaders, practitioners, academics and corporate leaders involved in urban ministry.

ix. This is verbatim quote of Ray Bakke as a plenary speaker at the 1996 biennial National Consultation on Urban Ministry held at Methodist City Mission, Pretoria in July 1996.

x. Consult Villafane Edwin 1995 (Seek the peace of the city. Reflections on urban ministry. Grand Rapids / Michigan: William B. Eerdmans) for an extensive discourse on the Jeremiah paradigm for the city and its implications for urban mission in the contemporary world.

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#### **Author's Declaration**

The author declares that there is no financial gain or personal relationship(s) that inappropriately influenced him in the writing of this article.

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## **A Trinitarian Response to Homelessness and Refugees**

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### **Abstract**

*Recent years have seen the phenomenon of refugees and homelessness becoming of great importance, not just to the individuals concerned, but also as influencing world events. This is not new; indeed, the Bible contains several references, so much that some have seen it as a major theme. This is particularly as Jesus himself left heaven and had an itinerant ministry.*

*It must be affirmed that having a home is good, and desired by God, yet homelessness is a result of sin. Hence it is effectively a fundamental experience for Christians, and is used by God as punishment and discipline for all humanity. But God acts in salvation, and part of this is the provision of a home.*

*In keeping with his nature God acts as Trinity, so this aspect of salvation involves justification, Jesus experiencing homelessness, sanctification, the action of the Spirit in generating the relationships of a home, and creation, where the Father ultimately provides. This implies that Christian action for the homeless has the same three aspects. Importantly, however, as with God, this must be seen in the context of the full blessing of salvation.*

### **1. Introduction**

The issue of migrancy and refugees has become extremely significant in recent world history; Groody (2009:638) gives some statistics as to the size of the world issue, and Stemmett (2008:28f) in the South African context. There has been an enormous number of people fleeing from their own countries, driven by war, as in Syria, or a desire for a better life. Many of these have tried to reach Europe, encouraged by the open borders policy of the European Union. Many have perished trying to reach one of the Greek islands, or in attempting to cross the Mediterranean to Italy from North Africa. Results have been enormous, from the moves in Germany away from a liberal policy, to the vote by the UK to leave the European Union, and more recently, the move by the Trump administration in the US to build a wall along the total length of the southern border with Mexico.

The enormous amount of human suffering involved must naturally prompt Christian reflection on the issues involved. And of course action; however,

Stemmett (2008:9) noted that very few churches in South Africa had a ministry to that group.

It may be immediately observed that several stories in the Old Testament relate to the theme. Maruskin says that the Bible can be viewed as a book both written by refugees and written for refugees (Stemmett 2008:99, who then gives a comprehensive survey). Indeed, the first clearly historical events are of a man, Abram, later Abraham, called by God to leave what was probably a comfortable situation and become a homeless nomad on his way to Canaan. “A wandering Aramaean was my father” (Dt 26:5) was part of Israel’s response to God as they were poised to stop their own wandering. Not long afterwards, events led to his descendants, leaving their settled homes and becoming sojourners in Egypt. That migration was reversed in what we refer to as the Exodus, where Israel returned to the land of Canaan. Tragically that was not the end, for the judgment of God fell on both the northern kingdom by the hands of the Assyrians in 722BC, and later, in 587BC, on the southern kingdom of Judah by the Babylonians; both events led to deportation. The latter was then itself reversed after nearly a century in exile. Snyders (2012:139) points to the experiences of the returning exiles, observing the fear and hostility of the new neighbours, a typical reaction. Then that was not the end; after the time of Jesus, the Roman response to the rebellion of 66AD was a total expulsion from the land. They recognised the power of Israel was intimately connected to the land. It is here that the modern situation has become so interesting, first with the Balfour declaration of 1917, the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, and possibly most significant, the reunification of Jerusalem in 1966. Is this the end of the times of the Gentiles (Lk 21:24)? But again, how much of the problems in the modern world find their roots in the tenacious identification of the Jews to that particular place; it is home! And there are many stories in the Bible of individuals suffering homelessness.

Christian history is also full of persecution and believers suffering for their faith. Stemmett (2008:60), from a Baptist tradition, notes persecution of early Baptists. Very often, these events included expulsion from homes.

However, more than these, the Christian faith itself is centred around a sojourner, one who left his home and entered human existence in a vastly deprived manner, even being born away from the home of his parents. He experienced living and ministering under a foreign power, calling others to follow him in an essentially homeless ministry. After his execution,

resurrection and ascension back to his real home, he inspired many to serve him by participation in prolonged missionary journeys, and of course, these were not limited to the first century!

Fundamentally, homelessness must be seen as a major theme both in the Biblical story and in the Christian life. ‘The Judeo-Christian tradition’, as the U.S. Catholic bishops have noted, ‘is steeped in images of migration,’ from the migration of Adam and Eve out of the garden of Eden (Gn 3:23–24), to the vision of the New Jerusalem in the final pages of the New Testament (Rv 21:1–4)” (Groody 2009:644). This latter significantly shows people from every nation (Rv 5:9). This must prompt investigation as to why homelessness is so significant, and what the Christian response should be; Groody (2009:640) bemoans the minimal involvement of theology. Theology itself has become alien in the modern world!

Immediately, it must be pointed out that in the world, there is a natural rejection of foreigners; people tend to associate only with those similar. Recent years in South Africa have witnessed a considerable amount of immigration, but also the horrific effects of xenophobia. This must be put in the context of the South African situation, where possession of land has always been contentious; the latest manifestation of this is the demand for land restitution without compensation. Snyder (2012:35) points out that “encounter” derives from the Latin in *contra*, meaning “against”. A Christian response of aid and help to the refugee is not a natural human trait, as has so often been seen. Rather there should be an imitation of the attitude of God himself, who amazingly opens the doors of heaven to sinners. Soares *et al* (2017) observe that there are several provisions in the Law pertaining to the care of the alien (e.g. Ex 20:10; 23:12; Dt 1:16; 5:14). Likewise, there should be an imitation of Christ; Groody (2009:654) notes his acceptance of several who would normally be rejected at the time. It is not surprising that many authors (e.g. Newlands & Smith 2010:139) see hospitality as an aspect of salvation. If the land belongs to God (Lev 25:23, Ps 24:1), there is a motive to hospitality (Wright 1983:58). Incidentally, the references to land purchase (e.g. Gn 23, Jr 32:6f) cannot really mean more than the right to use, not outright possession.

The nature of God as hospitable rests on love, and on his kenotic nature (Newlands & Smith 2010:204). Perhaps it can be added that God cannot in the least be threatened, which is at the heart of antagonism to refugees; Christians, with their ultimate home secure, have no real need for concern. Foster (1987:42) quotes the attitude of Wesley when his home was lost in

a fire: “The Lord’s house burned, one less responsibility for me.” From another perspective, Rivera-Pagan (2013:38) observes that refusal to be hospitable resulted in the destruction of Sodom (Gn 19).

## 2. Homelessness as Wrong

Homelessness is of course often part of a wider state of poverty, so must be seen as wrong, an aspect of the fallen nature of the world, and so needing salvation from it. It has then prompted a variety of Christian responses (*cf.* Williams 2001).

It can be said that God is in favour of having a home. It must of course immediately be affirmed that God is omnipresent and not at all restricted to a particular location; this contrasts with the view of the peoples of the area around Israel, who identified their gods with their territory. The story of Naaman (2Ki 5) is an example of this. However, Jonah had to be made aware that there was no way that he could flee from the presence of God.

However, it is clear that God particularly adopted what we refer to as the “promised land”, where he would be particularly known. It was his home country. More than that, he commanded the construction of the tabernacle, and then later on the Temple, where he could be particularly worshipped. Nevertheless, there was an immediate denial of absolute location; at the dedication, Solomon prayed, “behold heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, how much less this house” (1Ki 8:27). Yet there was a house! It would seem that God recognised that meeting with him, and worship was easier in a specific geographical location. Indeed, since that time, although there are repeated attempts to deny the necessity of church buildings, most find them necessary, if not essential. More than this, many attest to the feeling that there are some locations where God seems particularly present. God does seem to concentrate in places from time to time, such as in the “burning bush” (Ex 3:2), or the *shekinah* during the Exodus. Philosophically, this reflects the confession that God is infinite; this does not mean that God is very large, but as the word implies, he is without ends (Latin *finis*). He is totally present in any place at any time (*cf.* Williams 1995).

In my own experience I have found a few places where God seems to be particularly present, and I know that I am not alone in this; in one of his sermons, Nicky Gumbel, of Alpha course fame, relates how he used to travel quite a long way every Friday to a place where he felt God was

specially present. On the other hand, it was quite the opposite experience for me to visit Auschwitz, for there I felt a presence of great evil, still there a half-century after the horrors that had been perpetrated there. This “concentration” and experience of God has been termed the “numinous”.

Perhaps this indicates what a home is all about. We do not actually need a home at all; in fact, there are many people who live a nomadic existence and have no settled home. This lifestyle is not, in fact, restricted to primitive people. Yet for most, like God, having a home, although by no means essential, is most valuable. It is a blessing, of which God does approve (*cf.* e.g. Ps 84).

In this case, not having a home is not consistent with the nature of God, and would be seen to be wrong. This does not mean that a person is slavishly restricted to a particular place, but there should be a place that we identify with. It helps us to live in the right way when we reflect as far as possible what God is like.

Many people fall into what was the prevalent view in the Old Testament, of believing that it is only possible to relate to God in specific times and places, and, perhaps it should be added, in particular ways. Israel had to be liberated from a restricted view of God, and it was perhaps for this reason that God allowed, perhaps led, into experiences of conquest and location to situations outside the promised land.

It may well be suggested here that God had to repeatedly separate them from a specific location and to affirm that the strength and power of the Jews lay not so much in a location but the identification as a people, and of course in their worship of the one God. While these are no doubt helped by the actual location, that really must be secondary, and moreover, can be a distraction from the essence of what they should be. They had to be removed from a home because it can be the source of false security and error. That can well be true for Christians as well.

### 2.1 Living as Aliens

It is hardly surprising that many have seen the Christian life in terms of homelessness. Peter, in particular, describes Christians as “aliens and exiles” (1Pt 2:11); also the writer to the Hebrews (e.g. 11:13f). Frost (2006:9) says it is the best biblical metaphor for today’s church; he cites Brueggemann’s finding of parallels between the modern church and the Babylonian exile. Christians do not belong in this world; they do not really

fit into its way of life. Ogletree (1985:7) points out that for Christians, the world has become fundamentally alien; they belong to the new age. Indeed, for them, life has ended, their essential being is the life of the Christ who has given them a new life, and that life is heavenly, it does not belong in this world. The life of a Christian is of a journey to their real home; Christians are citizens of heaven (Phlm 3:20). Hardly surprisingly, the allegory of John Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*, has enjoyed repeated popularity since it was penned by the Bedford tinker. The promise of John 14:2, "I go to prepare a place for you", has understandably been constantly precious. Grau (2013:18) observes that the experiences of Israel in Exodus and exile had a profound influence on them; this must then also be true for Christians in their journey through life.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that homelessness is right. The attitude of such as Peter reflects rather the fact that this world has gone wrong, it is not as God intended; the ideal is that people should be at home here, but in a world not fallen. God made the world for human habitation, and it was good (Gn 1:31). But until this world is fundamentally changed, it is not the right place for godly people. They may be here, but it is not right for them; it cannot be their home.

Awareness that the real home of a Christian is elsewhere has prompted a variety of responses. Worldly goals are irrelevant; in any case, everybody comes to the end of this life. This has meant a focus on things other than this life, a focus on the spiritual rather than the material, which must be temporary. Jesus told us not to lay up treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume them (Mt 6:20). Likewise, Paul tells us to seek the things that are above (Col 3:1). There are several Biblical examples of the renunciation of wealth; Jeremiah interacted with the Rechabites, for whom poverty, which included the rejection of a fixed home, was how they felt they should live (Jr 35:6f). The prophets, who should have lived a life particularly close to God, also practised poverty; a good example is Elijah, clad in haircloth (2Ki 1:8), a practice repeated in his reincarnation in John the Baptist. The Levites likewise had no inheritance (Nm 18:23, cf however Lv 25:32); Neil (1973:84) suggests this is why Barnabas, the Levite, was willing to sell his property (Ac 4:30). Nevertheless, for Christians, the practice of self-limitation is not a rejection, but a matter of priority; Jesus did not reject this world, but rather in the incarnation, he affirmed it. Boerma (1979:52) speaks rather of indifference to property than a rejection of it.

This does mean that the extreme renunciation of this world and all that belongs in it, asceticism, is not a truly Christian response. Its adoption by many in the early Church was paralleled by many other religious people such as the Essenes and likely driven more by foreign ideology such as Stoicism than by adherence to the lifestyle of Jesus. He advocated not a rejection of the body and its needs, but balanced care of them in the light of heavenly priorities. Surely a more Christian attitude is that of "simplicity". The well-respected author of *Celebration of Discipline* writes that "we who seek to follow Jesus Christ are called to a vow of simplicity" (Foster 1987:71). There is a care for the material, but not a firm hold on it, so a willingness to give it up. This includes possession of a home.

## 2.2 Homelessness as Punishment

The Biblical account actually opens with a story of a couple becoming homeless. The Genesis story of the creation of humanity describes the first couple as placed in the idyllic situation of the Garden of Eden. Yet within just a couple of chapters, they were driven out and became refugees. The same happened to Cain (Gn 4:12). The implication is clear; not only is the wages of sin death (Rm 6:23), but it is also homelessness.

Yet these two are not separate punishments, nor even just aspects, but they are intimately linked. The unfolding drama of the initial temptation and sin show the breakdown of the essential relationships that were part of the intended human existence. As soon as the sin was committed, the couple hid themselves, denying the openness to God that they had had. They were compelled to clothe themselves, restricting their openness to each other, and they lost the relationship to the garden; that means that they lost their home. They had entered into the process of death. Soares *et al* (2017) write that "the reality of death was initiated in Adam and Eve's being 'cast out of the garden'. A term used in the Mosaic Law meaning to 'be put to death' and 'to be cut off from his people' (Ex 31:14)". Death is also a breakdown, but now of the interrelation of the various parts of the body. The interaction is what we call "life"; homelessness and the other features are likewise loss of full interaction.

It is not hard to perceive that much homelessness since then is a fairly direct result of wrong in some form or another. This may be fairly direct, as in the case of war, or less directly as in the attempted escape from other forms of suffering such as the outbreak of disease. The homelessness of the prodigal son was likewise due to sin.

### 2.3 Homelessness as Discipline

There is no hint in the Genesis narrative that a return to Eden was possible. Nevertheless, the situation of the first couple was homeless, but not hopeless; they were able to provide for themselves by tilling the ground. This gave them a constant reminder, both of their sin and of God. Any form of deprivation is suffering, even if it is a negative lack rather than a positive affliction. As such it is never right, even if it is used by a good God to achieve good results. Much suffering can well be seen as God's means of drawing attention to eternal issues. This includes the loss of a home; we can become so comfortable in our homes that we are unwilling to leave them to serve. The essential evangelical mandate is to "go" (Mt 28:20); God calls, but usually to send. Just as it often takes an illness to alert us to the fact that we are not immortal but need to see about our salvation, so an experience of homelessness can help us accept a move out of our comfort zone. This may well be to an appreciation of the unsettled nature of life, so alert to the need of eternal security in salvation; perhaps it may motivate to service.

### 3. God's Provision of a Home

If homelessness is wrong, it is not surprising that God intervenes. The wonder of the gospel is that in the face of something wrong, God does not do as we are so prone to, and just ignore the situation, but positively acts to rectify the situation. He is not a passive, deistic deity, remaining aloof from the human situation, but intervened and continues to intervene. Homelessness is just one aspect of the situation of wrongness that we call "sin", which God acted to correct.

Quite correctly, we are called "Christians", because we rejoice in the very visible action of God in the incarnation, demonstrating God's love, giving evidence of the truth of God's existence and action. Yet there is a danger of obscuring a vital aspect of faith. We tend to sideline the work of the Spirit and even neglect the Father. On the contrary, God is Trinity. God's response to homelessness, as in other aspects of salvation, is a comprehensive action of all three Persons. As Augustine of old stressed, *opera Trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt*. Everything that God does is an act of the whole Trinity, of all three Persons (*cf.* Crawford 2011).

Thus the theological categories underpinning a Christian approach to refugees have a Trinitarian base, as noted in the case of the image of God (e.g. Groody 2009:647), or of the *missio Dei* (e.g. Soares, Lotter and van der Merwe 2017).

So while it is quite easy to see what Jesus did in relation to salvation, and by extension to homelessness, the work of the other two Persons must not be forgotten. Mummert (1992) devotes three chapters of his work on ministry to refugees on the three aspects of entry, assimilation, and accommodation; these can find parallels in the aspects of the work of God in salvation, and so applicable specifically to salvation from homelessness.

### 3.1 Home as Justification

If homeless is wrong, it naturally follows that having a home, a settled relationship with a place and with the concomitant set of relationships is right and desired by God. Then this is an aspect of salvation that Jesus came to provide for us. A home, as life itself, is a gift, but it was made possible by what Jesus did. We live because Jesus carried the effects of sin for us, dying that death may no longer have dominion (Rm 6:9). Of course, this does not mean that our bodies no longer die, but that in accepting Christ, we receive a new life that survives physical death and goes on forever. An affirmation that then follows is the eventual gift of a new physical body, in a sense, a new home.

But just as Jesus experienced suffering and death as the effects of sin, taking them in a substitutionary way, the same is true of homelessness. The essence of a home is of a place of belonging, yet in a poignant phrase, "he came to his own home, and his own people received him not" (Jn 1:11). Likewise, "a prophet is not received in his own country"; "the son of Man has not anywhere to lay down his head" (Matt 8:20). Very early in his ministry, he preached in the synagogue in Nazareth, and was expelled and nearly killed there (Lk 4:29); those who knew him found it impossible to accept that he was more than they had assumed. Is this why he made what home he had in Capernaum rather than Nazareth (Mt 4:13)? Cogswell (in Mummert 1992:63) sees homelessness as a major theme of the gospel accounts of the ministry of Jesus:

The Gospels attest that Jesus spent much of his life as one "uprooted". Born in a borrowed stable...ministry on the move.

The wonder of the Christian message is of God's provision of salvation as a gift. But because it would be unjust for God to simply forgive, human sin had to be atoned for, the effects of it carried. This was through the crucifixion. "He bore our sins in his body on the tree" (1Pt 2:24). All the effects of sin were taken by him so that we can be free.

This included the effect of sin and wrong that manifested as homelessness. As well as other effects of sin, Jesus also carried the burden of the loss of relationships associated with a home.

While salvation is only possible by the incarnation, the entering of the second Person into a human body, there was an essential preliminary to that. In our own experience, we cannot move into a new home without leaving the previous one; our home changes. Even the rich with multiple dwellings cannot actually be in two places at once! So in order to enter a new human situation, he left the previous one. Essentially he left his previous home. He “down-graded”, considerably! He lost all the aspects of heaven so that he could be incarnate; this was indeed a major loss. Paul describes the *kenōsis* of the son of God, and tellingly, that it was to the status of a *doulos*, a slave (Phlp 2:5f). Now a slave is by very nature homeless; even if he or she lives somewhere, it cannot really be seen as a home in the full sense. Thus Jesus experienced homelessness as part of the incarnation.

The loss of a home for Jesus was far from theoretical, or a belief in a heavenly action that could not really be proved. Whereas in the culture of the time it was normal to live with relations, he did not do that. While we have the impression that his relationship with his mother was close, that could well be a misapprehension. My own experience is of a strained relationship caused by obedience to God and so not doing what my mother had dreamed for. Likewise, we can detect a measure of strain between him and his brothers (Mt 12:48). This can hardly have been helped by Jesus, saying that his disciples were a new family. It does follow that relations to the family can only be what God desires if they are built upon the relationship of each one to God, which presumes the forgiveness of each individual. The things which divide and strain relationships are dealt with in the death of Christ.

Then even the very epitome of a home, the father, forsook him. “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mt 27:46). On the cross, he was totally alone, alienated from every aspect of a home, experiencing and carrying it fully. Groody (2009:649n41) adds other aspects of his forsakenness.

If Jesus had just been crucified, there would have been no salvation. But for him, death was not the end of life but was succeeded by the resurrection. Salvation is then not simply the forgiveness of sins, but the

positive bestowal of new life in union with the resurrected saviour. Then after the resurrection, in the experience of a new life, life in its fullness, it would seem that Jesus no longer had a home, at least not an earthly one. How could he live and dwell in the same way as previously? Indeed, he was most definitely sojourning, appearing and disappearing, having no specific earthly residence. It is then most notable that very soon after the resurrection, but significantly after a period of time in this world with the disciples, he returned to his home in heaven. In union with him, we sojourn in place after place, only finally entering into what is actually home, significantly again, most likely after a delay.

Nevertheless, however, one of the wonders of salvation is that eternal life is not only something for the afterlife, but is in the present. John wrote several times that we HAVE eternal life (Jn 3:36 etc). But of course, it is only a shadow of the fullness to come.

Thus the incarnation and death of Jesus may be seen as God’s answer to homelessness, providing for those with faith in him an eternal home, and not only that but a solution in the present as well.

It is this that gives a glimpse into the way in which faith provides an answer to homelessness. For those deprived of a home, the words of Peter are most fitting; he writes to God’s people that they become “like living stones...built into a spiritual house (1Pt 2:5)”. The church is the house of God, far more than physically, for as Solomon prayed, a building can never be adequate. It is noteworthy that there is repeated reference in that little epistle to Christians as sojourners. Home is not just a physical space but is rather a place of acceptance. It has been said that “your home is where nobody turns you away”.

### 3.2 Home as Sanctification

It has also been said that a woman turns a house into a home. The existence of four walls and a roof is really only the start of making a home. A home is developed with lots of small things and small acts, and it is the same with the life of a Christian, and with the church. It is a tragedy that so many seem content with basic salvation, the gift of eternal life, but do not go further to develop it to something really special. It is like living, or trying to, in the basic structure of four walls, a roof and a floor, but nothing else. Furnishing follows, which makes the house beautiful and functional, but need not touch the basic structure. Sanctification does not add to the basic provision of sanctification at all! It must be added here that there is

little point in providing furnishings to a non-existent house! Theologically, seeking to make a beautiful life depends entirely on the prior provision of justification. Likewise, the functionality of a home requires the basic house. Good works can only be built on faith (Heb 11:6).

The Biblical attitude is that we are sojourners, because we cannot really own the land, or a home, as the real owner is God. However, insofar as salvation restores, to some extent, the pre-Fall situation of Eden, the implication is that in salvation, we have a responsibility to care for the land. We are not just sojourners, but stewards; we still have a responsibility to the world's actual owner (Frost 2006:246). This then means that we have a duty to use our homes in the way that God desires, which is also for the benefit of those without that benefit, the homeless.

Another point of the little touches in a home such as pictures and ornaments is to give individuality. This is important for our life in that we are not identical with other people. Part of the issue about being a refugee or even being in prison is the lack of individuality. Even the well-intentioned care of relief agencies rarely succeeds in providing this. People are so naturally treated like things, mouths to be fed, bodies to be covered, but not really as people; they naturally tend to be dehumanised. People in those situations tend to do even little things to put their mark on their experience and so make a statement of individuality. Even in the worst circumstances, people do little things to improve them.

At the same time the distinctive features of a home help in our relating to it, and here aspects such as heating and carpets add to the comfort which a home should provide. Again we can more naturally feel a part of a home that we have worked to make beautiful and comfortable; this also aids the relating with others, notably a spouse, with whom we have done this.

A home, therefore, reflects two aspects of relating with its inhabitants, individuality and identification. It is significant that these are the two poles of theism, in that a theistic God simultaneously manifests both clear distinctiveness, such as in holiness, and identification, such as in upholding and care. This understanding of God is distinctively Christian, and in no sense simply deistic, as in Islam, or pantheistic, as in Hinduism. Indeed the Christian understanding of God as Trinity is fundamentally theistic, with three Persons totally distinct and different from each other, but at the same time in such close relational interaction as to be one God.

Here the stress naturally falls upon the work of the Holy Spirit. He provides the interaction of the Persons in the Trinity, and likewise the relation between people. He provides the fruit and the gifts that adorn the saved individual and provide functionality. One example of this is in the nature of a home, which should be a place where people can escape from the pressures of life into a haven of peace. It is no accident that peace is one of the fruits of the Spirit and that it is a normal part of the apostolic benediction.

### **3.3 Home as Creative Love**

In salvation, the Father's work is also vital. A book of a few years ago was entitled *The forgotten Father*, and indeed Christianity has had a tendency to forget him. There has, understandably, been a stress on the work of the Son, especially in his sacrificial death to facilitate salvation. While events in the last century have overcome what had also been a neglect of the action and so the role of the Spirit, to date there has not been a corresponding appreciation of the work of the Father. Nevertheless, this cannot mean inaction; we cannot be saved except through him.

In the drama of salvation, the work of the Father is inconspicuous; but that does not mean that it is inessential. One of Jesus' best-known parables is the story of the prodigal son (Lk 15:11f); this story is of clear relevance to the question of refugees. Here the father does little, but what he does is essential. Where would the story be without the love that he showed the returning son? Would the son have even returned at all unless he believed that the father was there and that moreover he would be accepted? If only the elder brother had been present, the love and acceptance would not have been present.

This serves to highlight a related problem, that of fatherless families in South Africa, where an enormous proportion of homes do not have a resident father so that children and spouses are deprived of a major factor of what makes a home. Until the coming of Jesus, there was, despite a very few references in the Old Testament, little awareness of the fatherhood of God. Jesus offended the Jews by referring to God as his Father (Jn 5:18); the wonder is then that Christians can also know God as Father by virtue of the new life that he gives, enabled by the death of Christ and through the work of the Spirit.

The role of the Father has traditionally been linked to creation, although here again, this cannot be divorced from the work of the other two Persons.

Nevertheless, creation is a fundamental aspect of the issue, for the way in which humanity was created includes the need for a home. Whereas not all animals have that need, humanity certainly does, and this means that a homeless person is fundamentally out of touch with the creative purpose of God.

The Father maintains his transcendence, separation from the world, acting by the agency of Son and Spirit. In keeping with this, in his graciousness, he calls and inspires human agents to do his work in the world. In fact it is a rare person who actually builds a home, but usually provides, plans and enables others to do the work. Such is not visible but is absolutely essential. How can a house be built if there is no architect? How can it be beautified and furnished without the activity of so many others, working, incidentally, not directly for a specific home, but nevertheless in a way essential for it?

#### 4. What Then Should We Do?

For Christians, response to problems must ultimately be based on their relationship to God, on imitation of his acts, and especially of his compassion. Our action rests on our being in the image of God, and therefore reflects God's action, so as Trinity; this should then have three inter-related aspects corresponding to the Persons of the Godhead. Just as the action of God for the homeless depends on the work of the three Persons, so a Christian response, in the reflection of, and inspired by, the Trinity, will have three aspects corresponding to those three.

