



ACCI BIBLICAL BASIS FOR MISSIONS AND DEVELOPMENT



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BIBLICAL BASIS FOR MISSIONS AND DEVELOPMENT

As a Christian organisation engaged in Missions and Development, we find our purpose and direction in the Bible and the model of Christ. We understand that we are called to participate in God's redemptive plan and Christ's mission of reconciliation.

The comprehensive scope of creation, sin and redemption is evident throughout the Biblical story and is central to Biblical worldview. In the creation account we see God's intention for all He created to live in a state of interdependent harmonious relationships, which is the definition of peace. Creation shows humankind in right relationship with each other, with right self-image (or relationship with oneself) and in right relationship with the rest of creation. These right relationships are all held in perfect harmony through an undefiled primary relationship and intimacy with God.

Through the fall we see how all of these relationships became sin affected and broken (Gen 3:11-24). The result of this disharmony was the emergence of human poverty, which is experienced as spiritual, physical, emotional/psychological and social poverty. Humanity's distorted image of themselves, and subsequent fractured relationships with each other, has led to inequality and injustice, which are the basis of all social disorders including material poverty.

In redemption, we see God's plan for these relationships to be restored, and for creation to once again exist in its original state of perfect harmony and peace (Rev 21:1-4). To establish this, God sent Christ to Earth, with a mission and a message of reconciliation, to restore all that sin has damaged and reconcile all of creation to God.

Christ's mission of reconciliation embodies the nature of the Father who sent Him, which means it is founded on justice and compelled by love (John 3:16-17).

Christ came incarnate into the world and brought with Him a radical message of holistic transformation as he sought to bridge social divides, spiritual divides, and reinstate the equality of all humankind. Christ addressed structural injustices as he reversed the social order of the hierarchies of the day stating it is more blessed to give than receive, more privileged to serve than be served, and that ultimately human greatness is measured neither by status nor wealth, but by our service to others. Christ modeled humble servitude and sacrificial love, rejecting status, entitlements and worldly power, in pursuit of reconciliation and the Kingdom of God (John 20:21, 2 Cor 5:19).

Just as the Father sent Christ incarnate into the world with this mission to holistically transform and reconcile creation to Him, so Christ has sent us (2 Cor 5:19).

Christ's mission is our mission, and his model informs the basis of our engagement strategy in both missions and development. Therefore our interaction with people and communities is characterised by love, humility and service, seeks to be incarnational and contextualised, and pursues the just reconciliation of all relationships and holistic transformation of lives, communities and societies.

HOLISTIC VIEW OF HUMAN POVERTY AND DEVELOPMENT

1. POVERTY

Our approach to poverty alleviation is firstly determined by our understanding of poverty, both its nature and root causes. A holistic approach to poverty alleviation therefore requires a holistic understanding as a precursor to developing holistic solutions.

Bryant Myers defines poverty from a relational theology perspective as "Relationships that do not work, that are not just, that are not for life and are not harmonious or enjoyable" (B. Myers 2011). Distorted relationships between humankind and God, each other, creation and our own self-image, give rise to poverty, which can be experienced as social poverty, physical poverty, spiritual poverty and a poverty of being.

A holistic approach to poverty alleviation seeks to reconcile all four sin damaged relationships in order to address the full spectrum of human poverty. This is again modeled on Christ who came to reconcile all things to God. This is evidenced in the holistic nature of Jesus' engagement with humanity as he forgave sins, healed the sick, rebuked the oppressive systems of the day, restored the marginalised to their communities (story of the lepers Matt 8:1-4) and through the parables revealed the nature of the Kingdom of God.

Therefore in replicating Christ's model, addressing poverty from a holistic perspective must involve:

- **Spiritual reconciliation:** restoring people to right relationship with God and reinstating the Lordship of Christ in people's lives.
- **Personal reconciliation:** restoring our self-image and addressing issues of inferiority and superiority so we understand that we are equal creations of equal worth and value. Reinstating capabilities, wisdom, and dignity and empowering those who have been oppressed.
- **Social reconciliation:** restoring people to right relationship with each other, addressing injustice, inequality, oppression and reinstating the responsibility that we have to one another, our responsibility to 'love our neighbour as ourselves' (Mark 12:31).

- Material and physical restoration: ensuring all have the opportunity to participate in the stewardship of creation (utilizing and managing the earth's resource for the good of all humanity) and can be sustained by creation. This necessitates addressing systemic obstacles that limit people's ability to engage in stewardship, as well as personal issues of skill and individual mindsets, all of which can lead to material poverty. Promoting sustainable stewardship of resources that enable communities to balance the need for provision with preservation of creation for the sake of future generations.

