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# A Biblical-theological approach to promote evangelism in disadvantaged and poor communities in South Africa: A missiological viewpoint<sup>1</sup>

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## **Abstract**

*This article suggests a biblical-theological and missiological approach of evangelism in disadvantaged and poor communities. Therefore, it is important that the missio-Dei perspective is key to all areas within this article. Mission is the concern of the Triune God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, for the whole of His creation. The Father sent the Son and the Son sent the Holy Spirit. Through Jesus Christ, and by the Holy Spirit, God, for His own glory, unite people from every tribe, nation, kingdom, and language to worship Him forever in the New World. The Gospel of Jesus Christ must be proclaimed. Therefore, it is crucial that churches should wholeheartedly partake in the mission of God in the world. The church is the instrument of God to proclaim his kingdom in all parts of life. Believers should be faithful to the calling of God by following Jesus and partaking in the missio Dei, bringing love, hope and peace to a lost*

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*broken world. God chose people to build his kingdom and he blesses them in order to be a blessing to all the nations of the earth. The kingdom heals and ultimately brings reconciliation between God's humanity and God's whole creation.*

## **Opsomming**

*Hierdie artikel stel 'n bybelse-teologiese en missiologiese benadering tot evangelisasie in benadeelde en arm gemeenskappe voor, en dit is daarom belangrik dat die missio-Dei perspektief die sleutel tot alle areas in hierdie artikel sal wees. Missie is die besorgdheid van die Drie-enige God, die Vader, Seun en Heilige Gees, vir sy hele skepping. Die Vader het die Seun gestuur en die Seun het die Heilige Gees gestuur. Deur Jesus Christus en deur die Heilige Gees verenig God mense van elke stam, nasie, koninkryk en taal vir sy eie glorie om Hom vir ewig in die Nuwe Wêreld te aanbid. Die Evangelie van Jesus Christus moet verkondig word. Daarom is dit noodsaaklik dat kerke heelhartig aan die missie van God in die wêreld moet deelneem. Die kerk is die instrument van God om sy koninkryk in alle dele van die lewe te verkondig. Gelowiges moet getrou wees aan die roeping van God deur Jesus te volg en deel te neem aan die missio Dei, om liefde, hoop en vrede na 'n verlore en gebroke wêreld te bring. God het mense gekies om sy koninkryk te bou en Hy seën hulle om 'n seën te wees vir al die nasies van die aarde. Die koninkryk genees en bring uiteindelik versoening tussen God en die mensdom en God se hele skepping.*

## **Key words:**

**Biblical-theological; approach; promote; evangelism; disadvantaged; poor communities; South Africa; missiological study**

## **1. Introduction**

The main aim of this article is to focus on disadvantaged and poor communities to provide a basis and theoretical principles of mission. Furthermore, this article and its discussion are not based on affluent communities, but it

focuses mainly on disadvantaged and poor communities. Another important aspect in the article is that mission does not stand separately from the aspect of disadvantaged communities but it forms an integral part of it. The theological origin of *missio Dei* has an extended history, and is to be found in Reformed theology of the Reformation (Arthur, 2013; Bosch, 1991:8). The concept *missio Dei* is Latin, and was already used early in the fourth century by Aurelius Augustine to describe the sending acts within the Triune God. Since then, *missio Dei* became a vital term in Catholic and Orthodox dogmatics (Buys & Jansen, 2015:228). "Missio" as an activity of God was also articulated by the theologian, Karl Barth (Dames, 2007:41). Barth's influence was critical for missionary theology. The WCC Missions Conference in Willingen of the IMC in 1952 adopted the term and it became popular in Protestant missions theology through George Vicedom's book, *Missio Dei* in 1958 (Buys & Jansen, 2015:228). Furthermore, mission was understood as the very nature of God (Bosch, 2009:390), and the doctrine on the *missio Dei*, as God the Father sending Jesus Christ the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Holy Spirit (Arthur, 2013; Buys & Jansen, 2015:228; cf. also Is 6:8; Jn 20:21).