Firstly there will be a reflection of the creative work of the Father. We are human beings, which means that in most parts of the world, it is simply impossible to survive without the material provision of a shelter to provide warmth and protection from the elements. This has to be made, if not by the homeless person, then by somebody else. Then even if the essential building is done by the refugee, the material has somehow to be provided. It is naturally unlikely that this can be paid for, but would be provided as an act of charity. The choice of word here is deliberate as it is derived from the Greek *charis* (grace). Insofar as a provision of a home is a precursor to the ultimate provision in salvation, both are acts of grace; salvation in either sense depends on a gift; it cannot simply be earned.

While there are those who are directly active in alleviating homelessness, and in helping refugees, they cannot operate without those behind the scenes, sending them, and what they need. Their contributing will not be

seen, but it is nevertheless highly essential.

Secondly, there will be a reflection of the sacrifice of the Son. The influx of refugees into a town or country demands a measure of sacrifice. This will be both from the previous inhabitants, but also from those who are arriving. After all, in the provision of salvation, there is, on the one hand, the sacrifice of Christ on the cross and the provision of forgiveness. And how much an attitude of forgiveness is such an essential part, if refugees are to be assimilated. Then, on the other hand, there is change necessary in those who are being saved. The Biblical word for this is "repentance", translating the Greek *metanoia*, which essentially means a change in mind. Both in salvation and the refugee situation, there must be a considerable change in attitudes. Without this, success is all but impossible. Part of the current problem is that many people are just not prepared to make the changes necessary to accommodate the arrivals, and at the same time many refugees stubbornly try to maintain the attitudes and practices of their previous situations. If there is a refusal to do this, then it is likely that there will eventually be conflict.

Thirdly, in salvation, the work of the Spirit is totally essential. Christ died, but unless there is a link between the one being saved and Christ, he died in vain. It is far from irrelevant that the newcomers seek to receive aspects of the lifestyle of the society; they receive its life. Then especially the next generation will naturally be far more like the hosts. Essentially they receive life and become conformed to the life that is there. A Christian does the same, receiving the life of Christ, and becoming conformed to him in lifestyle.

Then there is a need for integration, and it is here that a church can be invaluable, providing not just unity in worship but also links between people. A church is a place where people can and should feel that they belong, so especially vital if they do not find this outside. Ogletree (1985:8) points out that because Christians are themselves, aliens, they have an immediate bond with refugees and the homeless. This does indicate that there is a response necessary on the side of the homeless; Stemmett (2008:56) observed that foreigners who did what they could, such as learn English, were less likely to experience xenophobia. The parallel in the case of salvation is the need to repent, believe and accept what God has done in Christ.

Lastly, and importantly, the actions of the three Persons of the Trinity are all essential, and inter-related. So just as, for example, Christ died in vain unless the Spirit acts to relate it to us, so the aspects of action are equally essential and related. James 2:14f refers to an example which can readily be applied to the issue of homelessness; there is no point in kind words without the material substance to back them up. Likewise, charity can be counterproductive if it is seen to be grudging and without real love. Then if action is done without the perception of sacrifice, it will not be so well received.

It is significant that Newlands & Smith (2010) subtitle their book *The transformative dream*, for a proper Christian attitude does depend not just on the transformation of the situation of refugees and homeless but on the mindset and attitudes of hosts. Here a major aspect of the work of the Spirit is, in fact, the renewal of the minds of Christians.

### 5. Finally and Eschatologically

The goal of God's action for us is not only to give a better life now. This aspect is important; I am always thrilled to read the several indications, especially in the gospel of John, that we have eternal life now (e.g. Jn 3:36). It is not something only to be received in the future. But complementing that, salvation is not only in the present, but does have an eschatological component. It is ultimately of limited value to receive help and comfort in the present if it will just come to an end.

It should then be the greatest help to the homeless to present the gospel as part of material help to them. But the latter is essential and will undergird the gospel appeal. Indeed the summons to accept Christ and the offer of eternal salvation is perhaps more meaningful to those who do not have a home in this world either. Any experience of suffering can well be the means by which natural pride and self-sufficiency are shown to be worthless; homelessness can be particularly persuasive.

It may then be observed that one of the reasons for xenophobia is fear of the newcomers affecting lifestyles (Rivera-Pagan 2013:43); would that the sojourning Christians did produce societal change! And not only in society as a whole; Cruz (2013:112) observes the enrichment brought by foreigners to the Church. Certainly that was the case for the One who came and sojourned among us.

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#### **Author's Declaration**

The author declares that there is no financial gain or personal relationship(s) that inappropriately influenced him in the writing of this article.

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### **'Household' Church as a Mode of 'Pre-Church' within Migratory Contexts like Southern Africa (Based on the Letter of Philemon)**

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#### **Abstract**

*Southern Africa is clearly a migratory region with official country borders while the population is ethnically inter-related. Added to this are the many people of different cultural identities who have occupied regionally since colonial times. The question of this article is how the Mission Dei can be accomplished without the normal excuse items of finance, ecclesiastical buildings, advanced theological requirements and political strongholds.*

*This research wishes to propose a biblical mode of Church that was popular in New Testament times and can be claimed to be responsible largely for the success of Church growth within the highly migratory nature of the Mediterranean basin of the Roman Empire. Household Churches were the first popular mode of Christian congregations before the communities took on more sophisticated formats like that described in 1 and 2 Timothy. Since then, the complexities of Church organisation and property ownership have grown exponentially.*

*Paul's letter to Philemon represents the most important New Testament letter in giving insight into this mode of Church. There are many examples of household Churches in the New Testament, and it is the task of this article to explore them and their nature in order to use this seasoned mode for the propagation of the Gospel and its implications for life within contemporary migratory contexts. House-hold Churches reduce the obstacles created largely by materialistic cultures like the need for buildings, budgets, sophisticated modus operandi and ecclesiastical trappings. They also allow the Church to experience the Gospel in its simple communal life-transforming application.*

#### **1. Introduction**

The initial stages of the Church were birthed within the land of Israel, starting out from Jerusalem, moving to Judea, on to Samaria and then to the "utmost parts of the earth" (Ac 1:8). The very early stage of the Church was essentially conscious of two institutions, the Jerusalem Temple and the family home. "Among the means by which Luke has chosen to concretise the message and meaning of the good news is his

description of two basic institutions of Judaism and early Christianity; namely, the Jerusalem Temple and the private Household (οικοσ, οικια)" (Elliott 1991:89).

Upon conversion to Jesus Christ many people in Jerusalem lived in 'tension' with the revered Temple and found refuge in communities of faith that met in homes: "Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people" (Ac 2:46-47, 2011 NIV) (All references from 2011 NIV unless indicated). At first this was merely the use of available accommodation, but this was to develop into something much more significant when the heads of households were converted: "The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God – he and his whole household" (Ac 16:34). There is a significant pattern here for the global Church today.

As can be seen in this verse, the father-husband of a house occupied a very significant role in the marriage, the home and the broader context of employees or slaves. He occupied an 'overseeing' responsibility, and his influence was very significant when it came to matters of faith as well. In Acts 16 a household Church was born on the conversion of the jailer being 'born-again'. Philemon was a person who similarly leads a household Church after his conversion (Phlm 1:1) with incredible results.

The plan within this article is to take Paul's letter to Philemon and explore its dynamics. Hooker rightly observes that "...the epistle to Philemon was often ignored as insignificant in the early church." Most often the 'Pastoral letters' have consisted only of the letters of Timothy and Titus alone; at least in my experience in the Church situation. The letter to Philemon should be added to this category. Paul appears to have had a 'man-to-man' relationship with Philemon up to this point of writing. However, this was all to change and develop when one of the subordinates in the household of Philemon – Onesimus – absconded and met the Lord Jesus as Saviour through the Apostle Paul in his prison holding. After this conversion, an entirely new set of scenarios were to unfold within the household Church of Philemon. Here is a significant scenario to consider as a model in today's world.

This is where the letter is so important: "Within the Christian network of Households and the community of 'brothers and sisters in the faith',

social relations were intimate, inclusive and governed by the reciprocity characteristic of family and friends" (Elliott 1991:114). How was the dynamic of landlord and slave to change in the Philemon household which coincidentally was also the Church to include Onesimus? How was Paul the apostle now going to relate to Philemon the 'pastor'? How would a slave be treated in the household Church? How does this Church resolve the liberty question of slaves?

## 2. Pre-Church Strategy

Luke 10:5-6 gives the very first step of starting a Church within a migrant generally unconverted context. In order to initiate the process of moving from individual faith to community, Jesus says: "When you enter a house, first say, 'Peace to this house'. If someone who promotes peace is there, your peace will rest on them; if not, it will return to you." Elliott correctly states: "The Household, once the gathering place of the powerless and the marginalized, eventually emerges as the institution where God's spirit is truly active and where familial relation, shared resources, and communal values concretise the vision of a salvation to all the families of the earth" (1991:95).

### 2.1. The Philemon Mode

The most notable element about this short single chaptered book of Scripture is its simple ecclesiology. There is no appointed pastor as such, no elders in the strict sense of the word, and no people carrying the description deacon (1Tm 3:8-13; Rm 16:1). Yet, all these functions are evident in this household Church.

In many senses, Philemon played the role of *episkopos* (1Tm 3:1; Tt 1:5). Philemon played the role of oversight as he "managed his household well" (1Tm 3:4). Whether managing a household, which included being a good husband, a loving father and a sound business manager of the operation, Philemon was a sample specimen of what is expected in someone before they started "caring for the Church of God."

Philemon was, according to Lim, "...fairly well-to-do; he can own a house which can host the local congregation (v.2) and to offer a guest room for Paul (v.22). It also depicts him as well respected among the local Christians due to his ability to refresh their hearts (v.7)" (2016:222). This is the quality and profile person Paul had in mind in 1 Timothy 3:7, "He must have a good reputation with outsiders so that he will not fall into disgrace and the devil's trap."

There is general agreement that Philemon lived in Colossae, as Colossians 4:8-9 speaks of Onesimus being sent back to Colossae. "He was evidently converted under the ministry of Paul (v.19) at Ephesus (cf. Acts 19; note especially verses 10 and 26); and could rightly be called the 'beloved' and 'our fellow-worker' on account of his fervent love for the saints (v.5,7) and the fact that he put his house at the disposal of the believers as a meeting place (2), and possibly took part himself in the preaching of the gospel" (Müller 1974:174).

People like Apphia, more than likely Philemon's wife, and Archipus, more than likely his son, would have played the role somewhat of *daikonos* (Müller 1974:174). They served the people, the community, in terms of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the same way or similar to Phoebe: "I commend to you Phoebe, who is a servant (deacon) of the church in Cenchrea" (Rm 16:1). Apphia and Archipus who also served the wider gathered Church in Colossae (Col 4:17), were soon to be joined by the new convert, Onesimus, serving alongside them.

Verse 16 is the crux of the letter to Philemon; in that, it places Onesimus centre-stage! Paul and Philemon were important enfranchised role players. However, the narrative of the script changes radically when a disenfranchised slave, Onesimus, becomes a fellow believer in Jesus Christ. Lim provides a wise insight by saying: "Paul establishes a familial structure by casting Philemon as his brother (v.7) and Onesimus as both his brother and child (vv.16,10)" (2016:224).

In the prevailing societal and family structures of the day, this was all to change through Onesimus's conversion, keeping in mind that he was a slave! Just as Acts 2:38 becomes the 'formula' to which all new converts should aspire in terms of faith, repentance, baptism and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, so too, Galatians 3:28 is the new formula for relationships in the Church of Jesus Christ: "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." The formerly disenfranchised communities of Gentile, slave and female are enfranchised in the Gospel. Holland supports this when he states that: "Paul's letter to Philemon presents a real-world example of how Paul interacted with Churches and individuals based on the unity he proclaims in Gl 3:28" (2018:1).

So Onesimus's conversion addresses one of the least addressed issues in the New Testament; namely slavery. It is one of the most explicit examples

of the application of the Gospel to the disenfranchised communities who are enfranchised through the Gospel. I deal with this from the perspective of women and Gentiles in my book *Equally Good News* (Pohlmann, 2014). I wish to push this boundary further now to include slavery. Just as Jesus and the New Testament address the issue of women and Gentiles 'accommodating' themselves until the opportunity for 'liberation' arises in a Christian manner, the same can be said of slavery in this context.

The conversion of Onesimus was to change the dynamics of the household Church dramatically. From this narrative and through the lens of this Church, the dye was cast for how Christians should apply the Gospel. Lim says: "My contention is that Onesimus, as a minor character in the narrative world of *Philemon*, plays a major role in subverting the hierarchy of unjust social structures, particularly the system of slavery within the Roman imperial context" (2016:229). Paul and the early church could not change the laws of slavery at that time, but this does not condone slavery. The Gospel first offers us the opportunity to be changed as new creatures in Christ, then to model this change within the present structure through some measure of 'accommodation' while waiting for the opportunities of 'liberation'. For example, the 'conformity' instructed in Titus 2:1-10 is not mandatory in traditional hierarchical and oppressive systems. Instead, it motivates Christians to use the power they have acquired in their new converted state to navigate the atrocities of society and finally, "...that in every way they will make the teaching about God and our Saviour attractive" (Tt 2:10).

## 2.2. The Titus Mode

Paul's letter to Titus is looking one step ahead and beyond the Philemon household model of doing Church. "The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you" (Tt 1:5). Just as the Colossian wider Church was placed in juxtaposition to the Philemon household church, there was also a wider conglomeration of household churches in the towns on the island of Crete.

This 'primitive' stage of structure is one step beyond the household church, namely the episcopate (*episkopoi*). It is worthy of comment that in this stage only the most basic oversight is needed. The initial requirement Paul is suggesting is that people like Philemon should be found to oversee the matters of the Church. No mention is made of deacons or the '*gunē*' (women who were emerging in leadership and serving roles). Examples

abound in Romans 16 alone: Phoebe v. 1, Priscilla v.3, Mary v.6, Junia v.7, Tryphema and Tryphosa, “those women who work hard in the Lord” v.12, Persis, “another woman who has worked very hard in the Lord.”

### **2.3. The Timothy Mode**

Moving from the household church to the Titus mission church, we have a further development in the Ephesian Church. This was a more sophisticated urban context within a bustling leading city. “As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain people not to teach false doctrines any longer” (1Tm 1:3). Included in Paul’s mandate to Timothy was the need to put more complex structures into place beyond that of the household church and the Cretan mission context.

Timothy was acting in the shadows of the apostolic authority of Paul (See. Col 1:1; Phlp 1:1; 1Th and 2Th 1:1). Timothy, as a ‘functioning’ second-generation apostolic gift, was brought alongside the ‘foundational’ apostleship of Paul. “The ‘foundational apostles’ created the opportunity for ‘functional apostles’ to work with them and take over from them” (Pohlmann 2013:73).

Timothy’s temporal role in Ephesus was to establish a permanent set of leadership dynamics, namely overseers (Eph 3:1), deacons (Eph 3:8) and women are serving in new capacities and ministries created by the liberty of the Gospel (Eph 3:11). This was because of the more advanced urban context and the increased number of people involved. The question remains whether this mode of Church is as effective as the household Church. Obviously, there are many pros and cons, so this article will now return to the strengths of the household Church mode.

### **3. Effectiveness of the Pre-Church Mode**

The pre-Church household mode of Church mode is embedded within the New Testament as a very effective and influential ministry. Elliott rightly observes that: “The Church which grows through Household conversions becomes at the same time a worldwide Household of faith” (1991:107). He goes on to notice that, “...the Household emerges as the preeminent sphere and symbol of the reception of the gospel, Christian identity, and solidarity in the Spirit” (1991:107). At least this is true of the home of Philemon as will be demonstrated below.

Even in the letter to the Colossians, the ‘twin’ letter to Philemon, the sense

of personal, functional change, role reversals and political engagement is second to the evidence in the Philemon letter. Paul, Philemon, Onesimus and the other role players like Apphia and Archippus were all thrown into a process of transformation only possible within the household Church mode.

### **3.1. The Salvation of Philemon, His Wife and Son**

Paul seems to have influenced Philemon into becoming a Christian. He often uses strong filial language in this regard. In Philemon 1:19, Paul says: “I, Paul am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back – not to mention that you owe me your very self.” With a similar strong tone, Paul writes to the Corinthians: “Even if you had then thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel” (1Cor 4:15). It is with that same tone that he implores Philemon.

It is difficult to know for sure when this happened. Acts 19:10 does refer to Paul’s two-year ministry in the region: “This went on for two years so that all Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.” Colossae is within a reasonable influence here. In verse 26: “And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia.” Verse 29a refers to, “the whole city was in an uproar”, perhaps because many had believed.

The result (Philemon as a converted man) will suffice for now. Philemon and his ‘household’ became Christians and immediately opened their home in their service of the Lord. This was admirable but not unusual in these circumstances. For example, “Greet Priscilla and Aquilla, my co-workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. Greet also the church that meets at their house (Rm 16:3-5).”

### **3.2. Slavery**

The book of Philemon brings the difficult and sensitive subject of slavery from the margins to the centre stage through the conversion of Onesimus. Slavery is a difficult subject because the Bible ‘accommodates’ it for such a long period. In spite of the obvious humanitarian focus of passages like Deuteronomy 15:1-18 towards slaves and the reminder to Israel: “Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you from there” (Dt 24:18) – the Bible still seems to

'accommodate' slavery beyond comfort when viewed from the twenty-first century.

Even in the New Testament, there is no open rejection and rebuke of slavery from the documents that we have. Beyond that, Paul's accounts of slavery are too close for comfort, unless there is another lens through which we should be looking (Eph 6:5-9; Col 3:22-4:1; 1Tm 6:1-2). Humanitarian dignity is clearly part of the message, but what about slavery? Rae indicates that the one book in the New Testament that will always be drawn into the discussion is Paul's letter to Philemon: "The New Testament was largely ignored, except in the negative sense of pointing out that nowhere did Jesus condemn slavery, although the story of Onesimus, the runaway who St. Paul returned to his master, was often quoted" (2018: 3). The question is: How have this letter and narrative been quoted?

Lampe brings some insight into the conditions of the time. Against the backdrop of slavery within the Roman Empire, the Church made significant strides in combating the evils of slavery while not being able to change legislation. "Slaves could be treated as pares in a brotherly or sisterly way, as Paul shows in the letter to Philemon. He places himself at the same level as the slave Onesimus, who had converted to Christianity (Phlm 6, 12, 16-18)" (2003: 78).

Ladd gives an interesting opinion. He puts Paul's stance in very strong language: "Paul has no word of criticism for the institution as such, in this sense he was unconcerned about 'social ethics' – the impact of the gospel on social structures" (1996:264). Is Ladd missing the point of 'accommodation' with a view to 'liberation'? This is very different from being unconcerned. In the case of Philemon and Onesimus, Paul was willing to do what he could through his understanding of the power of conversion and the greater Kingdom of God achieving its goals (Rom 8:28). Paul shows a willingness to "pay it back – not to mention that you owe me your very self" (Phlm 1:19). This includes the redemption price of a slave, thus opening the door for Onesimus to be free.

### **3.2.1. An Unconverted Slave Embraced Within a Household Church**

In Acts 16:34 we have a record of an entire household believing on the Lord Jesus Christ and confessing such through baptism: "The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God – he and his whole household." On the other hand, in the case of Philemon, we know that at least one person,

Onesimus, was unconverted. Paul says after Onesimus's journey to him in prison and subsequent conversion: "I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains" (Phlm 1:10). Tolmie correctly states: "That Onesimus had become a Christian in the meanwhile had a decisive impact on the way Paul approaches this" (nd:2).

This demonstrates some of the flexibility of the household Church. In this case, it embraced a slave serving the family business and sowed the seeds for the conversion of Onesimus. This is similar to the situation in 1 Corinthians 7:14. Though this verse speaks of a marriage context where one is a believer and the other not, the household Church could have the same result: "For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband." The word Greek used refers to a sanctifying influence. In the case of Onesimus, this worked out for the better.

### **3.2.2. A Converted Onesimus**

Onesimus moves to centre-stage of the salvation story in the book of Philemon. As a slave, his status in the household Church changes. This is the same as the formerly disenfranchised people of Gentiles and women. According to Galatians 3:28, the Gentile was brought onto an equal footing to the Jew, the woman to the man and the slave to the free. All three were to move forward to better represent the power of the Gospel in changing people's lives.

Onesimus was to experience a microcosmic experience of God's salvation Kingdom in the household Church of Philemon. "Most significantly of all, Paul tells us that Onesimus has been converted. This conversion is the central point of the letter, which suggests that it may provide the clue to its purpose" (Hooker 2003:1447). Conversion is a common theme throughout the New Testament, but working things out practically as a result of the conversion with slavery legislation in place, was to prove to be far more difficult.

In the case of the Gentile question, this was dealt with at length at the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15. The Gospel made a new way possible for Jew and Gentile to share in one body and under a new dispensation of the Kingdom of God. In the case of the 'woman' question, this is also dealt with considerably in the New Testament in cases like Jesus dealing with Samaritan woman (Jn 4:1-26), His revealing His resurrection to Mary Magdalene (Jn 20:1-18) and the indiscriminate pouring out of the Spirit

on “all flesh” (Ac 2:1-18). However, the question of slavery is not dealt with as comprehensively as one may wish!

The letter of Paul to Philemon is one of the most important samples on the question of slavery that we have in the New Testament. Hooker rightly says: “If Onesimus is to be ‘more than a slave, a beloved brother’ in the flesh as well as in the Lord, perhaps this is because his new status inevitably affects Onesimus’s earthly relationships” (2003:1448). Onesimus was to enjoy an adjusted lifestyle based on his new status in the household Church. Based on Colossians 4:9, Seitz says: “He is not described as a slave, nor are the circumstances of his finding his way to Paul, or now to them mentioned” (2014:186).

First, Onesimus was given a new lease on life hardly thought possible in later colonial slavery in the Western world. Paul refers to Tychicus and Onesimus as freely working and travelling together: “I am sending him (Tychicus) to you for the express purpose that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts. He is coming with Onesimus, our faithful and dear brother, who is one of you. They will tell you everything that is happening here” (Col 4:8). It looks like Paul partially got his wish with Onesimus: “I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the Gospel” (Phlm 1:12).

Second, Onesimus follows the cautious approach advocated by Paul on women in ministry, slave liberty and Gentile inclusion. The very letter Onesimus carried to the Colossians has these words: “Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to curry their favour, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord” (Col 3:22). This is countered by Colossians 4:1, “Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair because you know that you have a Master in heaven.” Payne is right to say: “Considering his general command to slaves to gain freedom if possible and his command to the slave-owner Philemon to free his slave Onesimus. Paul’s practical advice to slaves should not be equated with the acceptance of slavery in the sense of its approval” (2009:274).

Paul is not advocating the infringing of human rights in the least. Christians could not change the Roman law and used ‘accommodation’ to navigate the context of the day in a God-glorifying way. It is unsure how Paul would have spoken in the times of William Wilberforce (1759-1833),

Martin Luther King (1929-1968) or the land of Nelson Mandela (1918-2013) so many centuries later.

The point that emerges out of the Gospel in its application is well stated in the following: “The same truth of the image of the *imago Dei* that informs witness – the universality of the human being as created in God’s image – is also enormously influential in global Christianity, especially among marginalised groups of people” (Felker Jones 2016:18). Onesimus was one of these marginalised people brought near through the Gospel through the agency of a household Church.

#### 4. Conclusion

The household Church is probably the most effective tool in the ‘pre-Church’ process. It is able to navigate the most difficult of socio-economic and political environments. It is not dependent on funding, structures or buildings. Most important is that it is indigenous to the place where ministry is being exercised and not dependent on empire funding.

The household Church is a mode and tool to achieve the *missio Dei* following the New Testament pattern:

1. It embraces structures of a family household business that already exists. There is no need for a budget, constitution, election of leaders and has an identity in the community.
2. The focus is on transforming character and relationships in a closely monitored community. Everyone from the Pauline character, and Philemon character and Onesimus; the marginalised people are drawn into transformation.
3. There can be a close relationship with a more established Church base like the Philemon household related to the Colossian Church.
4. It releases people into global ministry just as the Philemon household Church cared for Paul in prison and released Onesimus and others to engage with the Colossian Church.

There is now a danger that sophisticated churches operating in the ‘Church mode’, like we see dotted around every city, town and rural community, could return to some of the ineffectiveness of the Temple in Jerusalem. Thus, we could have come full circle. This is exactly what happened to the well-known successful mega-Church senior pastor, Francis Chan

(2018:1-4). This is not to idealise the household Church nor to curse every sophisticated development of the more developed Church. However, any experience of the bigger or even the mega-Church life often testifies to the tendencies that led to the ineffectiveness of the Temple culture. Chan chose to go back to basics when he said to his wife, “What if we started a church out of our house’?” (2018:1). He sees something very powerful and meaningful in the household Church.

The household Church has its own checks and balances, especially when viewed through the eyes of the book of Philemon. This letter gives the context, opportunity and mode for life transformation through the Gospel at every level. Apostles, leaders, members, disenfranchised, enfranchised are all called into the *missio Dei* and could become more of a focus for Church development in the future, especially within the migratory regions of Southern Africa. Kunhiyop should be heard when he says: “African ethics is communal in that it seldom thinks in terms of individual ethical decisions that do not affect other people. Whatever affects individuals also affects their immediate family as well as their distant relatives, both those who are living and those who are dead but still interested in the affairs of the living” (2008: xiv). Africa; in particular, like other places in the world, reveres the traditional family. Thus, to lead a family leader to the Lord creates an even greater opportunity for Gospel effectiveness.

So, both in the African context of growth and migration; and the First World context of declining Church attendance, the benefits of household Church need to be explored again. I do not think it is an either/or scenario but a both/and. There is a new generation as Francis Chan has proved, who would be eager and interested if facilitated by the Church that is simple and authentic. The New Testament was born using this method, and it is worth emphasising again as a pre-Church methodology and kept integrated into later Church structural developments.

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The author declares that there is no financial gain or personal relationship(s) that inappropriately influenced him in the writing of this article.

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## Regaining the African Theological Voice: Lessons from the Gospel of Mark

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### Abstract

*To regain our theological voice is to suggest that we had it, perhaps lost it, and are now attempting to recover it. This paper will briefly trace the influence of early African believers on Christian theology and demonstrate that the contributions of these early Africans to Christianity had a tremendous impact on the direction the Church has taken. However, in spite of this background, the health of the African church continues to be hindered by systemic problems that "silence" the African voice. The solution to recovering the African theological voice lies in redefining the African believer's identity. I propose that an understanding of Jesus' identity provides us with a mirror that allows us to reshape our own identity as African Christians. We redefine our identity by not ignoring who we are as African Christians and by celebrating the diversity we bring to the global Church. Positive lessons about identity that will be uncovered from the presentation of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark include integrating our culture, interrogating our African world-view, exploiting our practical orientation and engaging the community in our theological work. Examples from scholars who have succeeded in one or more of these aspects will be provided.*

### 1. Introduction

Some may question what value Africa has in contributing to theological discourse. Some might even pay lip service to the idea of Africa's contributions but not be serious about it. Some Africans might not even believe that they have anything of value to offer. The premise behind this paper is that the African voice is a vital contribution to the global theological conversation. Unless we Africans "stand up to be counted," and unless the global church embraces African theological contributions, it will never fully realise its potential. The Church, as it currently stands, is like a half-finished song. While beautiful to listen to, it has an unfinished quality that leaves one yearning for more.