2. DEVELOPMENT

When we engage in development, we seek to participate in Christ's mission of reconciliation, which results in holistic sustainable transformation in the lives of individuals and whole communities.

We therefore define development as the process of transformation through which people are reconciled to right relationship with God, themselves, each other and the rest of creation. Subsequently the social, economic, and cultural issues, which result from such distorted relationships, can be addressed and peace restored in communities. Such an approach to development is by nature holistic and is an ongoing journey of change, maturation and growth sustained throughout the duration of our lives.

Holistic development can be approached from an individual perspective through discipleship, where the individual engages in a process of transformation, which begins with spiritual development and evolves to address the individual's interaction with others and the rest of creation.

Holistic development can also be approached from a community development perspective, where communities engage in collective action which builds solidarity and community capabilities. Communities may initially engage in collective action to address physical development, which in the process must also expand to include social, spiritual and personal development to address root causes, which are broken relationships both on a personal and structural level.

Holistic sustainable development aims for the reconciliation of individuals within their relational context, resulting in broad reaching transformation in families and communities.

See table 1 – Summary of Holistic View of Poverty and Development

THE ACCI VISION AND MISSION

ACCI's vision is for a world where all people have an opportunity to hear the gospel and the freedom to choose, believe and express their faith.

We believe in a world where Christian principles of justice and equality are actualised. Where individuals, families and communities are empowered to influence decisions affecting their own lives, advocate for their own rights as human beings with equal voice and equal value under the premise that all life has intrinsic value before God who created life.

As an organisation, what we do must always embody why we do it and how we do it. Our vision summarises why we are engaged in missions and development and our mission summarises how we engage. Both why and how are rooted in our understanding of:

1. The Biblical basis for missions and development;
2. The holistic view of poverty and development; and
3. Our statement of faith (Australian Christian Churches Statement of Faith)

Our vision statement leads with the sharing of the gospel and making disciples where:

- The Gospel is the good news of God's redemptive plan and Christ's mission of reconciliation that we have been commissioned to take into 'all the world'.
- A disciple is an individual who has exercised their freedom to choose, believe and express their faith. They are an active participant in the process of reconciliation and transformation.

Our vision statement continues based on a biblical understanding of our social responsibility. Whilst we recognise that the complete transformation of society and all its encompassing relationships will be fully effected when Christ returns to usher in the Kingdom of God, our commitment to social justice stems from a firm belief that the liberation that will be completed at that time begins now in this age (N.T. Wright 2009). We therefore have a responsibility to uphold the principles of the Kingdom of God in this world and will strive to:

1. Act justly
2. Administer justice
3. Uphold the dignity of others
4. Advocate for people who are vulnerable and marginalised.

These themes of justice, righteousness and equality and the importance God places on them resonate throughout the book of Isaiah. In chapter one God calls for his people to uphold justice as a part of returning to true worship “Learn to do right [good]! Seek justice, relieve the oppressed, and correct the oppressor. Defend the fatherless, Plead for the widow” (Isaiah 1:17 AMP). Isaiah chapter 58 further challenges believers who engage in fasting as a religious ritual whilst simultaneously fulfilling self-interests through oppressive means. He links the purpose of fasting directly to social reconciliation and the reinstatement of equality “[Rather] is not this the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every [enslaving] yoke? Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house-- when you see the naked, that you cover him, and that you hide not yourself from [the needs of] your own flesh and blood?” (Isaiah 58:6, 7 AMP)

Such verses speak of the responsibility we have as Christians to recognise the equal value of every person, and reflect this understanding of equality in our interactions with others. This is the basis of empowerment; the process by which we encourage people who have internalised oppression and inequality, resulting in a distorted image of self and low self-esteem, to recognise their own worth as an equal creation. We further encourage them to recognise their own rightful place as active participants in their own transformation, the stewardship of creation and the reconciliation of creation back to God.

This invitation of participation was first extended to all humanity by Christ and is therefore upheld in every aspect of our work. It is fostered through seeing empowerment as a necessary precursory step to meaningful participation, and as a legitimate goal which sees communities self-determining and driving their own development as an outworking of their understanding of their own equality and value.