According to De Jong (1996), mission is not only *missio Dei* but also *missio Christi* with reference to John 20:21, where Christ sent out the apostles to plant churches (Ac 13:1-2; cf. also Jansen, 2015:21). God redeems the nations and reconcile them with Him in a covenant relationship with the aim to bless them (Jansen, 2015:19).

Mission is an extension and amplification of God's being (Niemandt, 2016:85-87). It is, therefore, an action of God. Thus, God should be seen as the Great Missionary (Bosch, 2009:519; De Beer, 2012:5). The final goal of the *missio Dei* is that God will be everything for everyone (1 Cor 15:28).

Christ reconciles his people with God, after which the Lord lives in them through his Holy Spirit. To grow in the expectation of God's great future believers receive the Holy Spirit. To receive and be filled with the Holy Spirit is to taste the beginning of eternity here and now. Believers filled with the Holy Spirit become and act as his instruments to awaken hope in a world with various ills and wounds of the past. Biblical hope is to experience that God's tomorrow already breaks today. Believers have the assurance that they move towards total and radical renewal and restoration of creation as a whole. Real Christian hope is, therefore, also a longing that grows in people's hearts for the mentioned great day. Through their words and deeds, believers erect signposts of the definite coming of the kingdom. In this regard, the Holy Spirit is a guarantee and foretaste of God's great future.

The church reaches out and develops its community through the work of the Holy Spirit in cooperation with the community. In this way, it becomes a Christian community. The church performs the mission, and God uses the church that employs people in the community to help transform them into being Spirit-filled believers. However, the kingdom of God is broader than the church, even though the church is central in this process – God does not operate without the church. The significance of the church is that it integrates the whole community. This can be explained by the image of a river that runs into the Dead Sea, which becomes alive.

## **2. Background and scriptural perspectives for a *missio-Dei* vision in missions**

With the rise of post-modern paradigms, theology as well as missiology have become highly complex (Bosch, 2009:262-276; Hirsch, 2006:16).

If people within a community wished to function as a missional church (*missio ecclesia*) and be part of the *missio Dei*, they have to grow in missional spirituality and live in the fear of God (Ac 9:31). God's honour and his praise are basic motifs that provide the driving force behind involvement in the *missio Dei* (Jansen, 2015:21). In this context, churches should honour God, even if they are poor or disadvantaged. The reason is that they do not belong to themselves, or even to others, but to God. Therefore, if churches partake in the *missio Dei* with the aim to honour and respect God as churches, they become part of God's blessing to the world. Should God's people honour God in their words and deeds, God's honour will become vivid and visible, and above it all, they will grow in holiness (Eph 5:27). If churches turn back to the Scriptures, and adhere to the biblical principles of God, they will gain perspective on ways to take part in the *missio Dei*, and thereby fulfil their calling. Biblical principles tend to break down obstacles which in many instances are a hindrance to people's spiritual development (De Beer, 2012:61).

### **2.1 *The Luke-Acts perspective on mission and evangelism***

In this article, it is crucial to understand the Luke-Acts perspective of mission and evangelism. These two Bible books belong together since they give account of the ministry and mission of Jesus on earth (De Beer, 2012:38). Practically, these books tell the story of Jesus and salvation, and introduce Christ to the nations. The Luke-Acts perspective provides the ideal view of mission in the biblical testimony.

Jesus is the sent One, as well as the One who sends others, according to the book of Luke (De Beer, 2012:38). The Luke-Acts testimony is clear on mission and evangelism. Bosch (2009:84) explains that Luke's view has become highly prominent in the debate about a biblical foundation for mission. It is essential to understand the significant mission of Jesus Christ: the sent One is also the One who is sending (Lk 9:1-6; 10:1-6; 24:46-48). This significance is also strongly evident in the Gospel of John (Jn 20:20; 21-23; 25-29; 31).