### 2. Significant Contributions From Africa In Church History

To regain something is to suggest that one had something, perhaps lost it or it was taken away, and is now attempting to recover it. Many Africans

have long believed that Christianity came to us in the 19th century with the missionary movement. As most of us now know, this is, in fact, patently false. Christianity was nurtured in Africa almost from the moment of its inception. This paper will mention a few significant figures as a way of grounding the discussion. After all, the past sheds light on our present and gives us direction for our future.

Biblical records show evidence of Africans who doubtless influenced the shape of Christianity in some way. The Gospels and Acts make several references to individuals from Cyrene (in modern Libya). Mark, in relating the events surrounding the crucifixion of Jesus, records that “A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross” (Mark 15:21 *cf* Luke 23:26; Matthew 27:32). Luke, in Acts, notes that as a consequence of the persecution of the early church, some Cyrenean believers moved to Antioch and began preaching the Gospel to the Greeks who lived there (Ac 11:20). He also records that shortly after Jesus ascended into heaven, Philip was on the road from Jerusalem to Gaza when he encountered an Ethiopian eunuch, the treasurer of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. He shared the gospel with him. Having heard the gospel, he returned home to share it with his fellow Africans (Acts 8).<sup>i</sup>

During the patristic period that lasted from 100 AD to 451 AD (i.e. from the closing of the NT writings to the Council of Chalcedon), McGrath (1998:25-27) notes that several prominent African theologians contributed to debates that shaped Christianity. As early as the late 2nd and early 3rd centuries (160-225 AD), Tertullian, added to the growing list of doctrinal contributions. He was from Carthage, a city in North Africa and he became a Christian in his thirties. He is viewed as the “father of Latin theology” because of his influence on the Western church. He not only coined the term “trinity” to explain the relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but also defended the unity of the OT and the NT against Marcion, and was a strong proponent of the sufficiency of scripture.

Origen (185-254 AD), born in Alexandria, Egypt, contributed to Hermeneutics (allegorical interpretation). While his contributions to Christology (full divinity of the Father vs lesser divinity of the son) and universal restoration (salvation of all including Satan) were problematic, nevertheless, Origen’s contribution to the development of eastern Christian thought is undisputed.

Another African, Athanasius (296-373 AD), helped clarify the concept of the incarnation as it relates to the divinity of Christ. He played a major role in countering Arianism, a heresy which plagued the church in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. This heresy was effectively countered during the council of Nicaea (325 AD). This was the first-ever ecumenical council, and it affirmed that Jesus was of the same substance as the Father and eternally God. Both the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian creed helped to cement the Church’s understanding of the nature of God. They continue to guide the Church even today.

To this list, we add Augustine (354-430 AD), the bishop of the city of Hippo in Northern Africa, who has long been regarded by Church historians as the most influential Christian thinker in Church history. Augustine contributed to the development of various doctrines including the church and sacraments (see the Donatist controversy)<sup>ii</sup>, grace (see the Pelagian controversy)<sup>iii</sup>, and the trinity. His works, in particular *On the City of God*, managed to achieve a synthesis of Christian thought. His impact was felt in the reformation through his influence on Martin Luther and continues to be felt today. Both Tertullian and Augustine are regarded as the founders of Christian Latin literature (Jenkins 2002:17).

This brief excursion into early church history is evidence that these early African believers not only shared the gospel but also shaped Christian theology and succeeded in countering numerous heresies. They were at the forefront of the theological conversation. The contributions of these early Africans to Christianity had a tremendous impact on the direction the Church has taken. Indeed, as Jenkins (2002:15) points out, “As Christianity moves South, it is in some ways returning to its roots.” Christianity cannot, therefore, rightly be called the “white man’s religion.” The voices of these African thinkers continue to influence us even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as we develop church doctrine and practice.

### 3. Present Situation

Fast-forwarding to the 21<sup>st</sup> century reveals a very different scenario. While there has been unprecedented numerical growth of the church in Africa, and much good in African Christianity, the contribution of the African church today cannot measure up to what it was in the past. What happened in the intervening period between the patristic period and today that has so eroded the contribution of African Christians?

As time went on, Ajibade (2018:38) points out that “...doctrinal controversies, importation of Greek philosophy into Christian thinking, and erosion of biblical theology in the perspectives of many church fathers” stunted the growth of the church. Van Der Merwe (2016: 562) also notes that the arrival of Islam in the 7<sup>th</sup> century changed many things. Moreover, because the church was a Latin church and hence not indigenised, the common people in North Africa were unable to relate to it, and these churches could not survive the Muslim conquests (Jenkins, 2002:21). By the time the Muslims and the vandals invaded North Africa, the church was already severely diminished. Consequently, when Arabs invaded and occupied North Africa, they were able to terminate the expansion and growth of Christianity effectively. However, although most of the ancient Northern African churches are now gone, the ancient Egyptian Coptic and Ethiopian Orthodox churches are still very prominent in these communities.

During the Middle Ages and the Reformation, there was no significant Christian activity in Africa although the Nubian Kingdoms survived until the 14<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. However, in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Van Der Merwe (2016:563-564) records that Christianity was introduced to West Africa by Roman Catholic priests that accompanied Portuguese. Missionaries also penetrated inland to Angola, and by 1491, a king had been baptised in the powerful realm of Kongo (Jenkins 2002:29). By the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, there had been attempts to Christianise the whole of Africa by various organisations, thus officially marking the onset of the missionary era.

Africa now has the largest number of Christians in the world, a growth which accelerated after the end of colonialism and of mainline missions (a moratorium on missions went out from the All Africa Council of Churches in the 1970's) (Sanneh 2003:17-19). This unprecedented growth of the church in Africa has caught many by surprise. In an ecumenical conference held in Edinburgh in 1910, J.R. Mott told the attendees to “expect Africa to be taken over by Islam,” probably because by 1900, Muslims outnumbered Christians 4:1. Sanneh (2003:14-15, 18, 32, 42) suggests four reasons for this rapid expansion. 1) National awakening took place after the colonial period, which suggests that colonialism might have been an obstacle. 2) Cultural renewal, which came hand in hand with Bible translation into African languages, resulted in indigenous empowerment and allowed a naturalised Christianity to take root. 3) Africans stepped forward to lead the expansion without the disadvantage of foreign compromise. 4) The

adoption of the African names of God brought theological stimulation. Together with this growth, communities of hope have sprung up in areas of strife and despair.

Nevertheless, even given such a good beginning and the rapid numerical expansion, the African church continues to be hindered by systemic challenges that have “taken her voice captive.”

#### **4. Challenges**

What are some of the challenges that the African church is facing? Neopentecostalism and its attendant doctrines have had a detrimental effect on the healthy growth of the African church. The major doctrine espoused is the prosperity health and wealth gospel. The poverty and suffering experienced by many Africans on the continent make this a very attractive doctrine. The use of electronic media has ensured an exponential growth and influence on African believers in almost every corner of the continent. The proliferation of false “prophets” and of “mighty men of God” offering healings, miracles, and wealth is undeniable. One such example is that of Prophet Owuor of Kenya who now has the largest “church” in the country. Prophet Owuor lives and travels in luxury and is often surrounded by armed bodyguards. His followers revere him. In a meeting held in Nakuru in December 2018, he was accompanied by a police escort and a forty-car motorcade. His followers would not allow his feet to touch the ground but laid down “kangas” (sarong wraps) for him to step on. He claims to have gone to heaven and to possess the power to heal the sick, make the blind see and even raise the dead. Accusations have been levelled against him for staging his healings and miracles and for manipulating his congregants to enrich himself. Sadly, this is just one example.

Syncretism is also a major challenge. Traditional practices, such as witchcraft, ancestor worship, and polygamy, are actually on the rise. Sanneh (2003:44) defines syncretism as “the unresolved, unassimilated, and tension-filled mixing of Christian ideas with local custom and ritual.” It is not just an African problem; it can occur in any culture. This has filtered down to the development of new religious movements in the rapid growth of African Initiated Churches (AIC's). Sadly, as they attempt to make sense of the world, many of these movements espouse a syncretistic blend that can no longer rightly be called Christianity.

Even more serious is the growing group of Christians in Africa that are now rejecting Christianity altogether. The more extreme movements

attribute all our problems to Christianity and the white man and hence have moved beyond syncretism to a total rejection of Christianity. There is a very strong movement currently amongst the Kikuyu people of Kenya that has been labelled “*ruĩ rucoko mukaro*” (let the river return to its original path). Because Christianity came alongside colonisation and European civilisation, proponents of this movement believe that Christianity took them away from the right path and hence is the root of all our current problems. This movement is so strong that traditional initiation and sacrificial ceremonies have been reinstated alongside Christianity. The stronger proponents of this movement are discarding Christianity altogether. When one considers that the Kikuyu were amongst the first people of Kenya to be Christianized and hence should be expected to have a firm hold on sound doctrine, this is indeed cause for alarm.

Other challenges include corruption and unethical practices, poverty, disease and suffering, schisms (based on power struggles and tribal issues rather than doctrinal controversies), and the growth rather than a decrease of ethnic hostility.

These challenges can be attributed to the dichotomised lives of many Christians on the continent. Magesa (1997:6) points out that many an African Christian “...operates with two thought-systems at once, and both of them are closed to each other. Each is only superficially modified by the other.” His observation is accurate. It is this compartmentalisation that leads to dichotomous thinking and lifestyle. How did this come about considering the holistic nature of the African way of life? The following statement by Hillman (1993:5) accurately summarises the current African predicament:

When not deliberately trying to destroy them, the colonial processes invariably undermined the systems, values and views of entire cultural worlds. Stripped naked and taught, in schools and churches, to be ashamed of themselves, their “primitive” and “pagan” way, the people were coerced, morally as well as physically, into clothing themselves with the ways of the invading culture. The colonial incursions, although they brought literacy and antibiotics, made westernisation the way of human “advancement.” *Many people came to believe the “progress” consists not in being themselves, but in imitating foreign ways*” (emphasis mine).

Galgalo (2012:13) argues that the Christianity that was produced by these missionaries was also one of social and political convenience. Rather than

faith and genuine commitment, the motivating factor for joining a church was (and still is) historical circumstances, the need for cooperation, affiliation, vested interest or incidental belonging.

One can, therefore, conclude that the dichotomy the African church is experiencing today is a result of the resocialisation that took place with regards to social, economic, political, religious, ethical and artistic systems after the onset of the missionary and colonial eras. African Christians no longer know who they are.

### **5. The Solution: A Redefinition of Identity.**

How can African believers and the African church as a whole regain its theological voice? What is needed is a redefinition of the African believer’s identity. If we know who we are, then our “voice” will be what God intended it to be. Revelation presents a picture of a colourful church, “...a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb” (Rev 7:9). We redefine our identity by not ignoring who we are as Africans Christians and by celebrating the diversity we bring to the Church. We need to have a truly biblical world-view while at the same time retaining what is uniquely African.

Why focus on identity? Identity is core to our human existence. We operate based on our identities. In Africa, culture (including religious culture) and tribal identity may even overshadow Christian identity. Who is African?

Moreover, what does it mean to be both Christian and African? Redefining identity is a challenging task at best. In this digitally connected era, it is even more difficult. Africa is constantly evolving, and countless voices are pulling us in all directions. How are we to establish our rightful identities in this rapidly changing, postcolonial, globalised world? How are we to navigate between the traditional and the modern/post-modern? Who are we in relation to God and to community? What is our true identity? I propose that an understanding of Jesus’ identity in Mark’s gospel provides us with a mirror that allows us to reshape our own identity as African Christians. Given the magnitude of this task, this paper will focus only on a few selected aspects of Jesus’ identity in Mark’s gospel.

### **6. The Identity of Jesus in Mark’s Gospel**

Why Mark? Mark tells a compelling story that artfully unveils who Jesus is, and explores the basis and right understanding of his identity. As Mark

unveils Jesus' identity through a series of conflicts and misunderstandings, we see Jesus as he is, and we begin to grasp who we should be as his disciples.

Mark is also probably the most relatable gospel for Africans. It is not only about identity, it is also about power, authority, and suffering. There are also significant parallels with our own African context that enhance its relatability. How so? The gospel of Mark is very much an "oral" gospel, there are similarities between the world-view and the socio-cultural context of the world Mark describes and that of Africa, and it is a story (albeit a true one) with features that resemble those of African stories. Because of these parallels, a caution is in order. Mark's story is qualitatively different from African stories. Because it is theologically motivated, it demands a faith response from us.

## **7. Lessons for Africa from the Gospel of Mark**

What lessons can we learn from a brief foray into Mark and his presentation of Jesus that can guide us in redefining our identity as African Christians?

### **7.1 Integration of Culture: Conflict Over Fasting (2:18-22)**

Mark 2:18-22 lies at the centre of five conflict scenes between 2:1 and 3:6. In this text, the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees is now out in the open. The criticisms against Jesus have become more direct as the Pharisees question the validity of Jesus' ministry. The bone of contention is that John's disciples and the Pharisees are fasting, but Jesus' disciples are not (2:18). Fasting was a common religious practice in Judaism and was a feature of the piety of Jewish groups such as the Qumran community and the Pharisees. However, as Keener (2014:134) points out, while fasting per se was not a requirement of the law except on the day of Atonement, the Pharisees had made it their practice to fast twice a week (Lk 18:12). What is at issue then, is fasting that went beyond the normal requirements. Jesus is, therefore not in breach of the law, but he is certainly in breach of tradition.

So, how does Jesus counter this attack? He turns to the material resources of his Jewish culture. Using a proverbial saying about a wedding (one that was probably familiar to his attackers), Jesus illustrates that the issue of fasting is not relevant as long as he, the bridegroom, is with his disciples. We too can connect with this proverbial saying since wedding celebrations are a common feature of African life. A weekend rarely goes by without one. One can envision the exuberant singing and dancing, accompanied

by loud ululations from the women. Certainly, anything associated with mourning during such a joyous occasion would be out of place. There are several reasons why this was also the case in Jewish culture. First, acts of mourning were prohibited during the seven days of the wedding celebration (Keener 2014:134).

Second, Judaism commonly viewed the wedding celebration as a symbol of the new age of salvation (Guelich 1989:110, 116). Given that this new age of salvation was present in Jesus, celebration was more appropriate for the disciples than fasting. However, once the bridegroom is taken away, then that would be the time for them to fast (2:19-20). Although Jesus does not elaborate on the bridegroom's removal, it is evident that he is the promised bridegroom (Hos. 2:14-23) and that he is predicting his own death. Third, in the Old Testament and the intertestamental period, fasting was associated with mourning (1Sm 31:13; 2Sm 1:12; Es 4:3; c Judith 8:6; 1 Macc 1:25-28). Jesus then goes further and uses two parables about wine and wineskins. Drinking wine was a common practice in Jewish culture, and Jesus' opponents would have understood these parables in the way that he intended, namely that putting new wine in old wineskins was not wise as it would only ruin both (2:21-22).

Jesus integrated culture to communicate a significant theological truth. The use of a proverbial saying and the two parables assist him in defining the relationship between the law and the newness that he is and that he brings. By using shared cultural resources, Jesus is able to form a bridge that allows him to communicate more clearly that he has not come to reform Judaism. Rather, he represents something new, which cannot co-exist with the old.

The first lesson we learn is that it is appropriate, and even desirable, to integrate our culture in our philosophies, development and methods of presentation of theological content such as in teaching, preaching, written theological material, music etc. Both the material and non-material aspects of culture should be used as critical resources. Some African scholars have integrated culture in their methods with great success.

Manus (2003), for example, draws on African folklore to show how this can be done in the field of hermeneutics. This is the approach generally known as intercultural or inculturation hermeneutics. He combines historical, literary and social methods in analysing various New Testament texts and integrates this with African folk stories. His method is eclectic and

uses both folkloric approaches and intercultural exegesis as well as other paradigms such as liberation, (re) construction and even postcolonialism (Loba-Mkole 2017:13).

Loba-Mkole (2017:13-14) also proposes an intercultural approach but one which is broader in scope. He refers to it as intercultural mediation, intercultural construction, intercultural criticism or intercultural narrativity. He applies this method to biblical exegesis, translation and canonical studies. It has a triple dimension including as it does, the original biblical cultures, ecclesial cultures and contemporary cultures.

Ajibade (2018) integrates the various genres found in the African oral tradition with expository preaching. He intends to provide a viable and effective way of preparing and communicating sermons in the African context. He uses song, drama, proverb, poem, folktale and storytelling in contextualising preaching. The role of these oral elements is either supportive (e.g. introduction or illustration) or substantive (the vehicle that carries the sermon).

It must be acknowledged that many Christians in Africa might have a problem with these approaches. However, they are not new. That is what Jesus did as we saw from the text above. Not only is the integration of culture an extremely effective instructional technique, but it is also especially significant for African readers. Even with modernisation and globalization, there are many elements of both cultures that intersect, thus making it an easier task. What is non-negotiable is that Scripture as the final authority for faith and practice. Every aspect of our culture must be examined under the microscope of God's word. If it passes the test, then it can be used. If not, we must have the courage to discard it, no matter how important it is to the community or to us.

## **7.2 Interrogation of World-view: Jesus' Teaching with Authority (1:21-28)**

Mark tells us in 1:21-28, that when the Sabbath came, Jesus went to the synagogue and began to teach. This is the scene that introduces us to the difference between Jesus and the teachers of the law. The teachers of the law (or scribes) mostly belonged to the sect of the Pharisees, although the Sadducees and Essenes were also represented. They were also called rabbis, and their job was threefold: to develop and interpret the law, to teach students the law, and to function as judges (Guelich, 1989:56). One would, therefore, expect that they would demonstrate authority in all these

areas, but they do not. Unlike these teachers of the law, Jesus' teaching has authority (1:21-22). Not only did he have an authoritative manner, but it may also be that Jesus did not refer to tradition or the authorities as the teachers of the law did. Mark tells us that Jesus' teaching is interrupted by a man with an impure spirit. Mark has previously related Jesus' success in confronting Satan in the wilderness (1:13, and he now turns us to Jesus' first power encounter with an impure spirit. In the traditional African world-view, Africans believed in the spiritual realm without question. Even today, traces of this world-view continue to influence how we live. After all, traditional culture is still a prominent determinant of identity. Demon exorcism (or deliverance) in Africa is a way of life and is generally accompanied by much drama. It is not uncommon to see people rolling around on the ground, foaming at the mouth, vomiting, being physically tossed about or even passing out during these encounters.

What might seem strange to a reader is that this episode takes place in a synagogue, a place of religious instruction and study where impure spirits are not expected to be present. The man asks two questions and makes a statement that reveals that this impure spirit recognises who Jesus is and the presence of the Kingdom of God in his ministry. He is not merely Jesus of Nazareth, he is the Holy One of God (1:24). This has both a Christological and an eschatological dimension. Ultimately, it is Jesus who will defeat the Satanic forces, both now and at the end of time (cf. 3:27). Without any fanfare or drama, Jesus commands the man to be silent and the impure spirit to come out of him (1:25-26). The Jewish historian, Josephus, and the writings of the Qumran sect suggest evidence of the practice of exorcism in this period. Exorcists of the day either used magical formulas that called on a higher spirit to expel the lower one or repulsed or scared the demon out by physical means (Keener 2014:132). Their reaction, "He even gives orders to impure spirits, and they obey him" (1:28), suggests that success in exorcism simply by giving a command was something unheard of.

Mark presents Jesus as a teacher with a new teaching and new works that superseded that of his contemporaries. In this scene, the readers see that he understood the world-view of his audience, in this case, that demon exorcism was a necessary part of life. However, he did not simply understand it, he interrogated it and then acted accordingly. In this instance, while he did not doubt that the man was demon-possessed and needed deliverance, his approach to the situation was radically different from that of his contemporaries.

The second lesson that we learn, then, is that we need to understand and interrogate our world-views. No one has a neutral perspective on life. We all operate based on certain assumptions. Modernisation, urbanization and globalisation mean that many Africans grow up surrounded by multiple cultures. The result is that our world-views are shaped by influences from many sources, ranging from the traditional to the modern. Unfortunately, we often unconsciously treat people as though they have come from the same background as we have. Even worse, we read our own world-views into biblical truth, thus shaping Christianity “into our image.”

Interrogation of world-view is the philosophy behind the four-legged stool African hermeneutical model proposed by Mburu (2019). This approach is a model that is based on the concept of moving from the known to the unknown. Fundamental elements of our world-view affect our understanding of the biblical text either positively or negatively. This approach recognises that parallels between biblical world-views and African world-views can be used as bridges to promote understanding, internalisation and application of the biblical text. It, therefore, moves directly from theories, methods and categories that are familiar in the African world into the more unfamiliar world of the Bible, without taking a detour through any foreign methods. This method is eclectic and interdisciplinary in that it also recognises the importance of theological, literary and historical aspects of the text.

### 7.3 The Exploitation of our Practical Orientation: Question about the Greatest Commandment (12:28-34)

By the time we arrive at the scene that follows in 12:28-34, Jesus’ authority is firmly established. This is acknowledged even by one of the teachers of the Law who overhears a debate between Jesus and the Sadducees. His acknowledgment is an endorsement of Jesus’ authority and has the potential to undermine the temple establishment. This man asks a question of his own regarding which is the most important commandment (12:28). It is not likely that he does not know the answer to his question. Rather, as the readers will note from his response later, in testing Jesus on his orthodoxy on the Law, this man is perhaps more genuine than his colleagues. Rather than cite just one commandment, Jesus answers with two that are nevertheless related and that is a summary of the entire Law (Keener 2014:160). He combines the famous *shema* from Deuteronomy (Dt 6:4-5) and the command in Leviticus on interpersonal relationships (Lv 19:18). Beginning with a declaration of the oneness of God, Jesus affirms that love for God and love for others are the most important (12:29-31). This

is echoed by the teacher of the Law, who adds that sacrifice and religious activity without genuine loyalty to God and compassion for others are empty acts (12:32-33). This wise answer pleases Jesus, who declares that the teacher of the Law is not far from the Kingdom of God. By this, Jesus means that the teacher of the Law, unlike his contemporaries, had grasped the essence of the Kingdom. Mark reports that after this, no one dared ask him any more questions (12:34).

The love that Jesus talks about is not an abstract feeling, but rather a practical outpouring of oneself, both vertically as well as horizontally. This implies that one’s faith manifests itself in concrete acts as a direct outcome of a right relationship with God and others. Many scholars have noted that Africans tend to be very religious, even in modern Africa. Secularism is not yet an issue. The spiritual dimension of life is always a factor in our interaction with the world around us. Because of this orientation, when we as Africans read the Bible, we tend to look for issues that relate to God and faith and how these affect our everyday lives. West (2005:4) makes a similar point when he says that in Africa, biblical hermeneutics cannot be separated from theological reflection as the emphasis is generally on addressing contextual realities within African culture. These contextual realities are always intricately linked with human relationships. Indeed, African Christianity leans towards an ethical monotheism. This means that religion is not only about how one feels, but what is one’s responsibility to their neighbour (Micah, Amos) (Sanneh, 2015). The third lesson from Jesus, then, is that we need to exploit our already existing practical orientation, as this is the evidence of a genuine relationship with God and others.

Kunhiyop (2008) provides us with an example of this in his African Christian Ethics. After laying a foundation for a sound biblical ethic, he provides a discussion of contemporary ethical issues, thus using the practical bent of Africans to ensure that there is a valid application of biblical teaching. He addresses key socio-political, financial, family, sexual, medical and religious issues. He points out that “in Africa, there is no such thing as an abstract ethical system that has no practical and religious implications.”

However, in exploiting this practical orientation, we must be careful to avoid the fusion of the two horizons of “what it meant” and “what it means.” Very often, in African exegesis, interpretation and application are conflated, and our own context is prioritised. Identifying practical

application requires that we de-contextualise the biblical message from the cultural form in which it is communicated and then re-contextualise the biblical message in a form that is applicable in our African context. This implies that to bridge the gap between the biblical world and the modern African world, the interpreter must have a grasp of both.

#### **7.4 Engagement of the Community in Our Theological Work: Whoever is Not Against Us is for Us (9:38-40)**

Mark brings out the issue of inclusivity in the scene that follows in 9:38-40. The bone of contention has to do with those whom the disciples believe belong to their inner circle. In other words, who has the authority to represent Jesus (Guelich 1989:65)? Who holds this privileged status and position? John tells Jesus that they had stopped an exorcism because the person doing it was not one of them (9:38). John, like Peter, does not understand the nature of the Kingdom. Instead of siding with John, Jesus points out a basic principle: “whoever is not against us is for us” (9:40). In other words, the disciples needed to recognise that discipleship was not restricted to their inner circle.

Jesus was urging his disciples to make a shift from an exclusive to an inclusive mindset that leaves no room for jealousy or unwarranted ideas of privilege and status. The only criterion for membership is the belief in Jesus’ name. Rather than “hide” in our ivory towers, it is this kind of inclusivity that is needed in the theological task. This should not be too difficult to understand since the community plays a critical role in Africa. Human beings can never exist in isolation but must live in relationship with others, a belief system known as Ubuntu. Its most basic expression, “I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am,” is an inclusive ideology that defined how relationships were to be handled. However, a disclaimer is in order - this inclusivity only extended to people of the same tribe. Those from other tribes were often viewed in a dehumanising way. The Kikuyu proverb, “Hit the head; this animal is not one of us – he comes from a strange place,” demonstrates this clearly. Identity is therefore bound up in tribal affiliations. Perhaps we cannot eliminate this embedded tribal identity, but we can allow God to transform it so that the community of faith becomes our new tribe. The last lesson from Jesus, then, is the need to engage the community in the theological task.

Ukpong (2000a:23), who coined the phrase “biblical inculturation hermeneutics,” was a pioneer in promoting community readings of the text by engaging the current socio-cultural perspectives expressed by ordinary

readers. He developed an eclectic method whereby he combined popular African readings with Western approaches (e.g. in studying the parable of the wise steward in Lk 16:1-13). For Ukpong, ordinary readers are not simply to be viewed as fields of application. Rather, they are subjects of interpretation. They are ordinary exegetes whose views complement those of scholars. Ordinary African readers are consequently viewed as integral to the scholar’s work which is seen as a collaborative effort “in which the resources of the people’s culture and historical life experience are used as complementary to conventional critical tools of biblical exegesis”.

Okure, who approaches the biblical text from a more feminist approach, also emphasizes that inclusivity is a key characteristic of African biblical women’s scholarship. Both scholars and non-scholars are part of the process of “reading.” She is to be commended for bringing the issues of women to the fore. For Okure (2005:12) “ordinary African readers do not simply consume the product, they partially constitute both the process and the product”. Ordinary readers see things in and behind the text that a scholar might not see. This is especially so for those in life situations that are comparable to those in the biblical text. Both Ukpong and Okure include literate as well as non-literate readers.