ACCI's Mission is to transform communities and nations, one life at a time by developing holistic and sustainable solutions to combat injustice, poverty and reinstate the value of life. We aim to promote equal access to the rights and services that protect life and human dignity. In participating in God's redemptive plan and Christ's mission of reconciliation we seek holistic sustainable transformation.

- **Holistic:** Means to engage with the whole person and seek to understand the whole situation and identify and address the underlying root causes to surface level symptoms. A holistic approach recognises that in order for a person to be made 'whole', development cannot be confined to physical/material development, but must also address the spiritual, social, mental and emotional aspects of a person.

- **Sustainable:** An ongoing process of growth and development, in which the individual/s or communities primarily concerned can sustain momentum, impacts and the demand for resource.

- **Transformation:** Engaging both ourselves and others in reconciliation and development that incorporates the physical, spiritual, intellectual, emotional and psychological aspects of a person or whole communities.

Our Biblical mandate to help the poor is holistic and requires that we address the root causes of human poverty.

It includes:

- 1. Sharing the gospel and making disciples:** (spiritual) reconciliation and right relationship with God.

- 2. Relieving the oppressed:** (social/justice) loose the bonds of wickedness and let the oppressed go free.

- 3. Correcting the Oppressor:** (social/justice) Breaking the enslaving yoke (structures).

- 4. Advocacy:** (social/justice/equality) Defending the fatherless and pleading for the widow. Prophetically speaking of what the situation of the oppressed should be according to God's Kingdom, and proclaiming how such change can be effected.

- 5. Sharing resources:** (social/physical) Sharing bread with the hungry, providing shelter for the homeless and clothes for the naked.

- 6. Social reconciliation:** (social/equality/physical) Reconciling the social divides that perpetuate inequality through building relationships that restore equal value to the poor, and structures that protect the poor.

7. Empowerment: (social/physical/emotional) Enabling those who have been oppressed and marginalised to regain control over their own lives and futures. Recognising the equal value of their voice, opinions and their equal right to speak and make decision about issues, which primarily affect their lives, and advocate for their own families and communities.

8. Reinstatement Responsibility: (social/physical) Reinstatement our personal responsibilities to exercise justice and good stewardship. Loving our neighbours as ourselves and not hiding from the needs of others, but protecting and serving those who are vulnerable out of recognition of equality rather than a sense of superiority.

As an organisation, we believe that our actions and endeavors will be authentic when what we actually do in practice to implement our mission has been informed by both why and how we do it. Below is an excerpt taken from the implementation section of ACC International's purpose statement:

- ACCI uses a multifaceted approach to achieving our mission, which includes a combination of ministry initiatives and development projects that incorporate sustainability, rights, advocacy and public awareness campaigns.
- ACCI facilitates the sending of field workers and the formation of strategic partnerships to achieve our mission. The role of our field staff is to engage with and empower communities to be active participants in their own development.
- ACCI encourages our field workers to partner with other like-minded organisations and Governments to implement rights-based development in accordance with international guidelines and national frameworks.
- ACCI promotes the cause of Missions within our networks and provides opportunities for churches, donors and volunteers to engage with our mission.
- As we work towards achieving this mission we will strive to act professionally, think strategically, and be accountable to our stakeholders, primarily the communities we serve.

BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES ON KEY ISSUES

JUSTICE

God loves justice, His standards define what is right and good, and we have a personal responsibility to deal justly with others and for creating and maintaining systems of justice.

God is a just God, and God loves justice (Isa 61:8). The Bible reveals to us God's standards of interpersonal relationships and social order, which are founded on His concepts of justice. We have a responsibility to uphold justice in our relationships with others, and to create and maintain systems and structures that also reflect God's justice.

The Bible is the basis for the moral standards of what is good, what is right and what is just (2 Tim 3:15-17). God first codified His justice in the laws and commandments in the Bible, initially in the Old Testament and then finally in the New Testament. These laws are the ethical framework that governs individual and societal relationship towards the goal of peace and wellbeing (defined as Shalom). As we abide by the laws of God and demonstrate God's justice in our dealings with others, we not only achieve a greater level of personal and interpersonal wellbeing, but we further point people to Jesus Christ (Matt 5:16).

Whilst secular concepts of justice are understood as retributive with the power to punish wrong doing, justice in the Bible is spoken of in the context of human relationships and has the power to prevent injustice and to reconcile. Biblical justice is about upholding right relationships; both interpersonal relationships and structural relationships including judicial, political, religious, cultural and economic.