Bosch (2009:84) explains that the theme "salvation" is central to the work of Luke. De Beer (2012:38) describes this aspect further by pointing out that the words *soteria* and *soterion*, which means salvation, appear six times in Luke and Acts, and not a single time in Mark or Matthew but again, once in the book of John. The word *soteria* has a significant meaning of *redeem, recover or purchase back* (De Beer, 2012:38; cf. also Lv 25:26, 32; Rt 4:4, 6; Ex 6:6; Ps 77:14). Bosch (2009:84) is explicit in his research about the meaning of salvation. In this regard, salvation has a dual dimension: liberation from all bondages and entry into a new life in Christ. The researcher concurs with the above especially in terms of the poor community, and in light of the biblical testimony that there is only new life in Jesus Christ, and the old things such as sin, habits, conduct, behaviour, mind-sets and lifestyles have passed (cf. 2 Cor 5:17). Salvation in this context is of essence. Hence, irrespective of the condition of the poor living in poverty, Jesus Christ can give them a new and fulfilling life (cf. Joh. 10:10), far above monetary value through His salvation plan.

The notion of salvation in this article in both the Old- and New Testament is crucial. In the Old Testament, the term for "salvation" is *yésa*, and the basic meaning is "bring into a spacious environment" (Ps 18:36; 66:12). The word also carries a metaphorical sense of "freedom" from limitation, with the connotation of deliverance from factors which constrain such as disease (Is 38:20), trouble (Jr 30:7) or enemies (2 Sm 3:18; Ps 44:7). It is important to note that the usage of this word is synonymous with *yésa* in the latter part of Isaiah (41:14; 44:6; 47:4). In the New Testament, and especially the synoptic Gospels, Jesus only once mentions the word "salvation" in Luke 19:9, where it may refer to himself as the embodiment of salvation imparting pardon to Zacchaeus. The Lord also used the term "save" to indicate firstly his intended earthly mission (Mk 3:4), and did it by direct statement (Lk 4:18; Mt 18:11; Lk 9:56; Mt 20:28). Secondly, Jesus explained what is demanded of humans (Mk 8:35; Lk 7:50; 8:12; 13:24; Mt 10:22). Luke 18:26 indicates that salvation requires a contrite heart, childlike, receptive helplessness, and the renunciation of all for Christ (Walters & Milne, 1996:1046-1050). Important

in this article, Luke's version of *salvation* is universal, in the sense that it includes both Jews and gentiles, which signify that all humankind must see the salvation of God in Jesus (Witherington, 1998:840; cf. Lk 3:6). Seen from this perspective, Luke-Acts becomes a paean of praise to the incomparable grace of God, lavished upon sinners. Luke is calling the rich to show solidarity with the poor. The poor can either be Christian, or non-Christian. The Luke-Acts perspective shows a clear view of the *missio Dei*, which imply that churches have a vital role to play in the *missio Dei* pertaining the poor and disadvantaged communities. In the context of this article salvation is not only imperative for poor and disadvantaged communities but it is highly recommendable.

## ***2.2 Theological considerations of mission and evangelism in a missio-Dei perspective pertaining the poor and disadvantaged communities***

Mission and evangelism are part of God's great plan and purpose to redeem the whole of creation, which was broken by sin and evil, and transform it into the new creation (Wright, 2012:1-6; cf. Ac 20:27). Most people use "mission" and "evangelism" interchangeably since it involves the total Christian ministry to the world outside the church (Bosch, 2009:4). However, it should be realised that mission has a broader application than evangelism. This is because the former includes testimony of social justice, work of mercy, services of love, mission and evangelism to the centre (Wright, 2012). Evangelism is central in the process of transformation within the community. God is already at work in mission through his Spirit in every life, culture and community. His Spirit leads in all truth, and convinces people of sin, iniquity and future judgments (Booker & Ireland, 2003:1; cf. Jn 16:13). The Holy Spirit operates through the preaching of the Gospel and the Word of God in people's lives. In Ephesians 2:4-5, Paul explains that Jesus Christ brought hope while people were spiritually dead in their disobedience, and the Spirit brought them to life with Christ. It is because of God's grace and mercy that they have been saved.