Galgalo (2012) also encourages the involvement of community in reading Scripture. He proposes that text and context should be brought together in a conversational model. He argues that, because identity for Africans entails belonging to a social group, scripture should be interpreted “with (not for) the Christians who read and understand scriptures in their own ways as informed by their particular cultural setting and situations in life.” (Galgalo 2012:101). He proposes that this conversational model also be applied to the academy and the church. He argues that with the current model of theological education, academics are answering questions no one, in particular, is asking.

One major potential shortcoming of these approaches must be brought to the fore. The agenda of the contemporary African community generally tends to overshadow that of the biblical text. However, with proper hermeneutical principles that take into account the historical, literary and theological contexts of the text, this can easily be corrected as the benefits far outweigh the disadvantages. First, it helps scholars uncover truths in the text that they might not otherwise have seen for themselves. Secondly, engaging the community ensures ownership and internalisation of the text. Transformation is, therefore, most likely.

## 8. Conclusion

It should be noted that while the approaches above may emphasise a particular principle, there is often overlap. One approach may include two or even three of the ideas presented above. For instance, Mburu, whose approach begins with an interrogation of world-view, also makes use of cultural resources such as stories, proverbs, songs etc. Ukpong, who stresses community readings, also argues for practical application. He points out that, “The goal of interpretation is the actualisation of the theological meaning of the text in today’s context to forge integration between faith and life, and engender commitment to personal and societal transformation” (Ukpong 2001:24).

All the approaches above emphasise, in their own ways, a two-way dialogue between the world of the biblical text and the world of traditional and contemporary African realities. This kind of dialogue is what will allow African Christians to forge an identity that mirrors that of Jesus Christ himself. Understanding Jesus’ identity in Mark’s gospel provides us with a mirror that allows us to reshape our own identity as African Christians in at least four areas: integrating our culture, interrogating our African world-view, exploiting our practical orientation and engaging the community in- our theological work. This redefined identity is the key to regaining the African voice and becoming, once again, a significant contributor to the global theological conversation. Without a doubt, there will be positive output as we develop contextualised theological education, promote contextualised models of biblical preaching, develop relevant ecclesiology, and provide a global impact through scholarship and missions. It is time to begin to embrace African theological contributions. To return to our metaphor, it is time to begin to work together to finish the beautiful song that is the Church.

## 9. Notes

- i. This is regarded by Ethiopian Orthodox Christians as the foundation of their church. Although note arguments put forth by Edwin Yamauchi disputing the origins of the eunuch as being from Ethiopia and proposing instead that the biblical reference is to Meroe or Nubia (modern day Sudan). Contra the two Afrocentric Bibles *The Original African Heritage Study Bible* (1993) and *Holy Bible: African American Jubilee Edition* (1999) (Yamauchi 2004:165).
- ii. For Augustine, the church consisted of both saints and sinners. The holiness of the church therefore rests not on its members, but in Christ.

Consequently, the schism of the Donatists was therefore a far more serious sin than *treditio*. In addition, the efficacy of sacraments is dependent upon the grace of Christ and not on the personal qualities of the minister (*ex opere operato vs. ex opere operantis*) (McGrath 1998:75-77).

- iii. Over against Pelagius, Augustine upheld four main points: the total sovereignty of God and genuine human responsibility; humanity is universally affected by sin as a consequence of the fall; our total dependence upon God for our salvation (grace); humanity is justified as an act of grace (McGrath 1998:79-85)

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#### **Author's Declaration**

The author declares that there is no financial gain or personal relationship(s) that inappropriately influenced her in the writing of this article.

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## **SECTION C: MISSIO DEI**

## **A Pastoral and Theological Provocation for South African Suburban Baptist Churches to Reach out to Neighbouring Townships through Missional Projects which are Initiated through Acts of Loving Kindness**

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### **Abstract**

*This article describes and proposes a methodology for suburban South African Baptist Churches to engage in missional projects in the poor and needy neighbouring townships. It goes on to give a theological justification for such a course of action. The authors propose that a viable method for suburban Baptist Churches to reach out to poor and needy neighboring township communities is to humbly enter these communities with a view to build relationships through acts of loving kindness. This type of engagement will lead to opportunities for evangelistic proclamation over time once trust has been established and love experienced. It will enable to gospel to be heard as the good news that it is.*

*This article gives a theological justification for this missional methodology and provides a workable case study for scalability. The article endeavors to understand the historic tension evangelicals have had over the relationship between evangelism and social concern. It presents a critique of Walter Rauschenbusch's Social Gospel Movement which was largely responsible for the tension and explains the work of the Lausanne Movement which has been crucial in overcoming the historic tensions and so return evangelical mission to its biblical and historic roots.*

### **1. Evangelicals, Baptists and the Social Gospel**

There is a golden opportunity in South Africa for local suburban churches to reach out to the people of neighboring poorer townships through missional projects. Prosperous first world suburbs exist in close proximity to poor third world townships and informal settlements. There is so much need in the poorer communities, and often very little in terms of viable evangelical witness. Certainly, there could be more Baptist churches in these communities. This presents an opportunity for a suburban Baptist church to launch a missional project in their neighboring township, which could result, over time, in the establishment of a Baptist congregation

in that township. This ministry opportunity is something all suburban Baptist churches in South Africa should consider. David Lock's Masters dissertation explored his own ministry and participant observation in this respect (Lock 2018).

In July 2006, the elders of Gonubie Baptist Church (in the Eastern Cape), while on a prayer walk in the newly developed western end of Gonubie, looked further west and saw the sprawling township of Mzamomhle. Mzamomhle is a township which was designed in 1989 for 2 500 people, but by 2006 accommodated up to 40,000 people, mainly in informal housing. Its facilities were hopelessly inadequate to cope with the influx of people into the area. The Gonubie Baptist elders felt a strong conviction that they could not stand before God on judgment day if they did not reach out to that neighbouring community. However, despite the proximity of such a community, it was not obvious how best to reach out to them (Lock 2018).

*The Church of Irresistible Influence*, written by Robert Lewis argues that in the post-modern culture, the Church often lacked the credibility necessary for our age. In our age truth is nothing more than talk, especially if you don't show it. However, the transforming power of Christ to change lives has the effect of building bridges. Lewis (2001:40) thus advocates a more balanced approach of public proclamation and congregational incarnation with acts of loving kindness being the access point into a community.

Lewis (2001:36) describes the process he went through when thinking about how the church he pastored in Little Rock, Arkansas could reach out to its community. He first thought that the mission of the local church was to help the world understand its errors, to explain its sin and wrongdoing, for the intended effect of bringing sinners back to their senses. However, he discovered that this was not merely ineffective, it also fuelled hostility and alienation between the local church and community. Lewis went on to explain (2001:37) that a better way of reaching a community is to build bridges that balance public proclamation with congregational involvement, to combine faith with good works.

John Azumah (2007) confirms that this is also a valid presumption in the African context. "Plagued by conflicts, corruption and the scourge of HIV/AIDS, the saying that 'people do not care how much you know (or who you are) until they know how much you care,' is vital." This shouldn't

surprise us because it was Jesus himself who said to his disciples in the Sermon on the Mount: “Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven (Matthew 5:16).”

How then should a church like Gonubie Baptist Church reach out to a community like Mzamomhle? The answer is through acts of loving kindness which over time build bridges for the proclamation of the gospel. That became our local church strategy. Greer and Smith (2009:46-47) affirm this by saying that church-based programmes are most effective when they simultaneously meet both spiritual and physical needs in a culturally appropriate manner. Gonubie Baptist did this by visiting the principal of Mzamowethu combined school in Mzamomhle and offering to serve the school in any way they desired. The school initially asked Gonubie Baptist to build a netball court for the girls at the school. Later a feeding scheme was established which gave every junior primary child a hot breakfast at the start of the school day. Over the course of six years opportunities arose to proclaim the gospel, including a week-long tent campaign in 2011. A congregation was established and Living Hope (a Baptist NGO) took over the project in 2013. It currently employs eight people from the community and ministers at Mzamowethu combined school and in the local clinic to the glory of Christ (Lock 2018).

John Stott (1990:8) explains that evangelism and social concern have been intimately related to one another throughout the history of the Church. This is the way the Church has done mission from the very beginning of its existence. In its early days, their good works towards their own as well as outsiders was one of the main reasons Church growth was so rapid. They would share everything they had with each other so that no-one was in need (Acts 2:44-45, 4:32-37). The apostles performed signs and wonders in Jerusalem, healing the sick and releasing people from demon possession (Acts 5:12-16). The result of these acts of kindness was a receptive audience for the proclamation of the gospel message and the Lord added daily to their number those who were being saved (Acts 2:47, 5:14).

However, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>, the Social Gospel Movement was developed by theological liberals. In over-reaction to this theological distortion, many Evangelicals became suspicious of any kind of social involvement in missions (understandably!). McKnight (1996:82) summarises the problem as follows. “The history of

the Church in the United States has witnessed an incredible inability to hold in balance the preaching of salvation and social work. Evangelicals have largely focused on the former while Liberal Protestantism has worked on the latter.” This is unnecessary and damaging to the mission of the Church, but sadly has influenced Baptist churches in South Africa.

Part of this article includes a critique of the Social Gospel Movement with special emphasis on the writings of Walter Rauschenbusch. It will also explain some of the intense reaction against it by Evangelicals. Finally, it will explain how the Lausanne Movement through the Lausanne Covenant of 1974, the Manila Manifesto of 1989 and the Cape Town Commitment of 2010 has bridged the theological divide by providing an evangelical framework for mission to be seen as both evangelism and social concern.

Baptist Churches can therefore have confidence, from a theological point of view, that when they reach out to their poor and needy neighbours with acts of loving kindness, they are not being theologically liberal. Such an understanding will reduce the pressure to proclaim the gospel to neighbouring communities before a good relationship has been established and the people being ministered to have experienced that they are truly loved.

Evangelism and social concern can come together in a theologically responsible manner. Missional projects that reach out to communities with acts of loving kindness and endeavour to build relationships of trust, integrity and love do so on a firm theological footing. Suburban Baptist churches need to see their responsibility to reach out to their poorer neighbouring communities recognising that they have what it takes to do so because all it takes is a desire to establish such relationships through acts of loving kindness.

## **2. The Social Gospel Movement**

The conflict over whether the Church should be involved in evangelism or social concern (rather than both working together) came about primarily as a result of the tremendous changes that happened in the world in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century due to the Industrial Revolution. People flooded into the cities to work in factories. This resulted in very poor living conditions for many people, and huge wealth gaps between the factory owners and their employees.

These conditions are not dissimilar to how many live in South Africa. Post-apartheid South Africa has freedom of movement. There are no influx controls preventing people from moving to find work as there were in the apartheid era. This has resulted in townships like MzamoMhle serving populations up to twenty times larger than they were designed for. The levels of squalor and poverty are not dissimilar from New York City's notorious Hell's kitchen tenement section, where Walter Rauschenbusch ministered from 1885. Furthermore, Oxfam's inequality report, published in January 2018 ahead of the World Economic Forum's annual meeting in Davos Switzerland, shows that South Africa is one of the most unequal countries in the world from an economic point of view (Mhlanga 2018). How will the South African Church respond to this challenge? Walter Rauschenbusch responded to the challenge he was facing by developing what became known as the Social Gospel Movement. The movement applied Christian ethics to social problems (Stetzer 2010) and was established in the context of liberal Protestant theology which also questioned biblical authority and emphasised the experience of the believer (Vidler 1974:241). This presented huge problems for evangelicals wanting to engage in mission in similar needy areas.

The Social Gospel Movement was articulated in terms of the Kingdom of God. It was believed that society was progressing towards the Kingdom of God, even if not perfectly. Rauschenbusch lamented the receding of Christian hope being understood in the context of the Kingdom of God in early Christendom now being replaced by salvation being seen purely as eternal life (1913:161). It is agreed that Christian hope is more than eternal life, but to take eternal life away from Christian hope is to reduce the gospel of so much of its power. Christians should not have to choose between these two aspects of the gospel as both are true.

Rauschenbusch believed that the Christian Church should be sympathetic to the political socialist movement of the day (1913:323) and even aid forces which were making for the increase of Communism (1913:398). These political movements were largely Atheistic at the time and this caused many Christians to be troubled by the direction of the Social Gospel Movement. However, Rauschenbusch came to this view through a thorough biblical analysis of the prophets and the Early Church which clearly taught God's passion for the poor and oppressed (1913:41). It is easy to throw out the Social Gospel Movement because of differing political perspectives, but Baptist churches in South Africa would benefit

from close biblical study of the prophets and Early Church so as to develop God's heart for the poor and oppressed. Rauschenbusch regarded socialism as imperative to the future of the Church. He warned that the working classes interest in the gospel would soon pass from indifference to hostility, from religious enthusiasm to anti-religious bitterness (1913:331). This is an important warning to the Church in South Africa as well with its similar economic conditions.

Rauschenbusch (1913:51) believed that John the Baptist's message was to abolish social wrongs as they were real obstacles to the coming of the Kingdom of God. In his understanding, Jesus disregarded and opposed the ceremonial elements of religion and insisted on the ethical elements which sided with the poor and oppressed. There is no doubt that an objective reading of the gospels shows Jesus in this light however, it does not do so exclusively. Rauschenbusch was guilty of reducing the significance of the ceremonial elements of the Christians faith, not least that Jesus fulfilled the law and its requirements by dying as an atoning sacrifice for our sins on the cross (Romans 3:25, 1 John 2:2).

While Rauschenbusch did believe in individual sin and salvation, his real concern was with social sins and the salvation of society (1913:60,65). His analysis of the Early Church was that they transformed society (1913:116). Although the results were not perfect, they did succeed in gathering people into organisations where such moral teachings were urged with immense determination (cf. Rauschenbusch 1993) and where generosity was at the centre of their actions. This was one of the impacts of the Early Church. However, it is impossible to read the account of the Early Church in Acts and divorce their social welfare initiatives from their evangelistic proclamation.

Rauschenbusch held to a post-millennial view of eschatology, and so had a favourable view of how society would develop under the influence of the Kingdom of God. He believed that it was a mistake to postpone social regeneration to a future era to be inaugurated by the return of Christ. He believed social regeneration would set the stage for the coming of the king to his kingdom (1913:343). Traditional evangelical pre-millennial views of eschatology can have the detrimental effect of enabling the Church to ignore the social challenges of society. We might not agree with Rauschenbusch's eschatology, but we should not allow our differing eschatology to prevent us reaching out to the poor and needy communities

around us. A significant part of our mission, motivated by neighbourly love, must be to endeavour to improve the living situations of the poor and needy who live in close proximity to us.

In addressing the crucial challenges of the poor and needy, Rauschenbusch's Social Gospel Movement unfortunately did so at the expense of the traditional evangelical gospel of individual conversion. Wood (2017) makes the vital observation that individual conversion has been shown to have a transformative power on people's lives, which affects their social-economic condition and through them, society as a whole. Individualistic evangelism is a necessary component of compassion ministries and aids the long-term development of the whole self. There is thus no need to separate evangelism from social concern. They both go together to form the mission of the Church. While Rauschenbusch's Social Gospel Movement drew attention to the social requirements of the mission of the Church, it unfortunately did so at the expense of evangelism. This is a mistake we must be careful not to make as we take up the challenge of reaching out to in our similar neighbouring communities.

### **3. The Evangelical Reaction Against the Social Gospel Movement**

Evangelical theologians and missionaries reacted strongly against the Social Gospel Movement. They perceived the Social Gospel Movement to be a theological distortion and Stetzer (2010) notes that from about 1900-1925 nearly all progressive social concern produced suspicion in evangelicals.

Price (1979) states that one of the paramount tenants of the fundamentalist movement was individualistic piety. Scott Clark (2015) says that the Church has no agenda for the wider civil and cultural world. Locante (in Yaffe 2008) described Rauschenbusch's gospel as having little need of a saviour and displacing the problem of evil - the supreme tragedy of the human soul in rebellion against God - with the challenge of social equalities. He finds it hard to regard Rauschenbusch's theology as Christian in any meaningful sense of the term.

These criticisms of Rauschenbusch's theology are an over-reaction just as Rauschenbusch's Social Gospel Movement is an over-reaction to the evangelical understanding of mission as purely proclamation of the gospel. Rick Warren (in Daniel 2012) correctly evaluates the disagreement by saying that we should not have to choose between cultural restoration and

individual salvation. A cultural restoration was not meant to be the end goal. Everything we do, all the transformation we work towards, should point to the glory of God.

### **4. The Lausanne Movement—An Evangelical Bastion**

The Church owes a great debt of gratitude to the Lausanne Movement - initiated by John Stott and Billy Graham in 1974 for resolving this conflict, at least from an evangelical point of view. Through the statements agreed to at its three congresses (The Lausanne Covenant of 1974, the Manila Manifesto of 1989 and the Cape Town Commitment of 2010) they progressively demonstrated the place of both evangelism and social concern in mission and how both work together to fulfill the Church's mission. The Lausanne Covenant was a significant and ground-breaking accomplishment. Houston (2007) considered it miraculous because 2 300 people from 150 countries representing all branches of the Christian Church agreed to the covenant statement within a ten-day period.

The priority of evangelism was clear. Paragraph 4 of the Covenant (Lausanne 1974) states, "Evangelism is the proclamation of the historical, biblical Christ as Saviour and Lord, with a view to persuading people to come to him personally and so be reconciled to God." However, paragraph 5 (Lausanne 1974) explains the relationship between evangelism and social concern in, as Stott (1975) described it, a mildly worded way:

We express penitence and regret for having sometimes regarded evangelism and social concern as mutually exclusive... We affirm that both evangelism and social political involvement are both part of our Christian duty. For both are necessary expressions of our doctrines of God and man, our love for our neighbour and our obedience to Jesus Christ...The salvation we claim should be transforming us in the totality of our personal and social responsibilities.

This was the first tentative step to reconciling evangelism and social concern as the mission of the Church. It was a significant break-through and its importance should not be underestimated. There were still many evangelicals who held the belief that evangelism was all that mattered and any talk of social action brought to mind the 'dreaded Social Gospel' (Stott 1975). The Lausanne Movement came together again in Manila in 1989 for the purpose of building on the foundation of the Lausanne

Covenant, highlighting new challenges facing the Church and new theological themes which required greater clarification based on further reflection (Tennant 2014).

One of the areas where greater clarification was made concerned the relationship between evangelism and social concern. Article 4: The Gospel and Social Responsibility of the Manilla Manifesto (Lausanne 1989) included the following statements:

Jesus not only proclaimed the kingdom of God, he also demonstrated its arrival by works of mercy and power. We are called today to a similar integration of words and deeds. In a spirit of humility we are to preach and teach, minister to the sick, feed the hungry, care for prisoners, help the disadvantaged and handicapped, and deliver the oppressed...we...affirm that good news and good works are inseparable.

Our continuing commitment to social action is not a confusion of the kingdom of God with a Christianized society. It is, rather, a recognition that the biblical gospel has inescapable social implications. True mission should always be incarnational. It necessitates entering humbly into other people's worlds, identifying with their social reality, their sorrow and suffering, and their struggles for justice against oppressive powers.

We repent that the narrowness of our concerns and vision has often kept us from proclaiming the lordship of Jesus Christ over all of life, private and public, local and global.

Article 4 is a wonderful statement of what social concern in Christian mission is. It is how faith should be lived out in the life of a believer, and how it operates as we go out into the world on mission. It authenticates our message and integrates our words and deeds just as it was with Jesus. It is a prophetic denunciation against evil which is careful to include institutionalised and structural evil. The Manilla Manifesto made it very clear that the gospel has social implications which need to be lived out in an incarnational way in other people's worlds.

The Cape Town commitment of 2010 re-worded the Lausanne Movement's understanding of evangelism and social concern around the theme of love. The Cape Town confession of faith Part 1b under the section "We love the

people of God" (Lausanne 2011) includes:

B) *The integrity of our mission.* The source of all our mission is what God has done in Christ for the redemption of the whole world, as revealed in the Bible. Our evangelistic task is to make that good news known to all nations.

Integral mission is the proclamation and demonstration of the gospel. It is not simply that evangelism and social involvement are to be done alongside each other. Rather, in integral mission our proclamation has social consequences as we call people to love and repentance in all areas of life. And our social involvement has evangelistic consequences as we bear witness to the transforming grace of Jesus Christ. If we ignore the world, we betray the Word of God which sends us out to serve the world. If we ignore the Word of God, we have nothing to bring to the world. [55]

We commit ourselves to the integral and dynamic exercise of all dimensions of mission to which God calls his Church...

God commands us to reflect his own character through compassionate care for the needy, and to demonstrate the values and the power of the kingdom of God in striving for justice and peace and in caring for God's creation.

Ron Sider (in Tison 2014) made the following conclusion about the position of social concern in mission in the Evangelical Church as a result of the Cape Town Consultation:

At Lausanne III...the biblical obligation to combine evangelism and social action was assumed by almost everyone. A deep, powerful longing to share the gospel with everyone who is not a believer pervaded the Congress. However, so did the call to seek justice for the poor, care for the environment, combat HIV/AIDS, and work for peace.

This commitment to evangelism and social concern integrated together as the mission of the Church is a much more biblical understanding of Christian mission. It is clear that the Evangelical Church has progressed in its thinking in the last one hundred years. We owe a great debt of gratitude to the Lausanne Movement for helping us rediscover this biblical basis for our mission. It needs to be applied by local churches as they engage in

missional projects in neighbouring communities.

## 5. Conclusion

The vital importance ensuring that our mission incorporates both evangelism and social concern was clearly demonstrated by Caesar Molebatsi in a paper at the second International Congress on World Evangelism in Manila in 1989 in a paper entitled '*Social Concern and Evangelism III: Reaching the Oppressed*'. Molebatsi's context was apartheid South Africa and he was emphatic that if we are to evangelise people living under oppression, we need to identify with their oppression. Molebatsi (1989) postulates that a contextual gospel gives people a sense of dignity and hope that humanity will be redeemed. Without it, the gospel doesn't sound like good news to oppressed people, it sounds like bad news".

Suburban Baptist Churches in South Africa have a golden opportunity to reach out to their neighbours in the poor and needy townships that surround them. However, they need to reach out in such a way that recognises that many of the people living in those townships are still living under an economic form of oppression. Suburban Baptist Churches in South Africa should enter their neighbouring townships with an attitude of humility and compassion. They should prioritise building relationships with people and they should reach out, at least initially, through acts of loving kindness. As these relationships develop, opportunities to proclaim the gospel will present themselves. Over a period of time, as a direct result of the ministry of suburban Baptist churches, social and spiritual needs will be met and churches will be planted. Reconciliation will take place and most importantly, God will be glorified as his kingdom grows.

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The authors declare that there is no financial gain or personal relationship(s) that inappropriately influenced them in the writing of this article.

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## Church Without Borders: The *Missio Dei* From a Bible, Special Forces and Logotherapeutic Perspective: A Search for Meaning

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#### Abstract

*In this article Christians are compared to special forces' soldiers. Just as special forces' soldiers can be found around the globe and reveal special features that set them apart from other soldiers, in the same sense, the Christians, who had received the command to go out and make disciples of all the heathen, must be different. Just as these soldiers are driven by their military objectives to achieve their goals, Christians must also be objectively driven to do the missio Dei. By telling others about the gospel of the kingdom of heaven / God, and through making the heathen His disciples through baptism and teaching them to observe all things He had commanded us, we are preparing for the second coming of Jesus and find meaning through what we do because Christ is our life. He is the reason why we live, and because of Him, we do the missio Dei and find meaning in our lives.*

#### 1. Introduction

The real *ekklēsia* (church) has no borders. It is clear in the *Corpus Paulinum* that the *ekklēsia tou Theou* (Church of God), can be regarded, metaphorically speaking, as the *sōma tou Christou* (body of Christ - 1Cor 12:27; Eph 1:22-23, 4:14-16). Those that are "in Christ" (*en Christō* - Rm 6:1-11) are members of the church - a church that is universal and can be found everywhere around the world.

The heavenly image in Revelation 7:9 explicitly mentions that in front of the throne of God and the Lamb (Christ) there were/are a multitude that no one could / can count, from all nations, and tribes, ethnic groups and languages - a clear illustration that in God's presence, believers were/are coming from everywhere - they are not confined to certain nationalistic or ethnic groups - a definite indication that, according to the author of the Apocalypse, God thinks and acts universally, because, in Johannine language, He loved the world (Jn 3:16), and He constantly invites people to join His "world", the church (Rv 22:17).

## 2. The Term “*missio Dei*.”

The *missio Dei* is a well-known Latin phrase for the “mission of God” as used in theological, more precisely, in missiological and evangelical circles, particularly amongst those who believe that it is the task of every believer or follower of Jesus Christ, to go out in the world and to make disciples because that was His mandate for the church after His resurrection and before His ascension (Mt 28:18-20; Lk 24:1-53; Ras 1998:810-831). The purpose of the *missio Dei*, according to the Gospel of Matthew, is specifically aimed at the expansion of the church and the kingdom of heaven / God (Mt 16:18-28; 21:31-32; 24:14; 25:31-46).

## 3. The Universal Church

From the Gospel of Matthew, right through to the end of the Apocalypse, the New Testament testifies to this universal truth, and that is that the Church of God is universal and can be found anywhere. In fact, the disciples of Jesus were commanded to go out and make disciples of all “the heathen” (*ta ethnē* - Mt 28:19; Ras 1998:810-831), starting in Galilee, the place of the heathen (Mt 4 & 28:18-20), moving across geographical borders, across different cultures and linguistic groups, specifically tasked to make people disciples of Jesus (Neill 1982:16-20).

In obedience to Jesus’ command (Mt 28:19), the church had started to spread, from Palestine all around the globe (Neill 1982). Despite hardships and persecutions, the early church (the disciples of Jesus) had moved geographically in all wind directions, and with their missionary mandate and zeal, especially after Pentecost and the start of their persecution (Ac 2:1-41; 8:1-4) had spread the gospel of Jesus. Years later, the church father Tertullian had said that the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the church (Ras 2019). There is no doubt that the early church was actively spreading the gospel as part of the *missio Dei* (Neill 1982; Bosch 1979; Verkuyyl 1979).

## 4. The Church Will Never Be Destroyed

In the well-known passage of Matthew 16, Peter, the well-known disciple, and later apostle of Jesus Christ were told that the gates of *Hades* (place of death) would not overwhelm the *ekklēsia*. According to Matthew, Jesus said to Peter that Hades, the Old Testament *Sheōl* (Abbott-Smith 1977:9) would never overwhelm the church. When Peter had confessed, through a revelation from God, that Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah, the Anointed One, the one that the Father had sent, then Jesus had told him

(Peter), that on this “rock” (*petra*), He would build his *ekklēsia* (Mt 16:13-23; Gundry 1983:328-339).