Justice in the Bible is 'others' centred and focuses on our responsibility to others, in particular the vulnerable members of society. Ensuring that the vulnerable members of any community are treated justly in the absence of their ability to enforce or demand such justice comes out of a deep and Biblically rooted belief in the inherent equality of all humankind.

Justice therefore unravels when we lose sight of who we are in God and who God is in respect to our circumstances. When corrupted values such as the pursuit of wealth or power replace a just vertical relationship with God, the horizontal relationships we have with each other become oppressive. This becomes manifest in unequal relationships between the powerful and powerless, and the social structures we form become corrupt, unjust and manipulative in pursuit of these corrupted values. In such an environment life inevitably becomes a commodity that can be traded, bought and sold, violating people's dignity and resulting in some of the most extreme forms of injustice such as human slavery and human trafficking.

Injustice becomes evident in oppressive actions, when individuals' actions towards another person fail to meet God's standard of good and right (Eze 22:29, Exo 23:1-9). Injustice is also evident in corrupt systems that fail to deliver what is just or right (Amos 5:11-15) and corrupt officials who fail in their responsibility to uphold just standards (Isa 10:1-2).

The Christian pursuit of justice is about restoring relational balance so that every person can recover his or her dignity and equal worth. True equality and dignity mean that the poor and vulnerable members of society will be able to independently relate to the structures of society and meet their own needs rather than depending solely on the mercy of the non-poor to share the benefits of unjust systems and structures with them.

The Bible clearly states that meeting the needs of the oppressed is an aspect of seeking justice (Isa 1:17), but goes further to demonstrate that restoration of God's justice must also challenge and reconcile social structures back to right balance and back to God.

"[Rather] is not this the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every [enslaving] yoke? Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house—when you see the naked, that you cover him, and that you hide not yourself from [the needs of] your own flesh and blood?" (Isa 58:6, 7 AMP)

EQUALITY

The state of being equal; encompassing equal value, equal voice and equal rights and responsibilities. Christians assert the inherent value of all people and the equal value of all people on the basis that we were all made by God, and all bear his image. Through the story of creation we see that God made humankind in his image giving them life, dignity, liberty, rewarding work, and meaningful relationships (Gen Chps 1-3).

Our equality or equal worth is founded on the basis that we all share a common Maker and a common Master in God, and therefore there is no hierarchy of human worth before God. "Did not He who made me in the womb make them (servants, poor, widow, fatherless)? Did not the same One fashion us in the womb?" (Job 31:15 NKJV Gal 3:28)

Our equality is further confirmed in the pervasive effects of the fall. "For all have sinned and fall short of the Glory of God" (Rom 3:23 NKJV). All of humankind have been affected by sin and are equally sinful. In the fall our equality was maintained and there was no emergence of hierarchy before God. We are all in need of redemption. In this fallen state, the Bible confirms that we are all still loved by God and that God desires a relationship with us all (John 3:16-17).

In redemption our equality is evident in that Christ came to save us all, and that salvation is a free gift available to all humankind (Rom 1:16). Christ, in his mission of reconciliation, intentionally cut through all the morally irrelevant classifications that the world uses to create hierarchy and establish inequality, such as race, age, gender, education, wealth, titles, and nationality. He demonstrated that salvation and reconciliation was for all, and that all were of equal value to God who desired a restored relationship with them (Gal 3:28).

An extension or outworking of having equal value is having an equal voice. Equality means that that each person should be heard, and their equality should be sufficient to ensure that their voice (opinions, views, concerns, needs) is heard and responded to. Whilst justice calls for us to speak out for those who cannot be heard, equality requires us to amplify their voice so they may speak for themselves and advocate for their families and communities. This requires challenging all that silences them such as poverty, oppression, corruption and violence, and impartiality before the law.

"How long will you judge unjustly, and show partiality to the wicked?" (Pslm 82:2 NKJV). The assertion is that the rich and poor have an equal right to have their cause heard and their rights upheld because "...the Lord is the maker of them all." (Prov 22:2 NKJV)

Whilst our equality before God is the basis of our claim to equal rights, it is also the basis of our equal responsibility to uphold God's moral and ethical standards in our interaction with others. We have been commanded to love others as we love ourselves, which in itself is a statement of our identification and equality with our fellow mankind (Mark 12:30-31). The natural outcome of this commandment to love our neighbour as ourselves, is the formation of solidarity that binds humanity together, and serves to ensure that rights and interests of the collective are protected, rather than the elevation of the individual (Exo 20:1-6, Lev 19:18, Rom 12:16-20).