Mission is the activity of God that lies at the heart and core of God's mission and of the church, namely the Gospel (De Beer, 2012:55; cf. Wright, 2012:2). There are five markers of mission, namely (1) proclaim the good news of the kingdom; (2) teach, baptize and nurture new believers; (3) respond to human need by loving service; (4) seek to transform unjust structures of society; and (5) strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain the life of the earth (Wright, 2012:3). These five markers are interconnected, such as the rim of a wheel, which is united by its hub. In the same sense, the Lordship of Christ

reigns over all aspects of life and mission. These five markers could also be summarised in a number of key words: evangelism, teaching, compassion, justice, and care of creation.

Evangelism in the context of this article means “gospelling” the good news, which God has promised and effected through Jesus Christ. This entails narrating the whole story of what God has done by using the Old and New Testaments, proclaiming the good news that the God who created the world has acted to save it from the consequences of human sin and evil. This salvation was brought about through His Son, Jesus Christ (Booker & Ireland, 2003:2). People respond to this good news of God’s salvation through Jesus Christ, by turning to Christ in repentance. In other words, evangelism forms the centre of the fully-integrated scope of all mission through Jesus Christ (Wright, 2012:6-7).

Furthermore, the English word “evangelism” derives from the Greek word *euaggelion*, which means “gospel” or “good news” in the noun form, and the word is also translated as “preach” (Miano, s.a.). But in the verb form (*euaggelizesthai*) it means to “announce” or “bring good news” of Jesus who died for our sins (Baker illustrated Bible dictionary, 2013:534). This Greek word appears 55 times in the New Testament. Evangelism which entails the communication of the Gospel message, includes a warning, namely about sin and its consequences (Jn 16:8; Ac 24:25; Rv 20:11-15). It also provides an explanation of God’s remedy for sin as conveyed by the Gospel (Ac 8:29-35; Rm 3:21-26; 2 Cor 5:21). This includes the clear call to repent, or return from sin and turn toward God; and believe the Gospel by faith (Mk1:15; Lk 13:1-5; Ac 17:29-31; Rm 1:17; 10:9-13). Based on the Markan version, evangelism points to a personal conversion (Barrett, 1987:9; DeMoss & Miller, 2002; Farrell, 1996).

The researcher argues that the whole church should be mission-driven and evangelising since it exists for the sake of God’s mission, and mission is not a specialist activity for a few professionals (Wright, 2012:18). The risen Christ gave the Great Commission to all his disciples to proclaim the good news to the world including the poor and the disadvantaged (Barrett, 1987:20).

### ***2.3 The mission of God in disadvantaged communities***

A profound question about disadvantaged communities and poor people was asked over the years, “Have you ever done anything to help poor people?” (Corbett & Fikkert, 2012:9). These authors point out that most Evangelicals and missionaries would have answered “No” to this specific question. They also indicated that humans live in a world of urgent spiritual need, and to

respond, the church takes the Word of God as point of departure. Followers of Jesus Christ are compelled to have grace, show compassion and love for the poor and their physical needs (Corbett & Fikkert, 2012:11). The grace of God is the heartbeat of integral mission. Believers are obligated to convey God's grace, generosity, by assisting the disadvantaged (Micah Declaration on integral Mission, 2001:2).

The church should take the lead and work with the relevant stakeholders in communities to tackle poverty and show compassion to the poor (Mt 25:31-46), seeking justice and encouraging the oppressed (Is 1:17). The Scriptures relate God's call to care for the poor, and material possessions should be shared with those in need so that the love of God can be seen in the life of that poor person (Corbett & Fikkert, 2012:13; Barram, 2011:558-560; cf. 1 Jn 3:17).