In laymen’s language, the church is built upon the confession that Jesus is Lord – a church that can be found all around the globe in every nation on earth as long as there are those who confess Him (Carter 1996:94, 287). By participating in the *missio Dei*, by being co-workers of God (1Cor 3:9) the disciples were / are actively expanding the church, in line with the missionary mandate (Mt 28:18-20), knowing that their work is never in vain because the gates of death (Hades) can never overwhelm it.

## 5. The Implications of a Universal Church

Worldwide the Muslims, who worship Allah and confess Muhammad as the prophet of God, are bound together through their “creed”, called, the *shahadāh*. What makes them Muslims is simply this confession (Ras 2010:170). In every nation on earth, there are Muslims. They have travelled across borders, they had left their place of birth, went somewhere else for a better way of life, or simply left because of war, unemployment, limited job opportunities, or simply because of choice (Ras 2015:23; 2019).

Christians are not different. They also travel and can be found in South Africa, Christchurch in New Zealand, in Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, in Lebanon’s Beirut, in Moscow or in Wisconsin in the United States of America. They are not geographically limited because wherever there are people who confess Jesus as their Lord and Saviour, there the church of God will have a presence – simply because it is universal where all those in Christ make up the body of Christ (Carter 1996:94).

When one becomes a Christian, one confesses to follow Christ and this further means that one can expect that disciple to be obedient and to execute what Christ commands him/her to do, for example, to love God, to love the neighbour, to do good, to show mercy and compassion, to break the bread and to drink the wine in remembrance of Him, and also, to go out and make disciples of all the heathen (Mt 28:18-20). This means that all Christians must be involved in missionary / evangelistic work. To be a Christian, *inter alia*, means that one must be and has become a missionary, whether in the local church or in a foreign environment, trying to convince others about Christ (Rm 10:9-15).

## 6. The *missio Dei*

As a theological student, I was always impressed by the scholarly concept of the *missio Dei*. The missionary command of Jesus, to go out and make disciples (Mt 28:18-20), coming from Jesus, was presented to us as the *missio Dei* – the mission of God (Verkuyl 1978:3) – because, so we were taught from within Calvinistic circles, it is actually the Trinitarian God who is working His own mission(s) through us because He (God, the Father), has elected us in Christ before the foundation of this earth (Eph 1:3-10).

Whether from a *supralapsaristic* viewpoint (election took place before the creation – the view of Karl Barth - Eph 1:4-5) or an *infralapsaristic* one (election took place after the fall of man - the view of the Synod of Dordrecht), the Bible portrays to its readers that the believers, those in Christ, are actively involved, through the preaching (Rm 10:15) and spreading of God's word (Ac 8:4), to make disciples (Ac 8:26-40; 10:1-48), and by doing that in obedience to the Master's voice, we are building or expanding the "Church of God" (*ekklēsia tou Theou*) (Berkhof 1979:109-125; Pinnock 1975; Marshall 1969).

## 7. *Missio Dei* or *Missio Ecclesia*

From a pragmatic and pastoral point of view, it becomes irrelevant to debate whether mission is a *missio Dei* (mission of God) or a *missio ecclesia* (mission of the church) (Verkuyl 1979; Bosch 1979). It is the believers that are used as members of the universal ("invisible church") church to spread the gospel of Christ, because the heathen (Mt 28:18-19) do not talk about Jesus and what He has done for us, and in this sense, it is not necessary to philosophically debate about the role of God (Augustine) or the role of man (Pelagius) or the combination of both (semi-Pelagianism). Every believer knows that it is God who works in and through them through the Holy Spirit, so in that sense, it is God working in and through us (*missio Dei* – Jn 16:13; Rm 8:9, 14-16; 9:1; 10:8-17).

Evangelicals will say that disciples are shining lights (Mt 5:14-16), salt (Mt 5:13), "co-workers of God" (*sunergoi tou Theou* - 1Cor 3:9), that are actively working in this world, any place on earth, wherever they may find themselves, to win souls for Christ, and by doing that, they are practically doing and living the *missio Dei*. To place these two terms in opposition to each other, trying to philosophise which of the two is better in describing the intention of the Biblical authors, is from a practical point of view

simply not sound. It is better to understand it in a complementary manner from an anthropomorphic point of view.

## 8. Refugees, Asylum Seekers, Displaced People and the Church

Across the world, there are millions of people who are displaced, literally thousands and thousands of people were driven from their country of birth because of a plethora of reasons. After 9/11 the war on terror was taken to countries who were harbouring terrorists and who were not part of a so-called "democratic dispensation" where freedom in almost everything, whether religion, freedom of choice, movement, occupation, or economic choices is part of individual freedoms (Ras 2015; 2019; Streatfeild 2011; Tucker-Jones 2014).

More than a million people were displaced in Pakistan, many more in Afghanistan, some governments were toppled (Afghanistan, Iraq, Tunisia, Egypt, Libya) while others are constantly busy with wars that make people flee across borders. Just think of Somalia, Yemen, Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Darfur, to mention a few.

South Africa is flooded by illegal immigrants from all parts of Africa, especially Zimbabwe, the Congo, Cameroon, and Mozambique. The influx of Pakistanis and Chinese across South Africa's borders, especially next to Mozambique, the constant flow of Bangladeshi, Senegalese, Somali and Ethiopian people coming to open spaza shops in South Africa is a reality that on a daily basis confronts law enforcement, immigration officials and local populations in all nine provinces of the Republic of South Africa (Ras 2015; 2019).

The question is? What is the role of the church in terms of the *missio Dei* and in terms of their mandate to win them over to Christ and to teach them to do all things He commanded them? (Mt 28:19). It is clear that the disciples of Christ or the Church of God were instructed to go out, to make disciples (expand the church), to show love to everyone (Jn 13:34-35, 15:12-15) and to demonstrate in a practical manner love, mercy and compassion to all people (Lk 10:25-37; Rm 15:1-2; 1Cor 13:1-14:1).

From a pastoral and diaconological point of view, the church is forced to show compassion (Mt 25:31-46) because those entering the kingdom are those who physically had shown mercy and compassion (Mt 25:37-46). There are also no excuses when it comes to refugees, asylum seekers,

displaced persons or strangers (Heb 13:1-2). The church is called to be different, and that difference is God's love.

One remarkable thing that the author has noticed through the years is the physical "share and care" that Muslim clerics and community members reveal to, especially, other Muslim and non-Muslim members who come to South Africa in times of need. The long queues in Durban in front of the *Jamiatul Ulema* (Islamic Theological Council) where Muslims come for assistance is a good example.

The organisation, Gift of the Givers Foundation (<https://www.giftofthegivers.org>) under the dynamic and charismatic leadership of Dr Imtiaz Sooliman, is perhaps one of the best examples in South Africa ([https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gift\\_of\\_the\\_Givers](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gift_of_the_Givers)). Whenever there is a need, no matter who it may be or where it may be – they will be there. That is love in action – not "Muslim love", but love. Christians were mandated to do the same (Bosch 1979:247), and the best way to do that is to treat the whole world as a missionary context within different and diverse socio-political and linguistic-cultural contexts (Ras 2019).

### 9. Logotherapy and Its Search for Meaning

People, consciously or unconsciously, are constantly searching for meaning in their lives (Ras 2013:40; Ras, Ras and Zondi 2017:108-109). The will to meaning is a motivational force in every man or woman and can only be fulfilled by him/her alone – no one else (Ras 2000:18). If they do not find meaning in their search for meaning, then they very often become frustrated and can develop, what Viktor Frankl, the father of logotherapy, had called noögenic neuroses. These are neuroses that originate in the mind of individuals as a result of conflict between various values or moral conflicts. Simply put, they develop spiritual problems (Ras 2000:19).

Christians are not different from other human beings. The only difference is that they have the Holy Spirit in them (Rm 8:9; 12; 9:1). If they do not do what Christ has commanded them to do, for example, to go out and make disciples (Mt 28:19), then they also will or can, in logotherapeutic terms, develop noögenic neuroses. This "cognitive stress" can make them without purpose, without direction, frustrated, and can even lead to depression and physical ailments because a healthy body and mind are vital for healthy living.

To ensure that Christians are actively participating in the *missio Dei* the author thought that the image of the special forces' soldier can serve as a good inspirational model/metaphor that may assist Christians to become more goal-directed and focused on this critically important task of doing missionary work – to actively participate in the *missio Dei*.

### 10. The Role of Special Forces in the World

Every nation on God's planet has military personnel called special forces. They are called special forces because they are men who are tasked with special functions specifically aimed at reaching their set military objectives. They are an elite cadre generally associated with particular services (Ras 2019; Stilwell 2015:7; Stadler 2016).

In terms of selection and training, they are simply the best of the best. Physical, intellectual and psychological requirements far exceed any other military group, and they are well-known as people who are perceived to be fearless, highly determined and tenacious. They reveal a very strong fighting spirit that at all times, is totally aimed at taking out their perceived enemies as quickly as possible (Ras 2019). At all times, like any soldier, they need to have a high morale (Ras 2006:40-41).

Of course, the church as the body of Christ is not tasked to take out their enemies. Instead, we are called to love them. However, if special forces can be so determined to reach their set military objectives at all costs, then certainly the church can learn from this tenacious determination and implement the same kind of strategy or action in order to reach their own set objectives as part of the goal and purpose of the *missio Dei*.

### 11. The Christian as a Soldier

Christians are soldiers. At church we had sung, "Onwards Christian soldiers, marching unto war..." Soldiers of the cross. Soldiers following Jesus, not soldiers of armed militia or military organisations with the aim to take out their enemies through physical contact. Soldiering, in a Christian sense, is just a metaphor (Ras 2019).

As a military chaplain for sixteen years, and today known as a military veteran, serving Jesus in the army in an a-political manner, ministering and catering for the spiritual needs of all soldiers, no matter what their creed or religious affiliation, military images, metaphors and activities, for me, was and still is a normal phenomenon, as is also depicted in the Bible (Ras 2019; Military Veterans Act 2011). Just think of David and Goliath

during the time of war when the Israelites had to face the Philistines in the Valley of Elah (1Sm 17; Weber Vol 2:774).

The well-known Ephesians 6 pictures the Christian as someone who must stand steadfast against the methods of the devil. In this textual passage, the apostle Paul had used the image of the Roman soldier and had applied it to the Christians in the Greek city of Ephesus. The soldier image is here a metaphor that wants to encourage the believers in Christ to remain steadfast with the full armour of God so that they can extinguish the flaming arrows of the evil one (the devil) (Ras 2013:39-49).

This image is a classic example that Paul had used because of his daily contact with Roman soldiers while he was imprisoned in Rome at the time of the writing of this letter. The author of Acts, Luke, also said that Paul had a Roman soldier who had guarded him on a daily basis (Ac 28:16, 30) so that the use of the soldier image for Paul was just as normal as his daily prayer life and his daily communion with God.

Even in his address to the younger Timothy, Paul had used the image of the Roman soldier and said that he (Timothy) must suffer like a good soldier of Christ (2Tm 2:3). If Christ could suffer, then Timothy could also suffer. Paul also was suffering for Christ. All soldiers suffer because suffering is part of a soldier's burden, and Roman soldiers were no exception. Because soldiers must guard and fight, they suffer. The same can be said of the followers of Christ who are proclaiming the gospel of Christ.

To compare the Christian with a soldier was normal in Paul's days. So, using insights from modern-day special forces to inspire Christians to fulfill their duties when it comes to the *missio Dei* may be meaningful for those who are looking for meaning.

Matthew recalls the well-known conversation between Jesus and the centurion who told Jesus that He could just speak a word so that his son/servant could be healed. The centurion (in charge of a hundred soldiers), had used the example, that he could just say, "Go!", then a soldier would go, and that he could just say, "Come!", then a soldier would come, or "Do this!", and it would be done (Mt 8:10, 13).

According to Matthew, Jesus had praised the centurion and said to His disciples that in the whole of Israel, He had never found someone with such great faith. This soldier metaphor in the Gospel of Matthew, based on a miracle type of genre cast in a historical narrative setting, certainly

had inspired the followers of Jesus to follow the centurion's example of revealing the real type of "faith" (*pistis*) (Mt 8:10,13) that is needed, when becoming a disciple of Christ.

## 12. Characteristics of Special Forces

The most important skill in the world is the skill of observation – tactical and applied observation. Special forces operators see, hear and smell things that ordinary people do not see, smell or hear (Ras 2019). They are trained to become part of the bush or desert and to become one with nature. They are taught to intentionally and intensively observe their surroundings. These observational skills are honed through constant repetition so that they mostly operate by night because in the night they can blend in, surprise the enemy, and disappear like ghosts (Strachan 2018; Stadler 2016).

Their physical fitness levels are far superior to normal soldiers, and they simply have been selected after extreme fitness tests and endurance levels that sometimes are beyond normal comprehension (Stiff 2009:427-456). This state of fitness did not happen overnight – it evolved fast over an intense period of training where they were physically deprived of basic life essentials, like food, water, sleep, and things that ordinary people take for granted. They are people who on a daily basis, know what it means to operate "mind over matter". This state of fitness radiates energy levels that are remarkable and inspirational.

It is said that special force operators are *intellectually well developed* and they can think and reason far more superiorly than the average person. Individually, their minds are sharp and the different military subjects need to master constantly hone in on their skills so that they can adapt and survive and be soldiers who can use their professional, general, specialised, technical and applied practical knowledge and insights to operate as individuals and as part of a team in the most challenging circumstances. They also have a tremendous ability to adapt to any circumstances (Vermaak and Steyn 2017:6; Stiff 2009).

Whether as part of an aggressive patrol, a demolition team, a two-man team, or as small boat operators doing beach landings in foreign territory, they are driven by set objectives and will never withdraw from their mission except in the most exceptional cases, and then it is only a form of tactical withdrawal in order to fight another day (Stadler 2016; Du Toit 2015).

One of the most important features is their *will to survive* in the most challenging and difficult circumstances on the planet. Navy SEALs are not called Navy SEALs for nothing. SEALs, as an acronym, stands for “Sea, Air and Land experts”. This means that these persons are trained to operate and survive, humanly speaking, in the most arduous circumstances at sea, in air, and on land. It is truly all about the survival of the fittest so that the military slogan, “Only the fittest will survive”, is simply a practical daily lifestyle (Du Toit 2015; Ras 2019).

### 13. Christians as Members of God’s Special Forces

Applicable to Christians who are committed to the *missio Dei* and who want “to go out and do things there”, the image of the special forces soldier, metaphorically speaking, can only inspire them to become skilled observers (search and look for opportunities to proclaim the gospel of Jesus), to be physically energetic (reveal “drive”) to go to the heathens (Mt 28:19), to be intellectually sharp to know how and when to share the gospel with the lost world, and to be driven by the zeal of God in a set and purposeful manner, knowing that they can and must survive because they know they can do all things through Christ who strengthens them (Phlp 4:13).

### 14. Special Forces’ Training and Christian Training

Navy seals, for example, as well as South African operators, are trained in long night swims, scuba diving, survival methods and techniques at sea (Du Toit 2015; Stiff 2009). As part of their specialised air training they learn about airborne operations, to use parachutes, to do high altitude high opening jumps (HAHO) and high altitude low opening (HALO) jumps, and to operate in foreign territory after air infiltration into enemy territory (Stiff 2009; Stadler 2016; Els 2013).

In the army they are trained in fieldcraft, specialised weapons, demolitions, tracking, escape and evasion, reconnaissance, map reading and survival skills. In short, they are taught to operate anywhere in the world whether it is in the bush, the jungle, the desert, the arctic circle, or in the open by simply revealing a spirit and the physical tenacity to survive in the most severe circumstances on earth.

The question that arises? What type of training do Christians get in order to go out prepared and face those who are not Christians? With what tools and knowledge are they moving out to reach souls for Christ? What training package or skills do they take with them in order to ensure they

complete their mission successfully? If special forces operators worldwide are selected according to strict criteria and are thoroughly trained in order to reach their set military objectives, then certainly Christians, especially those volunteering for full-time missionary work, can also undergo thorough training sessions in order to be better prepared for the *missio Dei*. The Commander had commanded his troops to “Go and make disciples and teach them...!” (Mt 28:18-20) – so they have no choice but to go and simply do that.

### 15. Where Do Special Forces and Christians Operate?

Special forces’ members are rigorously trained after stringent selection criteria to fight on land, in water, and in air, whether in plain, desert, forest, jungle or mountain areas. They can operate as airborne and shock troops anywhere in the world, but they also can easily infiltrate and move underwater and launch any attack where needed, using scuba gear or whatever underwater equipment they think is necessary (Du Toit 2015; Stiff 2009).

On land they were taught to do reconnaissance far behind enemy lines, to do demolition work, to do tracking and anti-tracking, to excel in communications and to reveal exceptional skills in all kinds of weaponry, fieldcraft and first aid. Members usually are also trained in extraction and evasion techniques, and if caught by the enemy, to withstand torture and to survive on bare essentials (Du Toit 2015).

In short, exceptional circumstances require exceptional people who have the brute guts and will power to go in and finish their task. It requires a physical and mental attitude that are simply exceptional and testify to the member’s will to survive and to be mission-driven. It is all about being independent of others, but depending on oneself for survival when necessary. In the church, it is all about being independent of others but dependent upon God at all times (Ras 2019).

There is no doubt that the church, in its *modus operandi*, in a world where borders count and physically exist, and where the church is constantly bombarded by enemy arrows (Eph 6) in a spiritual war that also amounts to a physical struggle (Greek: *palē*; Afrikaans: “*worstel-stryd*”) at times, needs to be operationally independent in order to make inroads and to effect positive change (Ras 2013).

On the question, “Where do Christians operate the *missio Dei*?”, the answer is simple, the same like in special forces: anywhere - on land, in the sea, and in the air. Metaphorically-speaking, Christians are also SEALS. They represent God, and they are tasked to fulfill His missions. Like special forces’ soldiers, the members of Christ are driven by His objectives, and that is, to love God and their neighbours (Mt 22:37-40) and to go out and make disciples (Mt 28:19), teaching them to observe all things He had commanded them to do.

### 16. Logotherapy and the *Missio Dei*

Logotherapy is all about meaning and the search for meaning. When the church discovers meaning in what they believe and do or attach meaning to something or somebody, then, according to Viktor Frankl’s existential psychological-philosophy, then they will be healed, happy, content, and be able to cope with any challenges coming their way (Ras 2000; Ras 2013:39-49; Ras, Ras and Zondi 2017:108-109),

A church cannot be on a mission without meaning. There must be sense and meaning in what they do. What gives meaning to Christians is their living relationship with Jesus Christ, their Lord and Saviour. Without Christ, they are nothing. They are dead in Christ, and alive through the Spirit for Him who had resurrected them through His death. Whenever someone is in Christ, he is a *kainē ktisis* – a new creation (2Cor 5:17). A creation that no longer lives for himself but for Him who has redeemed him (Rm 6:4).

This knowledge, that the Christian is a man or woman on a mission to lovingly serve Him who had redeemed him/her, is *me judice* the driving force or impetus that makes life meaningful and what carries believers through, even in the most challenging circumstances (like recesses), when in contact with anyone outside the Christian faith. Differently put, from a logotherapeutic perspective, our driving force is Christ, our logo-anchor (Ras 2019; Ras, Ras and Zondi 2017:109). Just as their military objectives drive special forces, so we are driven by Christ.

### 17. The Moving and Independent Church

The church is always on the move. Wherever disciples are moving, there the church is moving. Simplistically put, what it really means is this; if one accepts the belief that every believer in Christ is part of the body of Christ, then it means that if the believer flies tonight to New York in Delta Airways, then the church is flying tonight to New York, or Tokyo

or Peking. If the believer travels by ship like Jonah in the Old Testament, then the church is moving on sea. If the believer is working in the navy as part of a submarine crew, then the believer is submerged under water and, even there, in the small cabin of a submarine, he can and must continue with the *missio Dei* (Ras 2019).

Believers need to be independent from each other, although in fellowship with one another, but only dependent upon God. When a church is in persecution or crossing borders in territory that is anti-Christ and anti-Christian in values and sentiments, then it is operating like “special forces soldiers”. Then the church (comprising of its individual members) also needs to go on high alert, be very vigilant and observant, and move with caution in order to achieve its specific objective, and that is to make disciples of Christ.

### 18. Matthew 28:19, the *Missio Dei* and the Christian

It has become a well-known habit and custom to refer to the Christian’s command to execute the well-known command of Jesus Christ after his resurrection, as the *missio Dei*. Despite the different views and interpretations of what the *missio Dei* entails and embodies, the fact remains, and that is that the disciples of Christ, the church, need to go out and make disciples and to teach them all things which Christ had taught them (Mt 28:18-20; Ras 1998:810-831; Bosch 197; Verkuyyl 1979).

In the Gospel of Matthew, within the wider textual context, the followers of John the Baptist (Mt 3:2, 6, 11-12 and 21:31-32) had to accept his teachings, repent, be baptised and were instructed to believe in the Coming One, that was Christ. Their baptism was “proleptic in nature” in the sense that their baptism was a “deiknumic pointer” (Greek: *deiknumi*) to Jesus, the Coming One. This had differed from Christian baptism (Mt 28:19) where people were now instructed to be baptised because Jesus did come and they are now commanded to become His disciples (Greek: *mathētai* – literally: “learners”/disciples/followers) (Ras 2019).

Through the Great Commandment (Mt 28:19) Christians world-wide are bound to all be involved in the *missio Dei* and, to use evangelistic language, and to win souls for Christ. It is not enough to lead people to Christ, to “make them” believers, that is, to proclaim the gospel so that they may believe through the workings of the Holy Spirit (Rm 10). The command was to make disciples.

According to Matthew, Christ had “comprehensively” commanded his first disciples to make disciples and to teach them to observe all things He had commanded them (Mt 28:19-20). This they had to do (Greek Aorist Imperative: *mathētheusate* - Mt 28:19) in all His power (Greek: *pasa exousia* - Mt 28:18) and within His constant presence (Greek: *egō meth humōn eimi* - Mt 28:20).

### 19. The *Missio Dei* and Baptism

There is a direct relationship between the *missio Dei* and baptism. A disciple is someone who follows Jesus Christ, but it is also someone before he/she follows Him, who has accepted the teachings and instructions of the Master. This acceptance is called faith and this faith (Mt 21:32), according to Matthew, consists of repentance, a confession of sins and baptism (Mt 3:2, 6 and 21:31-32).

Baptism always precedes the *missio Dei* (Mt 28:19) because baptism is the physical visible sign of a break with the sinful past (Ac 2:37-39; 8:35-40; Rm 6:4-5; 1Cor 6:9-11; Col 2:9-13; Tt 3:4-7) and a new Spirit-filled life (Rm 8:1, 9, 10, 14; Tt 3:5). The *missio Dei* is from the point of the disciples, simple obedience to Jesus’ voice. In short, it is simply the physical going out to make disciples of Jesus because one has now become His disciple (Mt 28:19).

### 20. The *Missio Dei* and the Kingdom of Heaven / Kingdom of God

Entrance into the kingdom of heaven (Mt 3:2) / kingdom of God (Mt 21:31-32) occurs through repentance, the confession of sins and water baptism through immersion. Matthew is clear on this (Mt 3:2, 6 and 21:31-32). That was taught by John the Baptist (Mt 3:2-12) and also taught by Jesus (Mt 21:31-32).

Matthew also directly links the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom of heaven/kingdom of God (Mt 3:2 & 21:31) to the time of the coming of the Son of Man (Mt 24:14, 30; 25:31-34) (Ras 1996). According to Matthew the gospel of the kingdom must be proclaimed in the whole world before “the end” (Greek: *to telos*) comes (Mt 24:3-13, 14, 15-30) (Ras 1996; 2019).

Matthew’s Gospel depicts, through a narrative genre, that Jesus will come at the end of time after the “gospel of the kingdom” (Greek: *to euangelion tēs basileias* – Mt 24:14) has been proclaimed to the whole world. According to the author of Matthew’s Gospel, this message consists of

repentance, confession of sins, and baptism that is also called faith. In other words, faith consists of repentance (Greek: *metanoieite* – Mt 3:2), confession of sins (Greek: *exomologomenoi tas hamartias autōn* – Mt 3:6) and baptism (Greek: *ebaptizōnto* – Mt 3:6). And this, according to Matthew, makes up the message of the kingdom (Mt 3:2 and 21:31-32; 24:13-14; 25:31-34), also called the gospel or the good news of the kingdom.

From an anthropomorphic and futuristic-chronological point of view, when reading the Gospel of Matthew 24 to 25 (Ras 1996), the narrative time-line is depicted as: Jesus has not come yet because many things have not taken place yet. For example, it is said that immediately after the great tribulation (Mt 24:29-31 and 25:31-34, 46) Jesus will come, but Jesus has not come on the clouds of the sky yet. Why? Because the great tribulation (Mt 24:21-31) has taken place yet because the abomination that causes desolation has not appeared in the temple yet (Mt 24:15-29). Matthew is very precise when using his adverbs of time (Mt 24:15, 21, 29, 30; Gundry 1983; Ras 1996).

Matthew clearly said that “this gospel of the kingdom” (Greek: *touto to euangelion tēs basileias*) must first be proclaimed to the whole world (Greek: *en holē tē oikōmenē* – Mt 24:14) as a testimony to all the heathens / ethnic groups (Greek: *eis marturion pasin tois ethnesin* – Mt 24:14) “... and then the end will come” (Greek: *kai tote hēx(ks)ei to telos* – Mt 24:14).

In other words, to use Matthew’s language, Jesus will come at the end of time, but before His coming, “this gospel of the kingdom” will first be preached to all heathen/ethnic groups (Mt 24:13-14). Co-textually (lexical-syntactical context) and contextually (historical-cultural context), this gospel that must be preached, consists of a “faith package”, consisting of three things: repentance (Mt 3:2), confession of sins (Mt 3:6) and baptism through immersion (Mt 3:6). This becomes clear in, especially Mt 21:31-32 and 24:13-14). Moreover, this proclamation of the gospel directly links up with the *missio Dei* (Mt 28:19-20). The same disciples that were there when the eschatological discourse was given (Mt 24:1-3), were there when Jesus had given the missionary command (Mt 28:16) - specifically instructing them to teach the heathen “all things” (Greek: *panta hosa*) He had commanded them (Greek: *eneteilamēn humin*) (Mt 28:20).

Applicable to our modern setting, the more the present-day disciples engaged in the *missio Dei*, the more people, whether refugees, asylum seekers, foreign nationals, immigrants or people with different ethnic backgrounds and faith are made followers of Jesus, the more the church will prepare the world for the coming of the Son of Man (Mt 24:13-31; 25:31-46).

By doing missionary or evangelistic work, by proclaiming the gospel of Christ, by going out and making people disciples, the kingdom of heaven/ kingdom of God is expanding on earth and in heaven and this prepares the way for the second coming of Christ (Son of Man) on the clouds of the sky (Mt 24:13-14, 15-31; 25:31-46). This is what Matthew, the author of the first gospel, wanted to convey to his first readers, and us, the modern-day readers. Just as John the Baptist had prepared the way for the first coming of Christ, we are now preparing the way for His second coming.