When the interests of the individual are elevated at the expense of the rights of others, then hierarchy and inequality emerges. Inequality is the assertion that one person has greater value than another and therefore justifies actions and interactions that suppress others, deny others access to basic rights and services necessary to protect their life, thus devaluing their life. It is essentially a violation of the second greatest command to "love your neighbour as you love yourself." (Matt 22:39).

HUMAN RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Human rights and human responsibilities are two sides of the same coin.

Biblical responsibilities

(justice + equality + relational context) = Upholding human rights

1. RIGHTS

We view human rights through the lens of our Biblical responsibilities. God made justice and equality a command and a responsibility, which we are to fulfil and uphold through relationships. He expects us to act towards others in accordance with our responsibilities and He also gave others the right to expect that we act in accordance with our responsibilities.

- **Rights are based in Biblical justice** – God is just and a God of justice and He requires of us just interactions with each other. These interactions or relationships are governed by biblical morality and in the Bible codified in laws.
- **Rights are held equally by all humans** – Our rights are based on all being equally created and having equal value and equal dignity before God, affirmed not just in creation but also in redemption. That value is not derived from our humanity, but from the goodness of God (His righteous character and nature).
- **Rights are outworked or violated in relationship** – Human rights are primarily relational, rather than individual. Although all individuals in all societies hold rights, they are outworked (or violated) in relationships as they deal with human interaction. Just as rights have no meaning outside of relational contexts, rights are also unsubstantiated outside of a primary recognition of humankind being first and foremost in relationship with God.
- **Rights are an outward focused responsibility, not an inward focused entitlement** – The Bible refers to rights most prominently in the context of responsibilities. Rights are spoken of as negative and positive rights (do's and do not's) e.g. "Do justice," "Don't murder", but the emphasis is not on an inward focused action of protecting our rights, but on an outward focused command to uphold others rights through due attention given to our responsibilities to each other. Therefore, rights in the context of the Bible does not lead to an entitlement understanding of rights, but an understanding of our responsibility to protect the rights of others.

- **Human rights are not an end in and of themselves** – They effectively function as universal ethics that protect our dignity and worth as derived from God.

- **Human rights are framed by community responsibility, not individual entitlement** – Our biblical perspective on human rights prevents it from becoming overly individualistic, where the individual rights are to be upheld and defended irrespective of the repercussions for the broader community. A biblical perspective operates within a larger overarching command to 'love one's neighbour as yourself' and 'it is more blessed to give than receive'. Therefore, in contexts where an individual's autonomous right will have a negative effect on the broader community or other individuals, Christ's commands requires the Christian to willingly lay down their right and take up their responsibility to others. This doesn't undermine the right of the individual or give another permission to violate someone's rights, but places greater value on the individual choosing servanthood and sacrifice.

- **God's gifts are the foundation of human rights** – Claims to human rights can only be made based on the presupposition of a Divine God who created all humankind and gave us five foundational gifts: life, dignity, liberty, rewarding and fruitful work, and meaningful relationships. These gifts, which were given equally to all humankind, are the basis of our human rights. These rights however cannot be understood as derived from simply being human, but given to all humankind by God. All humans have a right to protect these gifts given to them from God, regardless of their fallen state, or any other human condition.

- **Human rights derived from the goodness of God** – Secular human rights are rooted in the inherent dignity of humankind rather than in the goodness, provision and just nature of God. They are taken as original and not derived. Although our dignity is one of the gifts of God and underpins many more specific rights protected by charters and laws, God gives that dignity to us. It is derived from the equal value he places on us. Outside of the dignity and worth God assigns to man evident in redemption, our dignity and right to life was forfeited at the fall. If rights are based on justice, then our just return for sin is decay and ultimately death (Rom 5:12, James 1:15), but God chose to reaffirm and uphold the value of our life through his redemptive plan, therefore our dignity and our life are both gifts from God given through our vertical relationship with Him, and rights upheld in horizontal interactions in the community of humans as equal recipients of these gifts.