According to these authors, no section in life can alleviate poverty on its own. All people are in debt to God to help the poor. Impoverished and destitute people need interventions in areas such as economic development, health, education, agriculture, or spiritual formation. It is, therefore, the responsibility of every Christian to help the poor in order to fulfil this biblical mandate (Barram, 2011:558-560; Corbett & Fikkert, 2012:14).

Communities, churches and believers should take cognisance of Isaiah 61:1-3 according to which the prophet was anointed to preach the good news to the poor, proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed and proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. The mission of Jesus Christ was, and is still, to preach the good news of the kingdom of God, which implies that He must be revered as the King of all kings and the Lord of all lords. All things broken and defiled, which means that the whole of creation will be restored with the return of Jesus Christ, and Christians now already experience a foretaste of His coming glory, even those living in poverty. Ailments, sorrow and unfreedom are turned around, and under his rule and authority and power, and are restored to health, beauty and freedom (Corbett & Fikkert, 2012:32).

According to Colossians 1:5-20, Jesus Christ is described as the Creator, Sustainer, and Reconciler of all things. He died for all humans to reconcile them, in other words putting them into a right standing or relationship with God. This is part of the good news, however, the greatest part is the promise of making all things new. If Jesus Christ made all things new, and preached the good news among the hurting, the weak, and the poor, the church should follow suit. They should be involved in disadvantaged communities, and especially among poor people (Corbett & Fikkert, 2012:37). Believers have



been commanded to follow the King, Jesus Christ, into places of brokenness, poverty and injustice.

In this article, it is fundamental to understand that the care of the poor should be a vital concern for churches working in disadvantaged communities (Mt 25:31-46; Ac 6:1-7; Gl 2:1-10; 6:10; Ja 1:27; cf. Barram, 2011:558-560). In this regard, 1 John 3:16-18 states clearly: This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters, who are our fellow believers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children let us not love with words or tongue, but with actions and in truth.

Corbett and Fikkert (2012:41) point out that God's people showed true concern for the poor during eras of relative economic equality. According to them, this highlights God's desire not only for other current churches, but for all disadvantaged communities. Those who have material possessions must care for the poor, and share of their possessions with those in need. Although this is not the whole solution to helping the poor, it shows God's love in a concrete way.

The ultimate task of the church that represents God's kingdom on earth is to embody Jesus Christ by doing what He did, and what He continues to do through his people. This is done through both word and deeds to proclaim and demonstrate concretely that Jesus Christ is the King of kings and the Lord of lords. He is the only One bringing righteousness, justice and peace. Therefore, the believers who proclaim his kingship should follow where Jesus operated, among the blind, the lame, the sick, outcast and the poor (Corbett & Fikkert, 2012:41).

It must be remembered that God chose those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom He promised those who love Him (Ja 2:5). Furthermore, "God chose that which seems foolish for the world, to shame the wise. He chose weakness within the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly and despised things, and even the things that are not, to nullify the things that are, in order that no one may boast before Him" (1 Cor 26-29).

#### *God chooses the foolish, weak and despised objects*

God has deliberately chosen to work in the world starting with the weak who are on the "outside", and not the powerful ones on the "inside". The poor are not more righteous or sanctified than the rich. The biblical testimony does not consider poverty as a desirable state, or view material thing(s) as evil.

Wealth, which is the opposite of poverty, is viewed as a gift from God. The point to be made is that God chose for his own glory to reveal his kingdom in a “certain place” where the world with all its pride would not expect it, namely among the poor, the weak, the lowly, the foolish and the despised (Corbett & Fikkert, 2012:42).

As evangelicals and missionaries minister to the poor, so should families who are part of the local church and even governments. They should cater for the spiritual and physical needs of the poor seeing that they also have huge responsibilities for the poor in disadvantaged communities. The care of the poor is not an exclusive task of the church but an important task, which must be fulfilled in co-operation with other role-players in society (Corbett & Fikkert, 2012:44; cf. also Mt 25:31-46; 1 Tm 5:8; Dn 4:27; Ps 72).