### **21. Special Forces' Practices that Christians May Use When Doing the *Missio Dei***

Like special forces soldiers, Christians need to be driven by their objectives. They are called to love God, and their neighbour and their main objective are to make disciples, and this task must drive them at all times. Just as special forces are very vigilant and observant and know what is happening in their surroundings, in the same sense, Christians must be vigilant and see opportunities to do missionary work and must also identify obstacles that may impact upon what they are tasked to do.

Special forces soldiers are tough and tenacious persons who do not give up easily and the same must be said from Christians. They must not give up easily when circumstances are very difficult and demanding, especially when operating in foreign (especially Muslim) countries or across borders. Just as reccies adopt and blend into their environment, especially when it is a hostile environment (Stadler 2016), Christian missionaries and ordinary Christians who are not full-time in doing missionary work, must do the same. When Jesus sent out his disciples, He told them to be careful like the snakes. The word "careful" is the Greek word *phronimos*, which means to be "practically wise" (Mt 10:16; Abbott-Smith 1977:474).

Special forces soldiers are well-trained in the art of survival and can bear with almost anything because of the nature of their work. This includes to stay without food for periods of time, sleep deprivation, and to work under the most challenging or arduous circumstances. It is all about sacrifice.

Sacrificing food, sleep, enduring hardship and revealing a tenacious determination to complete their mission (Strachan 2018). Christians can copy these examples and must be willing to sacrifice even basic necessities of life when on special *missio Dei* missions across borders, in foreign countries, working in slums, informal settlements, cities or wherever the Lord is leading them.

### **22. Christians, the Search for Meaning, and Their Driving Force**

For the apostle Paul life was all about Christ. While imprisoned in Rome, he wrote: "...for to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phlp 1:21). He also said to the Galatians that he was crucified with Christ and that he did not live anymore, but that Christ was living in him (Gl 2:20). These words, in Paul's thoughts, were an encapsulation of his meaning in life; in other words, what he had discovered in life, that is, what was driving him.

For Paul, in logotherapeutic language, life was all about Christ. Christ is life and life is Christ. Seen from this psychological perspective, for this former Jewish zealot (Ac 22:1-10), life had made sense and became meaningful, because he had become a follower of Christ (Ac 22:8-10). Now, just as the apostle Paul could find meaning in Christ after his Damascus experience (Ac 22:6-8), so Christians today can find sense or meaning in Him. Moreover, this "meaning", Christ (the "real Meaning"), their Saviour, drives them (Christians) to be actively involved in the *missio Dei*.

From a logotherapeutic point of view, life must make sense, and whatever we do must be meaningful and assist us in our daily lives to cope and to handle even the most challenging circumstances. The problems and challenges in today's world are simply too many to mention. Human needs are huge. Physical resources are scarce, and everywhere people have to be content with a skeleton staff, and in most cases, also with limited economic opportunities, especially in war-torn states or in the so-called third world, or developmental countries. People and business organizations are very demanding, and life is not easy.

Worldwide Christian missions are accustomed to survive and to count their proverbial cents on a daily basis in order to continue with their daily tasks. As mentioned in Matthew's eschatological discourse (Mt 24-25), things will not get more comfortable. The needs are enormous, and the workers are few. Matthew also recorded that Jesus earlier had said when he saw the multitude and felt compassion for them: "The harvest is plentiful, but

the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field” (Mt 9:37-38). In other words, if Jesus is the reason why we live, then certainly we must live to tell the world about Him. Then His *missio Dei* will be our driving force.

Without Jesus, there is no *missio Dei* and without the *missio Dei*, there is no Jesus. Jesus, the Saviour (Mt 1:21; 10:32-33) is directly linked to the missionary command because He had commanded it Himself (Mt 28:18-20). All Christians and all disciples are called to go out and make disciples. Since the time of the first uttering of the great command (Mt 28:19) in the mountain area of Galilee (Mt 28:16), up to now, two thousand years later, the same command is still valid, and is still, according to the Matthean Gospel, applicable to everyone who confesses Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. The *missio Dei* is the *missio Jesu*, and the *missio Jesu* is the *missio ecclesiae*.

### 23. Conclusion

Just as special forces’ soldiers cannot run away from their mission and specific military objectives, so Christian missionaries and Christians cannot run away from the great commandment that still confronts us all on a daily basis. Discipleship is a moulding process of teaching and learning and following the Master’s voice. It is all about doing everything that He had commanded us to do, and that includes, not only to love God and our neighbour (Mt 22:37-40), but also to go out and make disciples of all the heathen (non-believers). Whether refugees, asylum seekers, foreign nationals, family or not family, we have to love every one of them, and we need to care and to share this love with them. We have no choice (Mt 28:19-20).

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#### **Author’s Declaration**

The author declares that there is no financial or personal relationship(s) that inappropriately influenced him in the writing of this article

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## The Importance of Recognising Zulu Customs and Values Consistent with Biblical Principles in African Missional Approaches

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### Abstract

*This paper is a study of the importance of recognising customs and values in missionary endeavors with reference to Southern African Zulu (hereafter referred to as Zulu) customs and values. The objective was to determine how embracing Zulu customs and values contribute to missionary endeavors. The study also sought to investigate how employing Zulu customs and values as bridges can bring Christianity in harmony with Zulu culture. A wide range of books and other sources, primarily on African traditional religion were consulted. Apart from books, a review of the Bible on the importance of recognising customs and values in missionary endeavors was attempted. The findings showed that Zulu customs and values consistent with biblical principles enhance missionary endeavors. It was also found that Zulu customs and values consistent with biblical principles contribute towards promoting Christianity among African people and can nurture them spiritually. This study motivated and prepared gospel workers to focus on future missionary endeavors. Based on the study, it is recommended that customs and values consistent with biblical principles be embraced into missionary endeavors. Klaus Fiedler argues, "African is what is relevant for Africans," of whatever origin a value or practice may be.*

### 1. Introduction

One of the leading 20<sup>th</sup> century African theologians began his book by asserting that "Africans are notoriously religious" (Mbiti 1969:2). Religion is a way of life in traditional Africa. Good or bad conduct may be informed by religion. As Christian workers, it is vitally important for us to understand African customs and values because it is the basis of numerous cultural beliefs and practices which can enhance missionary endeavors among the African people.

The intention of the article is attempting to explore predominantly selected South African Zulu customs and values which are consistent with biblical principles with a view of coming up with possible bridges that enable African people to appreciate Christianity within the context

of Africa. This article further intends to employ selected Zulu customs and values as bridges that can bring Christianity in harmony with African culture. The intention is not to address missiological concepts such as inculturation, enculturation contextualisation and so forth, but to present similarities between Christianity and African Zulu cultures which the Christian missionary can be exposed to for the purposes of bridging the gap between Christianity and African culture. Klaus Fiedler (cited by Hoschele (2008:350) argues that, "African is what is relevant for Africans, of whatever origin a value or practice may be". Writing from an inculturation perspective Kuene (2012:1) suggests that:

there are specific aspects of African culture and tradition that clearly illuminate scripture and can be useful to biblical interpretation without uprooting the African from his/her context as an African. To reject African culture and tradition as pagan and unbiblical, as did the early missionaries who brought Christianity to Africa is to throw away the baby with the bath water. There is no need for Africans to be stripped of their identity before they can be Christians.

Of key importance is the need for Africa to have a breed of theologians that will reasonably redefine African theology.

### 2. A Succinct Overview of Zulu Customs and Values

In its belief system, African culture has customs and values which may be used to promote Christianity among African people. Within its system, Zulu culture encompasses customs and values like Ubuntu, respect for elders, love for community and solidarity, parents - child relationships, fellowship, hospitality, sense of the sacred and many others. It is unfortunate that mass media and other modernizing forces seem to be successful in eroding the good that African culture had advocated. First, markers such as innocence and authority have vanished. Taboos are gone, and nothing remains to restrain evil impulses in human beings. Rather, bad elements from alien cultures are quickly embraced by Africans. Nevertheless, African customs and values consistent with biblical principles could be significant in contributing to missionary endeavors. Thus, the discussion below focuses on several African customs and values that should be incorporated in evangelism for the church to be successful in missionary endeavors within Africa.

### 3. Ubuntu

Biblically the spirit of Ubuntu is implied in Acts 2. Luke writes: “And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need.” (Ac 2:44-45). Kuene (2012:1) defines Ubuntu as “the essence of being human. It describes a pervasive spirit of caring and community, harmony, hospitality, respect, and responsiveness that individuals and groups display for one another.” In African culture today there is a cry at the disappearance of Ubuntu (Zulu/Ndebele expression for being human) or *hunhu* (Shona expression for the same). Ubuntu or *hunhu* are expressions that really cannot be translated into English. These rich expressions entail a view of life with a deep respect for people, and conditions that make life possible. In the words of du Toit (1998:49), it emphasized a spirituality of belonging to the community and to the soil itself. In the words of Desmond Tutu, “A person with ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self- assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed” (Tutu 2008). The understanding of Ubuntu by Tutu is that people with Ubuntu have strong feelings of sacrificing for the sake of others.

For Christianity to be quite attractive to Africans, it would be proper that it provides for this full expression of being human. It is plausible that African Instituted Churches (hereafter AIC) have embraced Ubuntu and other African customs and values and are successful in reaching to the core of African culture. Unfortunately, mainline churches permit doctrinally deviant movements to have an upper hand in meeting human felt needs and, in the process, fail to appeal to the longings of the African soul.

Therefore, the Christian need not find the concept of Ubuntu as a strange practice as this is also found in the Bible and needs to be presented and practiced as such among the African.

### 4. Solidarity

The Bible presents spirited arguments in favor of solidarity. The best that clearly advocates for solidarity is: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gl 3:28). “I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united the same mind and the same judgment” (1Cor 1:10).

It has been observed that Africans are looking for a church home where they can experience solidarity with their fellow church members as family members. Mbiti (1969:108,109) recognized the importance of solidarity in Africa. Hence, and as such mentions that, “The individual can only say: ‘I am because we are; and since we are therefore I am’”. Writing from a missiological perspective Okoye (1997:474) makes a valid point: “African solidarity, love for community, and respect for the aged as the most honored members of the family could be significant contribution” by Africans to the world. By employing this value system Christian workers in Africa could help the maturing church in Africa internalize Christian values of love and care for other human beings.

### 5. Sense of Respect for Elders

Peter summarizes the Bible’s teaching on respect in his first epistle: “Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king” (1Pt 2:17). The importance of respect in the Bible is further seen in the following passages: Mt 7:12; 1 Pt 2:17; Rm 12:10.

Africans also are generally admired for a strong sense of respect for those in authority and elders. According to Conton (1966:21), “Africans generally have deep and ingrained respect for old age, and even when we can find nothing to admire in an old man, we will not easily forget that his grey hairs have earned him right to courtesy and politeness”

The reason why African shows so much respect to the elderly is because they are considered to be the custodian of custom and tradition. It is interesting that the care of the aged in Africa is within the family. There are no nursing homes for the aged in Africa like in Europe and America since the elderly are cared for within the family. Parents and elderly are respected and cherished and the young ones are told to care for them. In the words of the Zulu proverb, “*ukuzala yikuzelula amathambo*” meaning to be a parent is to care and stretch yourself in your old age.

Africans also use poems to teach young people good behavior. Consider the practical example containing the moral effect of the elders’ words shared by Matei (1977:15): “In our little village when elders are around, boys must not look at girls and girls must not look at boys because the elders say, that is not good.” Thus, Africans can employ the sense of respect for the elderly to promote Christianity which also subscribes to the same virtue.

## 6. Humility

Humility is expected and expressed in many ways in Africa. African people openly and unashamedly show humility to the elderly, parents, husbands and wives and mostly to God. Men remove hats when greeting elderly folks and hold the right arm with the left hand when greeting those of age. Children kneel and thank parents by mentioning their maiden name after eating. Children offer a seat to an elderly person on a bus. Africans totally depend on God that they fully commit everything to Him. Thus, in their humility and in their dependence upon God, African people are able to be a powerful witness.

On the other hand, it is interesting to note that humility is a Christian virtue enjoying affirmation from both the Old and New Testament. The biblical characters of Moses are an example. In the Old Testament, a splendid character reference for Moses is given by God Himself, “Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all men that were on the face of the earth” (Nm 12:3). In the New Testament Jesus said, “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Mt 11:29). Now, this was not written by a relative or someone trying to make Moses and Jesus’ resumè look good so they could get a job. This is God talking about his servants.

Surprisingly, one important and often lacking in value, yet guaranteeing success in the mission field, is humility. It should be the default mode for everyone entering into missions, and especially for those directing missionary endeavors. Though humility at times is associated with weakness, studies reveal that humble missionaries are not threatened by others’ views and suggestions (Hibbert 2014:170-171). White (1977:9) maintains:

There is little that any of you can do alone. Two or more are better than one, if there will be that humility that you will esteem each other better than yourselves. If any of you consider your plans and modes of labor perfect, you greatly deceive yourselves. Counsel together with much prayer and humbleness of mind, willing to be entreated and advised.

To show the importance of humility by those involved in missionary endeavors, Elmer (2006:23) presents Christ as a meek servant. By employing the metaphors of a robe and towel, he explains that meekness, and not weakness, was exhibited when Christ put on a towel to wipe His disciples’ feet. Christ’ action is ideal in missionary endeavors.

## 7. Music as a Family Therapy and Bond

There are several accounts in the Bible which provide the strongest argument in favor of music both as a therapy and a bond. Here are some examples:

In 1 Sm 16:23, the Bible records “And whenever the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, David took the lyre and played it with his hand; so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him.” Again the power of music is revealed in 2Ki 3:15. Elisha requests: “But now bring me a minstrel.” And when the minstrel played, the power of the LORD came upon him.” In both cases, the music was used to effect healing and bond.

Studies further reveal that music is among the things that family life therapists recommend for keeping families together. Parcutt (2009:120-121) stated that, “One of music’s many functions is to bring people together and give them a common identity which evidently helps social groups to function efficiently”. This view is true because there are songs that African families sing during family togetherness ceremonies.

These could either be religious or social. Once a year an African family will gather to appease the spirits, (*umthethelo*) where songs are sung, which invite those spirits to manifest themselves through some of the possessed family members. It appears that music has many functions among Shona people, some of which are, as Webber (1982:213) pointed out, used to summon the spirits to relay a particular messages to the community; either by word of mouth or instruments and also to instill moral values to the children and the community at large. Music was also used to communicate current affairs, to recall history and to sing praises to the kings and powers that be. African cultures share a lot of commonalities, which means that what can be observed in the Shona culture seems to also be the trend in other families and people of Africa.

## 8. The Sacredness of Life

The sacredness of life is categorically stated in the Bible where God orders Christians never to murder. Moses counsels: “You shall not kill” (Ex 20:13). In the Hebrew mindset, this means you shall promote life because it is sacred. Later in the New Testament, Jesus gave this instruction for lifestyle living: “You have heard that it was said to the men of old, ‘You shall not kill, and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment” (Mt 5:21-22). By this instruction, Jesus equated anger with

death. Since life must be promoted, an element of anger that may result in killing a person must never be entertained.

From an African perspective, the shedding of human blood is abhorred. People who were killed were those whose continued existence was a threat to the life of others and to the peace of the community. In such cases, the principle that it is better for one to die than for the whole community to perish, Idowu (1980:65). War was only engaged in as a last resort after all formal and normal courses of action to search for peace had failed. Murder was not encouraged, especially within the clan. If a man consciously killed another man within the community, he, in turn, was killed. But if he killed a kinsman inadvertently, he was exiled for some long period.

Furthermore, the sacredness associated with life goes on to explain the rigidity with which the African treat and regard sexual intercourse and the sex organs. In fact, sex taboos and the demand for virgins before marriage stems from the fact of how Africans view sacredness of life. Speaking about the sanctity of life, Amadi (1982:58) makes this valid point: “The blood of virginity is the symbol that life has been preserved, that the spring of life has not already been flowing wastefully, and that both the girl and her relatives have preserved that sanctity of human reproduction”.

African values life more than anything else. This idea of the sanctity of life makes it an abomination for anyone, under any circumstances to take his own life. Suicide was never permitted. Punishment for suicide was such that the body was not buried since such a corpse was believed to be abominable to mother earth. Thus if this African custom was embraced as explained, there might have been a major difference. Traditional Africans and other people groups would have seen the church as a place for hope because its theology makes sense to them since it upholds the sanctity of life.

### 9. Parents-child Relationships

There is a striking relationship between how parents and children related in the Bible and African culture. Viewed closely, we are of the opinion that African culture and parents-child relationships are proven to be closer to the biblical injunction than the Euro-western cultures. The African parents-child relationships concept is based on Eph 6:1-3.

This passage enjoins children to obey (*hupakouete*) in Eph 6:1 as opposed to the ‘submission’ (*hupotassomenoi*) in Eph 5:21-22 which is given to wives to submit to their husbands. The *hupokouete* is imperative in the

form while *hupotassomenoi* is a participle in the passive. In strong terms, this suggests that the injunction to wives to submit to their husbands is lighter than the command for children to obey their parents. In Dt 5:16 the word ‘honor’ is also in the imperative mood. In all his words Paul seems to be saying that the parents deserve ‘double honor.’ The ‘double honor’ is because parents give children reasonable and loving boundaries in the form of rules. This is done to promote obedience over disobedience which is undesirable. Nichol also asserts that disobedience to parents ‘is treated as one of the greatest evils’ (Nichol 1980:1039). Since obedience to parents is the desired outcome, it is expected of children to show appreciation to their parents for their upbringing by reciprocating through their obedience to their parents. Paul is correct to instruct children to obey their parents because there is no other way of being grateful to them.

There are blessings for honoring parents. Paul expresses that the command to obey parents is the first commandment (*en eppangelia*) literally with a promise. The promise has two precious rewards. Firstly, that all children who obey and honor their parents are promised that it will be well with them. This could translate into success at school, success in marriage, success at work, of their offspring and success in all facets of life. To all those who do not forget their parents, they are opening for themselves a way of success.

Secondly, the command also promises longevity. In this children may be blessed to grow into ripe old age just by obeying parents. The author also strongly believes that blessings of obedience may even spill over to their posterity so that some people may actually be blessed because of how much their parent also obeyed their own parents.

Therefore African parents-child relationships concept shows how believing children can win their non-Christian parents through performing their God-ordained duty of obedience to parents and vice versa. The challenge from this article is for the church to be an advocate in the community for the rights of parents. This may include advocacy workshops in the community for the care of the aged. Setting up support groups for the neglected parents, or children, counseling for the abused and battered can be an evangelistic strategy in the community. It would be well if the church took a deliberate plan to be an education center for all positive African customs and values to the children. This includes lessons in the youth department on childhood, puberty, and marriage. This may not necessarily be only for believing children only but must include the community. If

the African church can recognize the importance of African parent-child relationships, we may win more souls by being relevant and desist from sermonizing alone.

### **10. Sense of Community**

One of the clearest Old Testament texts which demonstrate the evidence of a sense of community is Psalms 133:1: "Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity." In this psalm, David affirms the power of community consciousness among the Israelites when they gathered in Jerusalem for the great national feasts. Eaton (1967) aptly summarizes it: "From far and wide they have come to dwell in the Holy City throughout the days of the great festival. The gathering is a sign of a great reality: the communion of saints, the society of love under God."

Similarly, the sense of community and human living are highly cherished values of traditional African life. For traditional Africans, the community is an arena for reconciliation, forgiveness, and interaction. The community is also basically sacred, even though secular, and surrounded by several religious forms and symbols. The pronoun 'we', 'our' is used in everyday speech. Each person, family, clan, tribe or society has a sense of belonging. An individual has to give homage to their families. The basic essence of everything is unity. Unity in the African culture is the most integral part which makes the Africans who they are and to know their purpose of existence.

Mbiti (1969) underscores the importance of belief and sense of the community among traditional Africans. The individual in Africa does not and cannot exist alone except corporately. He owes his existence to other people, including those of past generations and his contemporaries. Whatever happens to the individual is believed to happen to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say:

"I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am. This is a cardinal point in the understanding of the African view of man" (Mbiti 1969:106).

### **11. Extended Family**

The extended family custom is not something strange in the Bible. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament have accounts of this beautiful custom respectively. The clearest biblical passages that show the importance of extended family are: "He had brought up Hadassah,

that is Esther, the daughter of his uncle, for she had neither father nor mother; the maiden was beautiful and lovely, and when her father and her mother died, Mordecai adopted her as his own daughter" (Es 2:7). "And immediately he left the synagogue, and entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon's mother-in-law lay sick with a fever, and immediately they told him of her. And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her; and she served them" (Mk 1:29-31). These biblical passages show that the networks of relationships among Mordecai and Peter's members of the family are remarkably extended and deep.

Similarly, the words 'family', 'brother' and 'sister', 'nephew' and 'niece', have a deep meaning in the African extended family. The family for the traditional African, as explained by Shorter (1975:98), mentions that this, "...usually includes one's direct parents, grand and great grandparents, brothers, sisters, uncles, and aunts, cousins, nieces and nephews" which truly defines the African extended family. The extended family, therefore, for the traditional African, usually includes one's direct parents, grand and great grandparents, brothers, sisters, uncles, and aunts, cousins, nieces and nephews. Further to this Shorter (1975:98) alludes to the fact that a child would refer to any of his uncles or aunts as his father or mother, his nephews, and nieces as his or her brothers and sisters.

People generally do not ask a child his or her personal name. Rather, a child is identified as 'a child of so and so parents.' The extended family system is the model. The molecular family pattern is alien and believed to be inimical to the traditional value of the community. Actually, it is only in recent years that the latter system began to surface mainly in urban towns as a result of external influences in the African continent. The extended family structure is held up to people as a model, one in which parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, nephews, and nieces live together and are cared for by their children grand-children and other relatives in mutual love and respect.

### **12. Mediator**

The concept of mediation is embedded in scripture. When human beings sinned, a great gulf existed between them and God. Jesus being a mediator came down and bridged the great gulf that existed between heaven and earth. Concerning the mediatory role of Jesus, the Bible records that: "His name shall be called Emmanuel...God with us" (Mt 1:23). Being God with us, Jesus came a mediator between heaven and the lost humanity (Lk

19:10). He never came to call from heaven to invite sinners to come over, but a mediator He came to lead us back to God. He said, “I am the way” (Jn 14:6). Writing about Christ’s mediatory work, John says: “My little children, I am writing this to you so that you may not sin; but if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1Jn 2:1). Jesus is our mediator; and our advocate with the Father.

In the African culture, mediation like in the bible is a common practice. In Zulu the word mediator is (*idombo*) and in Shona (*muyenzi*). *Idombo* is someone who is appointed by the family to negotiate on their behalf. If a young man is getting married, his family identifies *idombo* and sends him to the bride’s family. *Idombo* is expected to fully respect the groom’s family in terms of economic, social, physical and spiritual status. The bride’s family is convinced to entrust their daughter into the care of the son-in-law through the services offered by *idombo*. In addition, *idombo* serves as a peace builder in Africa. When biological members of the family pick a fight, *idombo* is brought in to reconcile them. Thus, Christianity in Africa can be promoted through *idombo* value because Africans are familiar with its services. Obviously, Jesus cannot be compared to an ancestor as understood in African Traditional culture as His role was to save the world from sin, but the concept of mediation is deeply rooted in African culture and as such is not a strange concept in the Bible.

### 13. Conclusion

What has been addressed in this article is the importance of taking into cognizance how missions can be effected among Africans without alienating African customs and values to be a strange phenomenon in comparison to biblical custom and values. We have succeeded in maintaining that the Christian gospel can be presented to the African in an African plate, yet without diluting the truth of the message of the gospel.

While the above ideas and suggestions on how to put the gospel in context cannot be prescriptive, they are both descriptive and provocative. They leave behind a challenge and task to which every Christian leader should subscribe to in their missionary outreach. If possible, in the line with the above suggestions each Christian leader has to come up with a deliberate plan or strategy of recognising the importance of African customs and values in missionary endeavors. If we are to depart from a lethargic, docile, indolent and superficial Christianity we have to face the reality of contextualising the gospel all around by incorporating biblical customs and values with African customs and values.

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#### Authors' Declaration

The authors declare that there is no financial or personal relationship(s) that inappropriately influenced them in the writing of this article

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## The Displaced in God's Redemptive Plan: A Missional Opportunity Through Diakonia

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#### Abstract

*The article deals with the displacement of people across the globe and questions the way individual Christians, the Church and nations, are responding to the perceived crisis of migration and refugee-ism. It argues that theologically we follow the anti-kingdom choice and reject Jesus by not choosing the way of Christ and solidarity with displaced humankind. Through a literature review, the article appropriates research by, amongst others, Rupen Das and Brent Hamoud (2017), firstly to show the nature of the task at hand and, secondly, to show how the Church might respond to this task of embracing those who are displaced. Our true response needs to be in the manner how Jesus acted towards the marginalised stranger. The implications of such action for a Christian response to displaced people are then put forward. The narrative is held together by a valuable practical theological framework that proposes four tasks of theology (Richard R. Osmer, 2008), and the writer's concluding recommendation of a fifth task aimed at ensuring continual Christian solidarity with those people who are displaced and who now exist as refugees and migrants in a strange land.*

#### 1. Introduction

With the displacement of human beings so rife in the world (while also remembering the brutal forced displacement of millions of South Africans under the apartheid regime). In this article, the question, how should the Church respond to the displaced person, especially in an era when rising nationalism, racism and discrimination seems to be rearing its ugly head again across Europe is addressed.

A poster on the cover page of a 2015 UNHCR Report<sup>1</sup> that addressed xenophobic violence in South Africa says the following: "Everyone is a foreigner somewhere". Rupen Das, a researcher at the International Baptist Theological Study Centre (IBTSC) in Amsterdam, and his colleague, student Brent Hamoud from the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary, grappled with this moral dilemma of the plight of the foreigner and the "questions, tensions, and problems of the refugee crisis facing the world today" (Das and Hamoud 2017:xxiii). As Christian activists, they wrestle with the notion of what it means for people to have a "fuller understanding

of the needs of the displaced – refugees, migrants, and the stateless” (2017). It is against this background of an estimated nearly 70-million<sup>2</sup> refugees in the world that the notion of serving those who experience displacement is examined in this article.

Returning to the methodology that is appropriated in this article, it is helpful to employ a logical, systematic approach. Thus, by utilising Osmer's four strategic tasks, guided by his four key questions, it is envisaged that this article will be beneficial for the Church and Christians in general to find ways to attend to the needs of refugees and migrants.

## **2. The Descriptive-Empirical Task: Priestly Listening – What Is Going On?**

Osmer's first analytical tool is to ask: “What is going on?” Das and Hamoud (2017:4) point out that in the last few decades, the liberation of Bangladesh, the Rwandan genocide, the Bosnian ethnic war, the civil wars of Sierra Leone and Liberia (and many other countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, Venezuela, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, etc.), have brought about “human suffering on such a massive scale that the world has had to take notice. It is evident that other humans expose large numbers of refugees and internally displaced people to immense danger and sub-human treatment. When one talks of displacement, people groups such as the Palestinians (in modern-day Israel), the Rohingya (in Myanmar, formerly Burma), Zimbabweans, Syrians, Iraqis and many others, come to mind.