2. RESPONSIBILITIES

As noted above we understand human rights from the perspective of our responsibility to affirm the equal worth and dignity (as derived from God) of all people through our interaction with each other on both a corporate and personal level. As Christians we are compelled by love to go beyond the law in our pursuit of upholding human rights, however, this does not negate our responsibility to uphold human rights as codified in national and international laws and human rights instruments. Romans chapter 13 guides our interaction with secular authorities on the issue of complying with secular human rights regulations and laws. Romans 13:1-10 states:

- **All authorities are instituted by God and are to be obeyed, honoured and respected.** “Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.” (Rom 13:1 NKJV)
- **Abiding by the authorities is equated with doing good and wins us favour.** “For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same.” (Rom 13:3 NKJV)
- **We should abide by authorities, laws and regulations from both moral and pragmatic perspectives.** “Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of the wrath of the authorities but also because of your conscience.” (Rom 13:5 NET)
- **The essence of the law is not inconsistent with the purpose of our love for our neighbour.** Both were designed to uphold the rights and dignity of others and require of us the fulfilment of our responsibility towards others. “...if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” Love does no harm to a neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilment of the law.” (Rom 13:9-10 NKJV)

As Christians we believe that God loves justice and He created humankind with equal value. Upholding human rights therefore falls within the purview of our God given responsibilities towards others and the actualisation of Biblical justice and equality. To this end we endeavour to fulfil our God given responsibilities to God’s command and His appointed authorities, and we seek to do good, as God defines good.

EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment is the process by which individuals, groups and/or communities become able to take control of their circumstances and achieve their goals, thereby being able to work towards maximising the quality of their life.
(Adams 1990 p43)

In all aspects of our work, we seek to empower individuals and whole communities to self mobilise and self determine their own development. We believe this is the outworking of recognising the equality and dignity of others, and is responsive to a holistic understanding of poverty.

Through his ministry, Christ modelled to us the importance of empowering people. Christ achieved this through reinstating people’s self-worth and self-esteem, through engaging them in meaningful participation, and challenging structural and relational inequality that limits agency, blocks opportunities for participation, and disempowers.

Jesus modelled empowerment through His relationships with the first disciples. Jesus empowered a group of believers, inviting them to be active participants in His mission and resulting in their personal transformation and their eventual self-mobilisation. Upon Jesus’ departure from Earth, God empowered a group of believers by His Holy Spirit that resulted in the self-mobilisation of the early church (Acts 1:8). The apostles and other believers then proceeded to empower the new believers, resulting in the release of self-mobilised believers who engaged with families and communities replicating Christ’s empowering model.

Through Jesus’ ministry and interaction with people, he demonstrated how he journeyed people through different levels of participation, towards the goal of self-mobilisation. His disciples and the early church again followed Christ’s example as they engaged people in progressively more meaningful forms of participation in the work of the early church, resulting in many being released as self-mobilised communities of believers empowered by the Holy Spirit.

STAGES OF PARTICIPATION:

a. Needs Identification – Individuals and communities are involved in identifying their own needs and priorities. Example: Jesus responds to the felt needs of people as they ask him to heal the sick and raise the dead (Mat 4:17, 7:28-29).

b. Consultation – Local people or local communities are consulted about the situations, problems and opportunities in their communities. This information then informs strategy. Example: The apostles take advice from the congregation regarding cultural issues. (Acts 6:1-4)

c. Implementation – People participate in the implementation of initiatives, which are a part of the overall 'mission'. Example: Jesus invites the disciples to be actively involved as He calls them to become fishers of men (Mat 4:18-20). Jesus sends out the 12 and the 72 disciples, empowered to preach, heal and drive out demons (Matt 10:1,5-8, Luke 10:1-2).

d. Decision-making – People are actively participating in sites of power where analysis, planning and decision making occur. Example: Jesus included the disciples in His planning and analysis of Jewish culture and the Scriptures. He discusses the issues of the multitudes with them and then engages them in feeding the 5,000 (Mat 14:15-16).

e. Self-determination and self-mobilisation – Communities self-determine the nature of their own development and self-mobilise to achieve their own goals. They may enlist the help of people or organisations with specific skills, but remain in control of the process.

Example: Jesus ascends to Heaven, leaving the mission of the church in the hands of the disciples with the promise of the Holy Spirit, the final empowerment (Acts 1:8). New converts begin to self mobilise, and pool their resources in order to respond to needs amongst them as they are identified. (Acts 2:44-45). The Apostles commission and send out others giving them responsibility and ownership over the mission (Acts 6:3, 13:2-3).

Jesus engaged with people as active participants in His mission of reconciliation. In doing so He demonstrated their worth and value which addressed the distorted self-image and subsequent low self-esteem of the oppressed. In the Bible we see Jesus frequently interacting with the social outcasts; those who have been disempowered and who have internalised their perceived lack of worth. Jesus didn't simply relate to them, but He engaged them. He recognised them as people with value and worth, and with capabilities and capacity to participate in the reconciliation of the world.