As a young child growing up in the Kensington community in Cape Town in 1966, my father made me very aware of the painful displacement that he, my mom, two-month-old brother and I had to endure through forced removal from District Six near the Cape Town city centre during that year. More than fifty years later, the emotions for many displaced District Six people (and others such as those from Sophiatown) are still painfully raw. The dispossession and destruction of peoples' homes led to them being summarily discarded, displaced and deported to the outskirts of unpleasant desolate landscapes around Cape Town and other South African cities and towns.

For Das and Hamoud (2017:4), “migration and displacement are defining this moment of history”. In addition, it appears as though the scale of the displacements is resulting in the inability of the international community to cope. Das and Hamoud (2017:9) assert that displacement is a nightmare

because it destroys homes, villages, families, livelihoods and communities while dreams for the future are totally crushed. In their view, “one of the harshest losses facing the displaced is the loss of belonging to a community”. In addition, the real threat of the loss of identity undermines their sense of self.

Further, Das and Hamoud (2017:9) explain that, in the painful reality of displaced human beings, they struggle to find meaning in who they are, based on where they come from, the jobs they have, the family or tribe they belong to, or the lands and possessions they own. Many even face a severe legal loss of identity as the process of displacement robs them of their nationality or their ability to substantiate their own official status in this world. At nearly all levels of existence, displacement damages the security of belonging and shows the vulnerability that people are exposed to, as Das and Hamoud (2017:65-66) explain the real-life account of a Syrian grandmother who found refuge in Lebanon:

Weary from the years and exhausted from the day, Miriam sat down and showed a piece of paper that would determine her practical status and dominate her psychological state. ‘it's official; we are refugees,’ she lamented. They had spent years avoiding this situation but now found it inevitable, and the indictment was total. Miriam, a grandmother who had simply intended to live out her days on her land in the company of her family, had reached rock bottom. She had become an occupier of another person's space, an unwanted guest in a foreign land, a liability to her new country of residency, and a legal dilemma for her world. Miriam had become a refugee.

At the same time, refugees who escape from wars, violence and economic hardships, very often enter environments where they face even more levels of dehumanisation and hostility by the very people whom they are running towards for safety and acceptance. As in the case of South African society, where centuries-old entrenched racist, colonial under-currents are still at play,<sup>3</sup> many people are still living as “dehumanised” individuals and communities, experiencing generational poverty and unjust hardship.

In the well-documented history of the church during colonial and apartheid South Africa, it was also evident that the church was not only silent but also complicit in formally instituting legal laws to displace human beings from their habitats. In the South African context, certain parts of the

church were extremely quiet during the forced displacement of non-white people from their homes (De Gruchy & De Gruchy, 2005).

Further, Professor Henry Mbaya (2018), in his book *Resistance to and Acquiescence in Apartheid* argued that the acquiescence of the church also largely contributed to the ineffectiveness of the church to make a strong case against the myriad injustices perpetrated by Christians against other Christians and people of other faith persuasions during the apartheid era, including the legalised violent displacement of whole communities of non-white people in South Africa during the 1960s and beyond. To a large extent, the displacement of masses of people is continuing around the world at an unprecedented pace. This leads us to ask the critical question: *Why is this going on?*

### 3. The Interpretative Task: Sagely Wisdom – Why Is It Going On?

When looking at the current global refugee situation, the reasons for the displacement of people appear to be primarily due to armed conflict and violence. According to the Rule of Law in Armed Conflicts (RULAC) website<sup>4</sup>, there have been more than forty armed conflicts since 2017 that have caused thousands of deaths and millions of people to flee from their homes in search of safety. As has been witnessed on many international television news channels such as Al Jazeera (such as the report, “Refugees face increasingly perilous journeys to Europe”, by Jonah Hull on 5 December 2017), Sky News, BBC, etc., many of these refugees attempt to flee across dangerous seas, deserts and mountainous terrain towards Europe, Australia, the United States of America and other countries where there are no armed conflicts.

Ironically, these flights for safety cause many refugees to lose their lives at sea, in the desert or freezing (or scorching) overland temperatures. Along the way also, they are exposed to human-traffickers who extort them of any money or valuable belongings – until they meet the “West” at the borders of countries who seem to shut its doors on them. Nürnberger (2005:175) contends that “in the West, the quest for emancipation and the quest for self-interest have crowded out communal and social responsibility to an alarming extent”. No wonder then that many “democratic countries” are turning away refugees at their doorsteps.

In addition, Sobrino (2008:38) gives some indication as to how these conflicts, that ultimately displace people and create refugees, are fuelled:

- The spending on arms is estimated at \$2.68 billion a day

- The arms market is one of the most profitable for all governments of the international community. The countries of the G-8 together with China, are responsible for 90% of arms exports. At least half a million people are killed annually with small arms
- The objective of globalisation is to dominate other people, another country, another world...

For Sobrino (2008), “all of this – whether hunger, the spread of arms, or forced displacement of people for lack of land, water, or soil – results in death, either directly or indirectly”. Analysing Sobrino’s perspectives, it could be fair to argue that migrants and refugees are in most cases, deprived of life and livelihoods. “Their death is therefore not only a negation of life but also a negation of fraternity” (Sobrino 2008:81). Sobrino takes a rather strong (but plausible) view of the situation when he asserts that the “negation of life” is due to the active presence of sin in the world “which configures the world as an anti-kingdom”, a kingdom that opposes everything that the church ought to stand for. Substantiating this anti-kingdom narrative, Sobrino (2008:83) asserts:

There is more wealth on Earth, but also more injustice. Africa has been called the world’s ‘dungeon’...Some 2.5 billion people survive on earth with less than two Euros a day, and 25 000 persons die daily of hunger, according to the FAO. Desertification threatens the life of 1.2 billion people in some one hundred countries... Immigrants are denied fraternity and even the ground beneath their feet. The United States is building a 1500 kilometre wall against Latin America, while Europe is raising up a barrier against Africa in southern Spain.

While there are, of course, countless other reasons why people become refugees and/or migrants, the brief description given above is, therefore, a limited perspective, but an important one, that gives insight as to why this is happening. With the question that has been answered, and with refugees now facing other challenges of rejection in the countries that they have fled to, a third important question needs to be asked concerning the response of the church in this specific situation: *What ought to be going on?*

### 4. The Normative Task: Prophetic Discernment – What Ought To Be Going On?

Bosch (1991:519) problematises the notion of Christian mission through

the ages when he draws from Dietrich Bonhoeffer who “viewed the church’s foreign missionary enterprise as a fight for self-preservation”. He goes further when he quotes James Hessig, who termed Christian mission as “the selfish war”. This leaves one to investigate what the norm should be for the church in mission.

Matthey (2010:87) argues that the *normative* function of the church in mission is borne in strong convictions of which he highlights three fundamental principles:

1. Mission begins in the heart of the triune God. The love which binds together the persons of the Holy Trinity overflows in a great outpouring of love for humankind and all creation
2. God calls the church in Jesus Christ and empowers it by the Holy Spirit to be a partner in God’s mission, bearing witness to the gospel of the love of God made clear in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and inviting people to become disciples of Christ
3. Christian mission involves a holistic response through evangelistic and diaconal work to reach out to people in their experience of exclusion, brokenness and meaninglessness. It involves the empowerment, affirmation and renewal of people in their hope for fullness of life

Matthey’s approach, therefore, proposes a *normative* methodology for the church’s role in the lives of those who have been displaced. It is a methodology that hints at the need for a “kingdom of God” mindset that embraces the marginalised migrant.

Keeping in mind Matthey’s normative methodology, another theologian, Bryant Myers (1999:46-50), proposes three theological ideas that seem more than useful for Christians who are serious about the transformation of society or, with relevance to this article’s topic, towards the *missio Dei* in a migrant world. Myers highlights these three concepts as follows:

1. Incarnation
2. Redemption
3. The kingdom of God

*Incarnation:* Myers (1999:46) uses the Incarnation as a powerful theological metaphor for those who practice transformational development for three main reasons.

First, the Incarnation is the best evidence we have for how seriously God takes the material world. The Incarnation defeats any argument that God is only concerned for the spiritual realm and that the material is somehow evil or unworthy of the church’s attention. God embodied himself and became concrete and real. It was possible to touch God’s wounds and hear God’s voice. This suggests that *doing* transformational development or mission is what God does. Thus, to declare that the mission of the church is solely about spiritual things ignores the Incarnation.

Second, the Incarnation provides a highly instructive model for how we must be willing to practice mission. God emptied himself of his prerogatives and, therefore, seemingly poses the question of whether or not we as Christians are willing to empty ourselves of ours.

Third, we must always remember that Jesus chose freely to empty himself of his prerogatives as God, making himself nothing. The entire purpose of the exercise was to invite people to redirect their lives and to provide the means by which they could do so.

Das and Hamoud (2017:75) provide a vivid perspective of the incarnation that also provides valuable insight into the significance of God’s redemption plan for the displaced:

While human migration often strives for upward mobility, and trying to live with dignity, the incarnation is downward mobility and the divine willingness to undergo the most horrific degrading indignities possible (Phlp 2:5-11). To cross this divide, God gives himself...

*Redemption:* Myers (1999:47) speaks of redemption being material as well as spiritual. In the context of a modern-day church encountering a *migrant world*, this notion seems to resonate with the *spirit of missio Dei* and God’s ultimate plan for humanity and all of creation. Jacques (1986:63) reinforces the vital point that “...God’s plan is redemption, and Jesus came to bring ‘good news to the poor’ (Lk 4:18). Thus, if the point of the biblical story is to redeem and redirect the trajectory of the human story after the fall, then Christians ought to be engaged in seizing the moment that the great migration of people across the globe is presenting

to the church today. The situation of refugee-ism and migration offers the church and individual Christians an opportunity to participate in God's redemption plan for all people.

It is worth reminding ourselves that this work of mission to the displaced is part of God's redemptive work. So, if God is working to redeem and restore the whole of creation, human beings, all living things, and the creation itself, then individual Christians need to ask: "How am I positioned in God's work of redemption and to what extent am I a part of God's redemptive plan in our migrant world?"

Lastly, because God is working out His redemptive plan in spiritual, physical, social and global realms, this also means that we are God's agents of redemption, however flawed and unsatisfactory we may be in this incredible role. When we serve others, we are working as God's hands and feet.

*The Kingdom of God:* Myers (1999:47) speaks of the kingdom of God as an important biblical concept that Jesus talked about very often. The kingdom of God was the subject of Christ's first sermon (Mk 1:14), was the only thing he called the gospel (Mt 4:23), and was the topic on which he focused his teachings to the disciples during his last forty days on earth (Ac 1:3). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said that the kingdom of God was the first thing we should seek and that everything else will follow. Hence, Myers (1999:48) argues that the kingdom of God is an important idea for those who work for human transformation.

Thus, to work for human transformation as a Christian means working for the redemption of people, their social systems, and the environment that sustains their life – a whole gospel for all of life. This is the kingdom of God (Myers 1999:49).

Hughes and Bennett (1998:31) takes the notion of the kingdom of God even further. They assert that 'life' and the 'kingdom of God' are deemed to be synonymous in the afore-said section of Mark's gospel and is particularly significant for our understanding of Jesus' teaching in John's gospel. It is a kingdom which is so different from the world which has not bowed before God but continually seeks to reach out to the world. Jesus' parables about the kingdom, emphasise that members of the kingdom are part of an organism which has begun to grow into something that will fill the whole world. In trying to help us understand our role in society,

and in this case, the displaced, migrant and refugee, Hughes & Bennett (1998:32) conclude:

God fulfills his aims for the world through a humanity that retains something of the image of God, but he works particularly through those who are being 'transformed' into the likeness of Jesus. Overall, God intends that his providential concern for the whole of humanity should point humanity to the fuller experience of his care and authority that awaits them if they bow before him and enter his kingdom

When Gutierrez (1974:11) reflects critically on theology, he believes that "[b]y preaching the Gospel message, by its sacraments, and by the charity of its members, the Church proclaims and shelters the gift of the Kingdom of God in the heart of human history. The Christian community professes a faith which works through charity." If this is true, then Gutierrez (1974:13), drawing from Schillebeeckx, challenges Christians even further when he says:

The hermeneutics of the Kingdom of God...consists especially in making the world a better place. Only in this way will I be able to discover what the Kingdom of God means.

Thus, Gutierrez (1974:15) proposes a theology which does not stop with reflecting on the world, but instead tries to be part of the process through which the world is transformed. It is a theology which is open – in the protest against trampled human dignity, in the struggle against the plunder of the vast majority of people, in liberating love, and in the building of a new, just and fraternal society – to the gift of the kingdom of God. Finally, in support of Gutierrez's perspective, Rieger (1998:207) argues that the kingdom of God cannot emerge without our acceptance of this dynamic in the following Eucharistic 'dialectic' of (1), thanksgiving to God and (2), in deeds done for our brothers and sisters. From this perspective, Christian praxis is highlighted at least as strongly as Christ's concrete presence. This, it is proposed, is what ought to be going on. *But how could we respond?*

### **5. The Pragmatic Task: Servant Leadership – How Could We Respond?**

In a story on the Amnesty International website<sup>5</sup> by an American living in Arizona, he describes the threat by the American government to sentence him to twenty years in prison for giving water, food and clothing to

migrants who had just crossed the Arizona Desert in search of safety and a better life in the United States of America – a country historically made up of migrants who later “swallowed up” the original, indigenous “first nation” population. This “humanitarian volunteer” as he calls himself and those from his small town of Ajo near the Mexican border, laments:

In Ajo, my community has provided food and water to those travelling through the desert for decades - for generations. Whatever happens with my trial, the next day, someone will walk in from the desert and knock on someone's door, and the person who answers will respond to the needs of that traveller. If they are thirsty, we will offer them water; we will not ask for documents beforehand. The government should not make that a crime.

From this human volunteer's experience, it is clear, therefore, that even the wealthiest government in the world (and perhaps also the most unashamedly-Christian) is not prepared to assist with the basic needs of indigent human beings. It appears as though there is a clear disconnect between Christian faith and Christian action or service in this case. This real scenario seems worse than those religious people who failed to attend to the injured traveller in Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan. In the case of the man from Ajo, he is even threatened with twenty years in jail (in *Christian America*) for following the biblical principle to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, etc. (Mt 25). His (humanitarian) diaconal work has been seen as a threat to the American way of life. How ironic for a country that can be undoubtedly regarded as a country of migrants. This fact was echoed earlier by Jacques (1986:70):

In the United States, the continuing controversy between the government and Christian congregations about protection for Central American refugees is proof enough that the risks are real.

‘Sanctuary is not only an expression of compassion and the opening of our hearts to those in great need; it is not just a means of expanding our horizons or thinking globally; more important, it is a way of speaking the truth to power, of speaking out against the US government's unjust interpretation of refugee laws’, wrote Mary Ann Lundy, one of the eleven church workers accused by the US government of transporting and harbouring undocumented Central American refugees as part of their work for the Sanctuary Movement.

With this hint of *diakonia*, understood to mean Christian service (even at a risk of facing repercussions from governments) to others, Carlos Ham in Dietrich *et al* (2014:112-120) proposes five useful dimensions of an empowering *diakonia* that can be useful for Christians as we encounter migrants and refugees in our daily lives. These five dimensions, briefly introduced here, can provide a logical framework for helping Christians to participate effectively in the lives of migrants and refugees in our midst.

First, an empowering *diakonia* is *visional*. A diaconal vision is inspired and empowered by God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is an empowering vision that affirms the fact that a different world is possible, and, seeking empowerment, it is also a vision that empowers for diaconal action. This visional aspect also accepts that a ‘*diakonia* of the marginalised’ is crucial for the church's engagement in realising God's alternative vision of the world.

Second, an empowering *diakonia* model is *normative*. This relates to the biblical or Christocentric standards that serve as a point of reference for Christian behaviour. These norms and standards thus provide meaning for the actions of the church. It is expressed in our core values, principles and standards in our judgment of what is important in life. Thus, a diaconal engagement is not an option, but part of the essence of ‘being church’, it is normative, essential for its mission, and therefore a faith-based empowered service (Ham in Dietrich *et al* 2014:113).

Third, an empowering *diakonia* is *need-oriented*. A needs-based perspective speaks to the social intervention of the church as it confronts holistically and prophetically the powers that seemingly prove so destructive in the lives of people. For Ham (in Dietrich *et al* 2014:113), the needs-oriented dimension of an empowering *diakonia*, also activates a feeling of solidarity, especially when Christians see the needs of others. When the Christian's values are activated from this perspective of solidarity, “we are motivated and challenged by the reality of people when their dignity is being neglected, and our values are being challenged in order to improve this situation.” Ham (2014:118) emphasises that, when Christian values transition to action, *diakonia* becomes “a Christian response to people in need and situations of crisis, and is characterised by actions of reaching out to them from locations of power and privilege with resources and infrastructure”. This principle of solidarity is reinforced by Biyela in Bloomquist and Filibus (2007:133) who emphasise that *diakonia* is a visible way for the church to show its solidarity with the poor, and the

marginalized refugee-migrant by extension.

Fourth, an empowering *diakonia* is *contextual*. This implies that, in considering a theology and praxis that is contextual, the church is guided and informed not only by its vision but also by the social-political-economic-ecological context in which it is serving. It points to an open-mindedness that understands the surrounding reality and challenges that people and the environment face in today's world. As the church, "we seek for an empowered action that regenerates the lives of people".

Thus, taken from this life-enhancing, regenerating perspective, it is evident that Christians – and historically Christian countries – are being given a tremendous opportunity to contribute to the well-being of refugees and migrants in this generation. Ham in Dietrich (2014:118), drawing from the World Council of Churches (WCC document on Theological Perspectives on *Diakonia*, makes a very argument for the role of the church in every context. Ham (2014) reinforces this point and asserts that every Christian community, in every geo-political and socio-economic context is called to be a diaconal community, witnessing to God's transforming grace through acts of service that hold forth the promise of God's reign. It heals relationships, and nurtures partnerships for the sake of God's good creation.

Fifth, an empowering *diakonia* is *transformative*. It is Ham's contention that a transformative empowering *diakonia* elevates a diaconal vision that urges and empowers us to address the needs of people and the whole creation, both locally and globally, which will be effective through concrete prophetic actions towards transformative justice. In situations of injustice, action is required, a diaconal pro-action which is transformative, asking what difference it makes (in Dietrich 2014:118). Biyela in Bloomquist & Filibus (2007:133) hold a similar view and argue that "[i]n this world of poverty in the midst of affluence, we need *diakonia*, caring for the needy, as central to church praxis. Thus, a strong emphasis is placed on a *diakonia* that will be effective through concrete prophetic actions towards social transformation and justice. Ham (in Dietrich 2014:119) reinforces the "humaneness" and transformative imperative when he asserts "*diakonia*... is service that makes the celebration of life possible for all. It is faith-effecting change, transforming people and situations so that God's reign may be real in the lives of all people, in every here-and-now."

## 6. The Christ Task: A Spirituality of Presence – A Christian Imperative of Incarnational Witness and Solidarity

Given the theme of *refugees, migrants and missio Dei*, Biyela's (in Bloomquist and Filibus 2007:133) suggestion of a church praxis that equates to the ministry of empowerment through *diakonia*, appears very feasible. He reinforces this "Christ task" of believers and the church as follows:

The church is the presence of the healing Christ in a broken world. I spoke about *Imitato Christi*, doing as Christ did. To be more correct, through the church Jesus Christ is continuing what he did in the first century. Jesus was in solidarity with the poor, and he calls upon the church to do the same...where Christ is, the church is also...If Christ is with the poor, the church also must be with the poor.

Further, Osmer (2008:33-34) argues that a spirituality of presence is what is needed in understanding and supporting people who are in need. Osmer describes a spirituality of presence as a "spiritual orientation of attending to others in their particularity and otherness within the presence of God". For Osmer, the key term here is "attending", while relating to others with openness, attentiveness, and prayerfulness. One of the challenges that Osmer (2008:34) foresees is that we may begin to act like the religious leaders who walked by the traveller in distress in the parable of the Good Samaritan, thus failing to even notice – let alone, stop and help - those individuals and groups who are suffering and in need. Ultimately, the key task of practical theological interpretation is grounded in a spirituality of presence, and a matter of attending to what is going on in the lives of individuals, families, and communities.

It is exactly at this point where congregational leaders must face up to certain challenges. For instance, Osmer (2008) asks "How can we lead if we fail to attend to others in their particularity and otherness? What sort of influence do we have to offer if we have not struggled to overcome our own tendency to not listen, to rush to judgment, and to ignore the suffering of others in our midst?" As such, Osmer argues that, unless we first learn to attend, we cannot really lead.

Lastly, Osmer (2008:35) offers the act of intercessory prayer as a clear perspective of what he regards as a helpful theological starting point for thinking about attending to the needs of others. He regards intercessory

prayer as a priestly act only when the leader does not merely pray about the people but also offers prayer to God from the people on their behalf. And to pray on their behalf, one must enter into their lives to the point that one begins to feel what they feel, yet without losing one's identity.

Osmer (2008:35) adds that having such an attitude of intercessory prayer requires entering into the situation of others through personal contact, listening, and empathetic imagination, it then moves upward to God, placing their needs and concerns before God in prayer on their behalf. This two-fold movement reflects the pattern of the priestly office of Jesus Christ, who, in his incarnation, entered fully into the suffering and beauty of finite existence, and who, in his life of obedience and sacrificial death he made an offering to God on humanity's behalf. This "Christ task", of seeing, listening, understanding and serving the refugee in a meaningful way that does not adversely impact the human dignity of the refugee (or migrant) is, therefore, a task that is not a matter of choice so to speak, but a normative Christian obligation that is synonymous with God's redemptive plan for humanity. It is what Jacques (1986:69) calls, a *diakonia* that "demands of individuals and churches a giving which comes not out of what they have, but out of what they are – those bearing the name of "Christ" in their "Christ-ian" identity – and asserts:

Migration confronts the churches with the question of whether they are truly ecumenical, in the sense that they are not so imprisoned within one culture that they cannot be a spiritual home for those who come from another culture. The problems of migration are in reality a test as to whether the Church does not only preach the Universal Church, but lives as part of the Church Universal

## 7. Conclusion

In the light of the *Missio Dei*, it is evident that a great opportunity exists for the church, to engage refugees and migrants at least diaconally wherever the church finds itself. As Bosch (1991:519) insists, **the mission of the church** continually needs to be renewed and re-conceived. Mission is not a competition with other religions, not a conversion activity, not expanding the faith, not building up the kingdom of God; neither is it social, economic or political activity (although there is merit in all these aspects). So, the church's concern is conversion, church growth, the reign of God, economy, society, and politics – but in a different manner! Thus, mission is "the participation of Christians in the liberating mission of Jesus...It is the good news of God's love, incarnated in the witness of a

community, for the sake of the world". When seen from this perspective, one could argue that migration of people across the world, presents the church with a missional opportunity as its members genuinely fulfill the *missio Dei* via serving those who are seeking refuge in different geopolitical boundaries.

Das and Hamoud (2017:7) suggest that many Christian faith communities should see refugees and migrants as a missional opportunity. They argue that, as many traditional institutional churches have retreated in their commitment to global missions, they see the presence of foreigners in their communities as God bringing the mission field to them. In many instances in Europe, where large numbers of migrants have entered the life of the local church, migrant churches are now contributing significantly to the "vitality of worship and Christian life to denominations that have been stagnant for decades. In some denominations in Europe, church growth is almost completely attributable to the growth of the migrant churches".

The Church should, therefore, be a place where displaced individuals, who are essentially victims who have lost their families, homes and communities, can always find a welcoming sense of community that allows them to experience belonging again. This reality, of lonely and lost migrants, refugees and foreigners who have been displaced from all that is familiar to them, creates openness towards God in their desperation for safety and belonging (Das and Hamoud 2017:7-8). Let the church be the church as it continually reflects on the "Christ task" of a diaconally-centred *doing* theology. As Jacques (1986:71) asserts, it is, therefore, the individual and collective responsibility of Christians towards refugees and migrants, to take measures to enable them again to be subjects and not objects of history. By welcoming strangers, and by taking action in the public arena, the church makes its struggle for justice, God's will for all, more authentic and credible, thus reaffirming God's redemption plan for all of humankind. The church should be the "tangible hope" that refugees and migrants look to the world over.

## 8. Notes

1. Weblink <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/559f9c004.pdf> (Accessed 29 May 2019)

2. The call for papers highlight that, in 2018, according to the United Nations, there were over 68 million forcibly displaced in the world. This fact is substantiated in the UN weblink <https://www.unhcr.org/figures->

at-a-glance.html that indicates the displacement of 68.5 million people globally up until 2018 (accessed 29 March 2019).

<sup>3</sup> In his Mail & Guardian article of 9 June 2016, "Look at the kwerekwere in the mirror", Professor Tinyiko Maluleke highlights the hard work that lies ahead for South Africans in embracing not only refugees, but also fellow South Africans.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.rulac.org/news/the-war-report-armed-conflicts-in-2017> (Accessed 30 May 2019)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2019/05/i-gave-water-to-migrants-crossing-the-arizona-desert-and-they-charged-me-with-a-felony/> (Accessed 29 May 2019)

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## Author's Declaration

The author declares that there is no financial or personal relationship(s) that inappropriately influenced him in the writing of this article

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## The Groaning Creation: Is There Any Hope? Engaging Brueggemann on Social Justice

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### Abstract

The Background to this study is the understanding that one of the challenges facing developing countries, and particularly the Democratic Republic of Congo, is the issue of social justice, a lack of socio equilibria. For instance, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, despite being the richest country in the world in terms of its resources, the daily average income is still inhuman, ranging from 1.2 USD to 2 USD per person per day. Mismanagement of natural resources, coupled with corruption, external exploitation, envy, a broken justice system, and an indecent taxation system result in people to having a poor quality of life.

The purpose of this paper is to address the challenge of social justice in developing countries, taking as a case study the Democratic Republic of Congo, and to propose a prophetic theology opposing the social disequilibria and announce hope for an alternative future. This paper uses the theology of Brueggemann on social justice and applies it to developing countries challenged by an oppressive and imperial system, with special reference to Democratic Republic of Congo.

My conclusion is that Social justice in most of the developing countries is threatened by the imperial system, by the monopolistic embodiment of the complex system of the state in an individual, and by oppressive social policies. Brueggemann's understanding of social justice leads his readers to search for the common good and seek for hope of an alternative future for every human being.

### 1. Introduction

Many countries live in the age of darkness in which confusing realities, selfishness, the spread of all kind of evil, rebellion which makes refugees, killings, interminable wars and terrorism whose perpetrators claim to have the right to behave in the way they do. The world seems to have become liveable only to those who have power and who work on owing others. The world becomes a jungle without socio-equilibria, that results from the decline of the social environment. The powerless plunge into a deep well

## SECTION D: SPECIAL INTEREST

of despair, and the future becomes black. Their cry is that they are ‘thirsty for justice’.

Who can cry out against the spreading of the legitimate socio-injustice spreading around? Some choose the way of neutrality, others are fatalistic, while some others cry out. Many scholars have pointed out on the way of acting on such realities:

Albert Einstein quoted by Fitzhenry (1993:356), said; ‘The world is dangerous to live not because of those who do evil, but because of those who let it happen’.

If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor (Desmond Tutu).

Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter. The ultimate tragedy is not the oppression and cruelty by the bad people but the silence over that by the good people. In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends (Luther 1987).

The previous declarations resonate with Lamentations 5:1-22 when becoming the daily reality in many of the African inhabitants, mostly the Congolese.

The present reflection considers the theological view of social justice in Brueggemann’s understanding; he stresses that justice is the pillar of the common good that all human beings deserve. It requires imagination and the search for a better world as stated by him, “The great crisis among us is the crisis of ‘common good’. We face a crisis about the common good because there are powerful forces at work among us to resist the common good, to violate community solidarity, and to deny a common destiny” (Brueggemann 2010:1).

Two objectives will be considered in this article: The first one is to view the social justice challenge in developing countries, using the Democratic Republic of Congo as a case study. And the second one is to propose the relevance of social justice in Brueggemann’s thoughts.

## 2. Challenges of Social Justice in the Developing World. Case of Democratic Republic of Congo

The Democratic Republic of Congo is in the central part of the African

continent, with a population of 82,242,685. The country was viewed in 1960 as one of the most promising countries in Africa. Unfortunately the 1990s, despite abundant natural resources, saw the beginning of a state of economic and political collapse (Matti 2010:401). There are over 1100 types of minerals according to the World Bank, with an estimated value of 24 trillion USD, which is equivalent to the GDP of the United States and the European Union combined. The Democratic Republic of Congo has 64% of the world’s known coltan reserves, 10% of copper, 30% of diamonds and gold deposits among the most promising on the planet. For instance, the Albert lake is the richest lake in terms of the number of fish in the world, and the Kivu Lake contains methane gas that has never been exploited (Gerstl *et al* 2013:2). Based on its natural resources, the Democratic Republic of Congo is potentially the richest country in the world (Mercier 2009:13).

Despite all its resources, the Democratic Republic of Congo is one of the poorest countries worldwide. The average life expectancy for a Congolese citizen is 48-50 years which is below the sub-Saharan average of 56.6 years and that of developing countries where the average is 61.5 years (Ngonga 2015:60). Based on the global average, the Congolese expectation is low. According to the infant mortality rate, the country rose from 2005 to 2013 from 58 to 92 deaths per 1000 children. About 30.8% of children aged 6 to 59 months suffer from malaria (Ngonga, 2015:60,70).

On literacy rates, Mabaya and Mwamba talk about the net enrolment ratios from 51.7% in 2001 to 80.4% in 2013 (Ngonga 2015:87). This means that the enrolment increased but promises made by the government on the free primary education is only a slogan. The school fees for primary and high school are so high, that many children are unable to attend school. The report of the Central Bank shows the collapse of the percentage in the educational budget which was 30% in 1960, the year of independence; 19% in 1970; 16.8 in 1983; 0.5 in 1994; 0.3 in 2005 and 2006; 2.1 in 2007; 1.8 in 2008; 0.1 in 2009; 0.6 in 2010; 0.3 in 2011; 0.9 in 2012; 0.3 in 2013 and 0.6 in 2014. In sum, the allocated percentage to education in the state budget has decreased from 30% in 1960 to 0.6% in 2014 (Nyembo 2014:78). This picture shows that education is not a priority in such a country. The result is that the average salary of both a primary and a high school teacher is around 70 USD per month, yet the average cost of living for a small family is around 500 USD. Meanwhile many teachers in the country have not been paid for more than ten years. Yet in 1963 the salary of the workers was around 2,750 FRF equivalent to 55.22 USD. When

using the Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation calculator, in January 1963, 55.22 USD were the equivalent today of 444.64 USD; though it was not considered enough by the government (Jorge Beys 1963:21).

Noticing that nothing can replace education in the transformation of society, it is proved that the destructive power in the Democratic Republic of Congo is the educational system according to Freire's understanding of education when arguing as follow, "In fact, those who, in learning to read and write, come to a new awareness of selfhood and begin to look critically at the social situation in which they find themselves, often take the initiative in acting to transform the society that has denied them this opportunity of participation. Education is once again a subversive force" (Freire 2005:29).

In Freire's understanding, the way we consider educational matters today shows the way we want to see our society tomorrow. Yet education (and schooling) was one of the first rights granted to children, as in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century (Kosher *et al* 2014:11). The above picture of life expectancy, infant mortality, illiteracy, lack of good education, are signs of poverty.

In reference to poverty, the Congolese Central Bank's indices show a gross income per inhabitant of 250 USD in 2000 and 444 USD per year in 2016 (Nyembo 2014:30). It shows an average of 1.2 USD per capita per day, compared with Mabaya and Mwamba, who talk about 411 USD in 2000 and 746 USD in 2014, according to the World Bank's WDI database (Ngonga 2015:87). However, in both cases, the daily average is still inhuman, ranging from 1.2 USD to 2 USD per person per day. More than 64.2% of Congolese live without electricity (Ngonga 2015:70).

Considering the monthly minimum wage in dollars, 82.2% of workers are regarded as being, to all intents and purposes, unemployed. Although the country is incredibly rich in terms of natural resources, it has long been under the curse of this wealth (Witness 2004:4).

With regard to the above statements, four causes of poverty can be considered in many developing countries, and particularly in the Democratic Republic of Congo:

- i. Firstly, there is mismanagement of natural resources and corruption. According to the ratio of the "quintiles", the average income in 2007 of the 20% of the richest Congolese was 15.1 Times higher than that of 20% of the poorest. In his discussion

on the end of poverty, Sachs (2005:56) presents poverty as a result of a corrupt leadership and retrograde culture that impede modern development. According to the Transparency International Index (IIAG 2018) the Democratic Republic of Congo features as the 161<sup>th</sup> out of 180 listed countries on the corruption perception index of 2017.

- ii. Secondly, there is external exploitation and envy. International firms and lobbies exploit weak countries. Lack of control of those mining enterprises by the legal systems of the country encourages an increase in corruption. The country assists a lot of informal trading. The second way of exploitation is through external debt. World economic and banking policies have been set to exploit those who are in the developing countries. Generally, the global economic and banking systems are mostly against the poor.
- iii. Thirdly, the justice system is corrupt. Justice is one of the pillars of a true and strong democracy. One of the causes of corruption in the justice system is the lack of good salary for the exploited people and greed on the side of the oppressor. Mvioki argues that since the second Republic, the Congolese state has resigned its role as employer (Mabiala 2006:183). The justice system in the developing countries depends on those who are in power.
- iv. And the fourth cause of poverty is the taxation system. As in Jesus' time, taxation was perceived in multiple payments; this was a system that resulted in deepening poverty in Israel. Moltmann (1999:99-100) affirms that Jesus uses "man who has experienced violence" as a counter-term of "poor". The tax collector makes some other people poor and enriches himself at their expense. He becomes rich because he cheats by exploiting his power to further impoverish the poor because of the powerlessness of the poor.

The previous section needs to be addressed by a social justice theology to mitigate social disequilibria which becomes a threat to our society.

### **3. The Need for Social Justice and Prophetic Theology in Brueggemann's Context**

Walter Brueggemann is considered as one of the distinguished Bible interpreters of our time. One of his prominent books is *The prophetic*

*imagination*, published in 1978. His reading of the Bible focused on social justice which is the aim of this reflection.

### **3.1 Social Justice**

Social justice is concerned with the way social goods and social power are distributed. Brueggemann (1997:736-738) sees the Mosaic tradition as more focused on distributive justice than on retributive justice. Social justice entails equity in redistribution of resources, equal access to services, resources, power, knowledge or information. In the social justice process, people must be empowered to participate in the process that affects their lives by addressing power imbalances. Brueggemann's view will be discussed in a later section.

The Biblical narrative of Micah 2:1-5 inspires us when the prophet denounces injustice resulting from leaders' abuse of their power. The context of Micah is relevant nowadays. The matter of social justice must be considered as an integral dimension of spiritual life. It should not be considered primarily as the result of some social policies, rather as the expression of our obedience to the Gospel of the Lord.

The current society needs social justice that is both a goal of action and the process of action itself. Our responsibility is to stress equity or equality for individuals in society in terms of access to resources and opportunities. It requires the understanding of the right to self-determination or autonomy and participation in decision-making, freedom from oppression, and a balancing of power across society (Mostert 2014:129). Explaining the sense of justice, Conde-Frazier (2006:326) declares:

'Religious education for justice requires living in the borderland between God and the people. It creates a prophetic space where we do not announce and denounce but where we help to bring about alternative practices for more humane living'.

### **3.2 Prophetic Theology**

This theology speaks of and speaks to a particular time and to a particular place, about a particular situation. A prophetic theology is a model of theology engaging with the socio-economic and political situation of the time and confronting the Pharaohs and the present empires (Maduro 1989:433).

Prophetic theology requires theology not only to be an academic exercise, but also to be a way to consolidate our Christian life. That is

what theologians have called person-centered and life-centered theology (Maduro 1989:86). It is demonstrating our theology in our manner of daily living. In my view, this way of doing theology ensured the success of liberation theology when Gutierrez was engaged his theology from the poor to the poor.

Prophetic theology brings fearless criticism, and resistance to the system, to policies, law and dehumanised practices (Ulshofer 2008:78). The Kairos tradition, liberation theology and the liberating model of Jesus are forms of prophetic theology. Prophetic theology reminds us of the way Jesus lived with the poor. The current reflection is a way of considering the socio-political situations surrounding people and proposes the way to address them.

## **4. The Threats of Social Justice in Brueggemann's Thoughts**

This section outlines three of the most important threats to social justice in Brueggemann's understanding, that can be applied in many developing countries, particularly the Democratic Republic of Congo.

### **4.1 The Imperial System**

The imperial system is a system of oppression, coercion, and exploitation with cheap labour for more production. The imperial system can come from outside or inside. From outside it refers to the international system of exploitation of weak countries. It occurs when the strong nations impose policies to exploit weak ones, exploiting their resources, creating wars and fainting to come on help in the countries they created wars. From inside, the imperial system operates as the governance of most of the African countries, where people in power have all the rights to ill-treat their own fellow.

Four characteristics can be identified in the imperial system:

- i. The first one is to refuse to notice the failure of the fabric of the social economic system and politics (Brueggemann 2010:103-104). In the empire, people are forced to live a utopia world. They are forced to congratulating the failure of the social degradation. They are forced to accept social improvement where it is not.
- ii. The second one is that the empire willingly ignores the reality surrounding them. Insensitivity is the mark of the empire. It does not take in account other realities. The empire is a closed world, self-centred.

- iii. The third one is that, in the empire, grief is not allowed to be freely voiced. There is a lack of freedom of expression. Contestation is not allowed. People are muzzled. This is the case of many of those who raise their voices in the Democratic Republic of Congo; they either lose their lives or are sent to jail.
- iv. And the fourth characteristic is that the empire always gives false promises of wellbeing. Those promises are false because they are not based on the truth of hope but on the egocentrism.

Many developing countries fit the above criteria and can be considered as empires. It can be compared with the cultural and political situation of Israel in the tenth century, which Brueggemann (1972:96) argues to be focused on the use of power. Powerful people possessed the economic and political resources. They had power to bring disaster or welfare, curse or blessing, life or death. The same schema is still working nowadays in socio-political contexts where people in power embody what they want the society to be. The same understanding of power was in Pilate who said to Jesus: “Don’t you realise I have power either to free you or to crucify you?” (Jn 19:10). This kind of abuse of power is still common nowadays, since people are being abused by the so-called ‘powerful men’.

#### 4.2 The Embodiment of the Complex System of the State Monopoly

In this second threat to social justice, the emperor is the one who embodies the law. There is not any institution above the emperor. Everything must be done as the emperor sees fit. The whole empire is forced to submit to him and to his will. Everything is set according to the wellbeing of the emperor, while the common good of the people is not the emperor’s priority. The narrative of God’s people in Egypt considers Pharaoh as an agent of immense power and the embodiment of state monopoly because of his capacity of producing wealth at the expense of others and transforming food into a weapon and tool to control the world. Being like this, Egypt becomes both a source for life and an aggressive agent enslaving those who seek life (Brueggemann 2000:75). The narrative of the first chapter of Exodus shows how the Nile, which was supposed to be the source of life became the source of death where all the male children born were killed.

The gift of God became a way of ill-treating the people of God, similar to the situation of most of the African countries, where the leaders have a monopoly over the natural resources which they exploit in their own interests. Natural resources, for example of the Democratic Republic of

Congo, are the creation of God, but the gift of God becomes the property of powerful people victimising the weak in the interests of a minority. This creates what scholars call “the myth of scarcity” with the principle of “never generate bread for the world” but only for “us” and “ours”, however God created abundance that can supply all human beings (Brueggemann 1999:113). This greedy conception turns the world nowadays and seems to be over inhabited that the natural principles of God are no more able to feed every one of the human beings because of “too much for some people” and “no more for the majority”.

#### 4.3 Oppressive Social Policy

Most policies are made to exploit the weak. Social policies reflects the Democratic Republic of Congo social system where most of the policies are made to protect the interests of those in power. In my opinion, the oppressive system can be summarised by three characteristics:

- i. The first is the hard labour without wage: This can be seen in the narrative of 1 Kings 5:13-18 where subjects were chosen for forced labour in the interest of the king or the man in power.
- ii. The second is hard labour without decent wages: law enforcement is on the side of the powerful. The oppressive social policy does not focus on the common good or on social justice. In an oppressive and imperial system, wages are usually indecently low. The imperial system is a system of exploitation, with cheap labour for more production. This is one of the strategies of capitalism in the developing countries. They usually use people for cheap labour. The case of the Democratic Republic of Congo can be highlighted when Chinese and the government pay people around 50 USD per month while the worker must stay on duty from 8 am to 6 pm. The most important consideration for a capitalist is production; while 50 USD can just fit for accommodation of a single. That wage is not enough for himself and any dependants.
- iii. And the third characteristic of the oppressive system is the oppressive levy or tax system. Generally, the levy collected in the empire system works on the profit of the oppressing system. The multi levy or tax system makes it impossible for people to live decently; even when doing business, the oppressive system does not allow people to make progress. People in this system look forward to a way of escaping from it.

In the struggle for liberation from the imperial system, the narrative of Moses and Israel shows us two dimensions that have potential to allow people to discover their freedom.

- i. The first one is the break from a religion of static triumphalism. Having dismantled the religion of static triumphalism by exposing the gods, Moses showed that in fact these gods had no power and they were no gods. These gods constituted the mythical legitimacy of Pharaoh. His empire was also built by the mythic claims which were ended by the disclosure of the alternative religion of the freedom of God. The narrative shows that there is a connection between the religion of static triumphalism and the politics of oppression and exploitation (Brueggemann 2001:6-7). The church nowadays must ensure that its theology frees the people of God instead of using the Bible as tool of oppression of the weak.
- ii. The second dimension of freedom is the break from the politics of oppression and exploitation. Moses' narrative reminds us of the notion of state theology which is simply the theological justification of the status quo with its racism, capitalism, totalitarianism and imperialism by blessing injustice, canonising the will of the powerful and reducing the poor to passivity, obedience and apathy (Leonard 2011:6).

The above characteristics of the oppressive systems constitute the threats of the social policy. They are made to exploit weak people.

### **5. Key Themes of Social Justice in Brueggemann's Understanding**

According to Brueggemann, our prophetic theology should focus on the search for the common good and on hope for suffering people.

#### **5.1 The Common Good**

Brueggemann's interpretation of the Pentateuch has a great impact on his social reading of the Bible. The Church today should also read the Bible to improve its social view. In reference to the Church today, he expresses: "The tragedy of the church is that it has so many people who read their Bible as history stoppers" (Brueggemann 2006:198). Yet the Bible is not only an history, but a daily living Bible. He argues that the church has the task of re-imagining the world differently and reading the Bible as history makers. "When the church only echoes the world's kingdom of scarcity, then it has failed in its vocation. But the faithful church keeps at the tasks

of living out a journey that points to the common good" (Brueggemann 2010:32).

Based on Genesis 47:13, Brueggemann exposes the important steps resulting in the enslavement of people. He discovered three consequences the peasants experienced by not having food. Firstly, they paid money in exchange for food. Secondly, their cattle were taken on behalf of Pharaoh. Yet cattle were the means of their production or industry, which was exchanged for food. And finally, their freedom was taken in exchange for food. Brueggemann noticed that slavery occurred by the manipulation of the economy in the interest of concentrating wealth and power in the hands of the few, at the expense of the community. It is called the 'state slave'. That is exactly what has occurred in the Democratic Republic of Congo where wealth is concentrated in a few communities. Food has become a real weapon of dominion.

After the exodus of the people (Exodus 20), God gave Israel the Ten Commandments designed to organize the social power and the social goods for the common benefit of the community (Brueggemann 2010:26). The new commandment received by the people at the mountain had as its purpose the abolishment of the Pharaoh's rules, which were replaced by God's rule of freedom and worship. The first rule is that God must be loved, served and trusted (Exodus 20:1-3).

Secondly, all kinds of neighbours must be respected, protected and not exploited, while the rule of Pharaoh used the neighbours to increase his production (Exodus 20:5-9). Thirdly, the predatory practices and aggressive policies that made the disadvantaged ones vulnerable to the ambitions of those in power had to be abolished among the people (Exodus 20:17). And finally, the people needed a day to rest. The first motive of the exodus was not to worship, rather to rest. Rest was something impossible in the Pharaonic system where life was defined by production. In his system, Pharaoh himself risks missing his rest by being busy in setting tasks and quotas that people must fulfill. Such a practice makes society a place of production and accumulation, lacking in enjoyment. When society takes such a course, people become like machines in creating for human benefit and so become objects to be used by others.

Furthermore, in Sinai, God changed the Pharaonic rule of production and accumulation to the rule of an economy of social common good. God promoted a very different system: the cancellation of the debt of the poor

after seven years (Dt 15:1-18); the ban on interest on a loan among his people (Dt 23:19-20); slaves deserving of hospitality (Dt 23:15-16); not requiring collateral from the poor (Dt 24:10-13), poor deserving wages and not be deprived of it (Dt 24:14-15); and justice be done to the resident alien or orphan (Deuteronomy 24:17-18). These rules tended to promote the socio-equilibria and provision for the needy and marginalized, a system that Brueggemann (2010:39-43) calls the “economy-with-neighbourhood”.

In light of this it is suggested that people should revise their relationships by resistance to the temptations of greed and individualism, which characterize our society. Mostly, even among the marginalised in the society, people are unable to understand that ‘neighbourhood’ is a force that can oppose the oppressing force of the pharaohs of this time. In the same way, Bergant (2012:383) argues: “According to Brueggemann the autonomy, secularity, and individualism that characterize modernity have “exiled” the contemporary believer”. Furthermore, Wynne (1977:1769) reminds us of the emphasis of Brueggemann on the character of the Old and the New Testament, showing how the common good is a very important aspect. But for this to be accomplished, people must live with, and for their fellow human beings.

In Jeremiah 9:24 and the Exodus, three important Hebrew verbs can be used to explain the purpose of the Lord, which constitutes the pillars of the common good: *Hesed*, *Mispat* and *Sedaqah* (steadfast love, justice and righteousness) that Brueggemann calls the ‘triad’ of common good.

- i. *Hesed* (steadfast love) means to stand in solidarity, to honour commitment, to be a reliable partner. It is a social welfare which commits to welcoming marginalized people to full membership of the community. In the search for social welfare, people need to be in solidarity with each other.
- ii. *Mispat* (justice) has the meaning to rule, to govern, to command, to judge, to arbitrate, to warn, to punish, and to vindicate. *Mispat* explains and needs a leadership based on justice.
- iii. *Sedaqah* (righteousness) is the intervention in social affairs to rehabilitate society, social wellbeing and to respond to the social grievances. Righteousness is our response to the unjust society. Righteous people act in a prophetic way as their living style.

‘Exodus’ can be used as paradigm in search of common good. The book of Exodus on the one hand informs us of the big picture: slavery, the misery of people, their grievances and the freedom of the people. On the other hand, it stresses the hard and powerful hand of Pharaoh, as well as the confusing fall and end of his oppressive system. The same picture can be applied to the developing countries using the prophetic imagination.

The Bible explains the term ‘Exodus’ as a departure. Brueggemann’s (1999:114) understanding of the Exodus is not necessarily on just a geographical displacement; it also is an economic exodus, an imaginative act of human beings to live without permitting the Pharaoh to dictate the circumstances of their lives. The story of Exodus talks about the oppressor, Pharaoh, that people must leave for another place that will be better for them. Was there another way of acting without living in Egypt?

The important thing is how the oppressed people of this century must be released by their pharaohs. How can the notion of the Exodus be applied in a non-geographical sense? How can the oppressed people of the Democratic Republic of Congo, for example, escape from their pharaohs or live their lives without permitting them to be dictated and threatened by the people in power?

Exodus 2:23-25 informs us that when Israel was yearning for freedom, God came and took the role of the liberator to respond to their yearning. God himself decided to stand against Pharaoh in order to champion Israel’s cause with enough power and authority to legitimate Israel’s life and to overturn oppressive structures, procedures, and assumptions (Brueggemann 1999:48). Israel escaped from oppressive power by the power of God himself. He used a power greater than Pharaoh’s and a man to accomplish his plan to deliver his people. The overthrow of oppressive structures, when God legitimates this, becomes legal and is no more to be considered as rebellion. It should not be considered as a lack of the respect due to political leaders, according to Romans 13. Moses would have been called a rebel. But it was in the plan of God to release his people. Are all rebels those who fight for liberation from the Pharaohs of this Century? The logical way to oppose the modern pharaoh is to align on the side of God who is always on the side of the oppressed.

The big challenge of deliverance is not to stuck to the Exodus; rather to transform the vision of the Exodus to a sustainable social practice that has institutional staying power, credibility and authority whereby the egalitarian community will be formed.

## 5.2 Hope for an Alternative Future

Two reflecting ideas can lead us on hope for an alternative future according to Brueggemann's thoughts. Firstly, it is possible to believe in hope against hope. Brueggemann (2006:204) argues that when the people and the king were in exile, the message of the prophet was no more to criticise, but to give hope.

When Jerusalem was destroyed, people changed their view of things. Their emotion was despair because of the deep sense of loss of what they experienced. Politically they felt humiliated to be among those to whom they boasted that they were great and important. Theologically, they felt they were losing the promise of being the people of God. That is what usually happens when the symbol of our pride is gone, when what should increase begins to decrease, when the socio-political situation collapses and fails. Despair takes root and hope disappears. When people's faith changes emotionally, politically and theologically, they experience their loss, vulnerability and their abandonment (Brueggemann 2014:89-90). When African countries experience destruction, political and socio-economic collapse and all kinds of societal fall, is there some reason to hope? Knowing all this reality, the prophetic task in the midst of exilic despair over destruction and displacement, is to declare and enact hope for a buoyant future that is securely in the purview of God (Brueggemann 2014:101). The reading of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel shows that they have some common mode of poesy. They do not only speak of the abandonment of Israel by Yahweh. They also present him as the source of hope and life. A faithful people expect to receive from God a new future. The responsibility of the prophets was to help the community who lost the temple, the symbol of dignity of the people of Israel, to receive the newness of a new world defined by Yahweh (Brueggemann 1986:12). He refers to Jeremiah to whom the Lord had given the mission to pluck up and tear down, to destroy and overthrow. But the most important task for the prophet Jeremiah was to consider other insights of his calling: to plant and to build. Those two verbs constitute a basis for an argument of hope among the people. In the words of Brueggemann, Jeremiah has the capacity to speak newness out of nullity. The ideology of our age does not believe in real newness. This newness is possible with the power of God (Brueggemann 1986:29). Hope in this way is understood as the capacity of God to do new things able to violate our understanding, our reason, our control and our despair. Hope trusts in the capacity of God to intervene *ex nihilo*.

This applies to the context of the Democratic Republic of Congo and its potential to become a liveable country. Even in the case of families broken by war, a destroyed economy, a bad socio-political situation, where people are always killed by people in power, when no way seems to be found for those who are ill-treated, there is a possible newness in the future. As Brueggemann noted the pain of the prophet Jeremiah, which surely may be the pain of many prophets involved in their call in many developing countries and in the Democratic Republic of Congo, is to know how his contemporaries could not notice, acknowledge and admit the time they were passing through. The prophet assumed that either his contemporaries were too stupid to understand or so dishonest that they covered up the reality of their time. This is exactly the Democratic Republic of Congo's reality where blind supportive groups cover up evil by arguing positively for their own interest. That's what Brueggemann (1986:31-33) calls "stupidity".

People can then be energized by the promise they have been given, by accepting the darkness of the life which can be compared by the vulnerability of the Friday (symbol of crucifixion of Jesus) that sometimes chases hope. The move from vulnerability to surprise was possible by the connection between the Friday of crucifixion and the Sunday of resurrection, between the 'post Joseph' period in Egypt when people of God began being ill-treated and the day of the doxology of the people after crossing the sea. This move is possible because we are God's people; we can appropriate God's freedom as ours and hold on to the Scripture.

And secondly, hope without exploiting God. One of the challenges in this time of enlightenment is the practice of a utilitarian God. In the terms of Brueggemann (1986:53), God is considered as essentially a God to be used just to provide social change or to be a human provider and not firstly a human subject of worship. The tradition of Ezekiel turns the spotlight on such exploitation of God. God must first be obeyed, glorified, honoured, adored and feared. God must not be recognized and known because of his usefulness, but because of his nature. Ezekiel 8:6 demonstrates that God refuses to stay where he is not honoured. "This articulation of God's glory and God's departure is a way to help people to think through the absence of God and the conditions under which God will stay or leave" (Brueggemann 1986:54).

## 6. Conclusion

The paper focused on the need for social justice demonstrated by the common good that every human being deserves. Brueggemann's understanding of social justice served as the framework for this paper. Social justice, entailing equity in redistribution of resources and power, remains a challenge in developing countries worldwide. Social equilibrium is far from being a reality when one considers the lifestyle and social policy of the people in the Democratic Republic of Congo, for example. Many causes of poverty have been enumerated, namely mismanagement of natural resources and corruption, external exploitation, justice and taxation systems.

According to Brueggemann, social justice has been threatened by the imperial system, by the embodiment of a complex system of state monopoly and by an oppressive social policy. The paper proposed a prophetic theology confronting the Pharaohs of this time, and their empires. People need an understanding of Exodus as an economic exodus, and an act of human imagination envisaging being able to live without the necessity of some pharaohs dictating the circumstances of their life.

The search for a common good, and hope for an alternative future are the messages for desperate people. There is hope between the Friday of crucifixion and the Sunday of resurrection. It is still possible to sing a new song. God's freedom is ours when we remain holding on to the promises of Scripture.

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#### **Authors' Declaration**

The authors declare that there is no financial or personal relationship(s) that inappropriately influenced them in the writing of this article

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