In empowering them to participate, Jesus restored their self-image, as well as restored them to their communities; addressing distorted social relationships and social divides.

Christ further empowered people by challenging and reconciling the relational and structural inequalities that oppress people and limit human agency. He challenged the authorities of the day and the teachers of the law, who constructed and upheld institutions that were oppressive and unjust (Mat 23:23, Luke 13:10-17).

He engaged with Zacchaeus the tax collector who was extorting the poor, resulting in his transformation and freedom for those he oppressed (Luke 19:1-10).

In our development, we seek to replicate Christ's model of empowering people towards self-mobilisation and self-determination. We believe this is an important aspect of reinstating the equality and dignity of all people, and an important part of the process of reconciling distorted social and personal relationships to reflect the inherent value and equality of all humankind.

Empowerment in development therefore seeks to enhance the individual and community's agency (ability to act and make meaningful choices for oneself), which is critical to the long-term self-determination of communities and sustainability of development.

Empowerment is a dynamic process, which involves locating the relational sites of unequal power and oppression that limit agency. Once identified, empowerment seeks to enhance the potential for communities and individuals to challenge such inequality and oppression, and negotiate more equitable conditions for their wellbeing.

This requires addressing the external structural inequality and oppression exerting influence on the community, as well as the internal factors exerting influence, in particular, the community's internalisation of prolonged subjugation. This necessitates dealing with levels of confidence and self-esteem within communities. Lack of confidence and low self-esteem can escalate into fatalism. Fatalism is fundamentally a distorted self-image, which results in people who cease to believe they can effect any level of change over their circumstances, and cease to assert that they are deserving of more equitable conditions or basic human rights. They become resigned to their circumstances as being out of their control.

Empowerment therefore seeks to affirm each individual's true worth in God, and reinstate their equality and dignity by recognising them as active participants in their own development. It recognises people's capabilities and assets that can be utilised and enhanced to affect holistic transformation in their lives and communities. It gives control and decision-making power back to communities and individuals over issues that primarily affect their lives. Empowerment recognises that Christ invited us all to participate in his mission of reconciliation, again affirming our equality.

ADVOCACY

Advocacy is an extension of our biblical responsibility to love and care for others by speaking out against injustice and calling for restoration and change.

Advocacy, as in the story of Amos (Amos 5:24), prophetically proclaims what society should be like, when Kingdom principles of justice and equality are the foundation upon which every relationship, social structure and institution are build.

Advocacy therefore publically speaks out against social and structural injustices, which are counter to such Kingdom principles, and that impact upon people's inalienable rights to dignity, equality and just relations.

We advocate for others when we:

1. Speak out through public campaigns on behalf of the poor, needy and vulnerable. (Isa 1:17, Prov 31:8-9)

2. Organise and amplify the voices of the oppressed and marginalised to be heard. This can be either directly empowering people to speak on their own behalf or through ensuring that advocacy is directly representative of the views of those most affected. (Esth chpt 5)

3. Lobby for structural changes to policy and lawmakers that protect the poor and marginalised. (Lev 25)

We advocate out of a commitment to love our neighbour and a commitment to solidarity and identification with the oppressed (Heb 13:3 Gal 2:10). This identification is the basis of the hope for the oppressed, which moves the body of Christ to speak against issues that are affecting humanity as what affects one member of the body affects us all. In the words of Martin Luther King Jr. "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere". (Letter from Birmingham Jail, April 16, 1963). Therefore, we view silence in the face of injustice and systemic oppression paramount to a sin of omission (James 4:17), or failing to love and help our neighbour, which according to the Bible, is the equivalent of refusing to personally help the Lord.

"Then they will reply, 'Lord when did we ever see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and not help you?' And he will answer, 'I tell you the truth, when you refused to help the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were refusing to help me.'"

(Mat 25: 44-45 NLT)

INCARNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT (NOT THE DOCTRINE OF INCARNATION)

Incarnational engagement relates to the way we enter and engage with a group of people or a culture in order to contextualise the message that we seek to bring. Christ first modeled incarnate engagement with humanity as He stripped himself of His heavenly entitlements as the Son of God, an equal member of the Trinity, and humbly assumed the form of man.

Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross (Phil 2:6-8 NLT)

Christ did not come as a generic human, but assumed the specific cultural identity of a Jewish carpenter within the context of the Roman Empire. In doing so he contextualised the gospel within the framework of humanity and the limitations of our human mind and body. He more specifically utilised the framework of Jewish culture and took on the social identity of a carpenter, thus locating himself within culturally constructed hierarchies and normative social obligations. From this vantage point he was able to demonstrate how the gospel finds its expression within a cultural framework and how it challenges and transforms a culture to reflect God's principles. It is for this reason that the Jews found Jesus message and life so confrontational as He challenged their very social structure and inverted their hierarchies and sense of privilege.

Christ incarnate embodied the message of the gospel both in word and deed (John 1:14, Phil 2:6-8). He contextualised the word (spoken message) through using the language, literary techniques, expressive styles, poetry and symbolism of the host culture. In doing so He ensured the message connected with people deeply on a cultural level, which engaged both their mind and their emotions. This ensured that Biblical truths were not coopted with existing beliefs, but were able to challenge and transform the very core of their worldview. Christ embodied the gospel in deed through sacrificing His status and position as the Son of God and entering the world as a servant. He identified with the sinners and outcasts and challenged the structures and cultural practices that oppressed people. In doing so, he demonstrated the application of the values of the Kingdom of God to concrete and culturally relevant situations. This incarnational presentation of the gospel allowed people to comprehend both the message of the gospel and the implications of how the gospel would transform their lives, their cultures, and the ordering of their societies.

Christ therefore revealed his message through the vehicle of a limited, imperfect culture, which had been constructed by fallen people. From Christ's model of incarnate engagement with Jewish culture, we discover numerous important points, which form the basis of our belief in incarnational engagement with cultures and communities around the world.

1. No one culture is superior in its ability or suitability to communicate the gospel (holistic reconciliation).

2. Cultures, as with individual hearts and minds, can be transformed to reflect and express God's principles and the hope of the gospel.

3. Members of each culture will best understand both the gospel message and its implications for their societies when presented within the context of their culture. As Christ came incarnate into Jewish culture, he identified with Jews so they could identify with him and thus accept the credibility and relevance of his message.

4. Incarnate engagement is based on engaging with people where they are at; spiritually, physically and socially and culturally.

5. Incarnate engagement is highly intentional and requires that we first come as learners and observers of culture and humanity.

6. Incarnate engagement brings a deeply personal message to the receiver, and requires great sacrifice on the part of the bearer of the good news.

Therefore the act of engaging in incarnational missions today, is the act of stripping away self, and one's own culturally specific ways of expressing the gospel, from the pure meaning of the gospel message, which is in and of itself supra-cultural (belong to no one culture, but able to be expressed within every culture). Incarnational engagement requires us to firstly contextualise ourselves in word (presentation of the message) and deed (how we live and outwardly demonstrate the implications of the message) within our host culture. The ability to do this requires a commitment to seeking to understand the culture, language and worldview of our host communities.

Incarnational engagement secondly requires us to respect cultures impartially and equally. This does not mean that we accept and endorse all aspects of a culture, but that we allow the values and principles of the Kingdom of God to be the compass that guides the transformation of cultures towards an indigenous expression of Christianity, rather than our own cultural translation of Christ's message.

To be incarnational is to be with people. Christ came to dwell amongst us. He was the Word made flesh - the embodiment of the gospel. In following Christ's model, we need to realise that incarnational engagement is not simply a commitment to be seen and heard in a contextualised way, but it is a commitment to be with people, in relationship and in community. It is primarily through relationships that we can be salt and light, which permeates communities and dispels darkness (Mat 5:13-16).

CONCLUSION

Mission and Development are therefore avenues through which we can engage in Christ's mission of reconciliation. The holistic transformation that reconciliation encompasses, leads us to address of all forms of human poverty. It requires that we strive to reinstate God's justice in all personal and corporate relationships, recognising the equality of all humanity, and commit to respect, uphold and protect the rights of others through fulfilling our responsibilities to each other. It further requires that we engage in empowering relationships, which reflect the recognition of our equality and follow the model of Christ who empowered and engaged people in his mission of reconciliation. We seek to further follow the model of Christ who came incarnate to communicate within cultures and socio-economic frameworks and thus allow those frameworks to be transformed from within. This is further recognition of our equality as we recognise the equal value and validity of each culture and language to express and reflect the values of justice, equality, and holistic reconciliation. Our commitment to missions and development and to the principles of love, justice, equality, empowerment and human rights, is the outworking of the two great commandments to 'Love the Lord your God', and 'Love your neighbour as yourself'.

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