Community workers, academics, educationalists, researchers, and others should fulfil this task wholeheartedly as well. They should minister to the physical and spiritual needs of the poor in disadvantaged communities, whether through projects, programmes or intervention. The biblical testimony is clear in Isaiah 61:1-3, where the prophet confirms that God had anointed him to preach the good news to the poor, bind up the broken-hearted, proclaim freedom for the captives and prisoners, proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour, and comfort those who mourn.

This verse is not only meant for the prophet Isaiah’s audience at the time, but for all people who are willing to participate in the *missio Dei* to churches that are impoverished. It is paramount to acknowledge Jesus Christ before others, otherwise He will also not acknowledge them before the Father, if they are ashamed, and do not acknowledge Him (Lk 12:8-9; Mk 8:38; Rm 1:16; 2 Tm 1:8; 2 Pt 4:16; 1 Jn 2:28).

In this article, it is necessary to view poverty according to a broader perspective in terms of disadvantaged communities:

### *2.3.1 Poverty according to a biblical framework (Corbett & Fikkert, 2012:54)*

To diagnose the “disease” of poverty, firstly, the fundamental nature of reality should be considered by starting with God the Creator of heaven and earth. God reveals Himself as a relational Being and exists as the three-unity. Human beings are relational because they are made in the image of God. God established four foundational relationships for every person, namely with God, with oneself, with others, and with the

rest of his creation. These relationships can be considered the building blocks of life. If these relationships are functioning well, human beings experience the fullness of life, seeing they are what God created and intended to be. Christians can have these relationships in place, but they can also live in a context where social injustice has become the overarching system around them and others.

A closer view at the basic relationships according to Corbett and Fikkert (2012:55):

- Relationship with God – primary and important, from where the other three relationships flows. In this relationship, human beings glorify God because they were created to serve and to give God praise through thoughts, words and actions.
- Relationship with oneself – people have worth and dignity because they were uniquely created in the image of God. They have a high calling, namely to reflect God's being; they are superior to the rest of the creation but should remember they are not God.
- Relationship with others – God created human beings to live in a loving relationship with one another. People should keep in mind that they are not islands, created for themselves; they are made to know, love, encourage one another, and use the gifts and talents God has given them to fulfil their calling in life.
- Relationship with the rest of creation – according to Genesis 1:28-30, God created human beings to be stewards, in other words, people who understand, protect, subdue and manage the world that God has created. The aim is to preserve creation and produce bountiful. God called humans to interact with his creation, turn possibilities into realities, and be able to sustain themselves through the fruits of their stewardship.

Those working in poor communities, discover and appreciate God's active involvement in this context for a long time. When one enters such communities, it provides sense of humility and awe, because what is observed reflects the hand of God. Nevertheless, a significant part of the church's task should be introducing the community to God. These inhabitants may not even know who God is. They should be helped to appreciate what God has been doing for them since the beginning of the world. Furthermore, they should be led to discover their own gifts and talents as well as their calling.

### *2.3.2 Christian views of the poor*

According to Myers (1999:4), believers have different views of the poor:

- Made in the image of God – this truth is based on the creation story which indicates that their poverty is due to a lack of opportunity, knowledge and skills.
- People in rebellion – this specific view draw on the Fall of humankind in creation. Thus, the reason for poverty is lack of initiative, laziness and bad choices. They, therefore, need to accept the Gospel, and make better life-choices.
- Christ incarnate – according to Matthew 25 where Christ places Himself in the distressing guise of the poor. A practical example would be Mother Teresa's ministry to the poor. People lack love and relationships and do not belong, whereas they need accompaniment and should bare their suffering just as Christ.
- God's blessed – based on the prophetic literature and the Exodus account. The poor are blessed and the kingdom are meant for them. The reason for their poverty is that they are oppressed by social systems to keep them poor for the benefit of the non-poor. It is, therefore, vital that they receive justice and assistance in finding their voice and place in the economic and political system.
- Lost souls – this view draws selectively on the Gospels and posits a dualism between the spiritual and the physical realms of the modern world. The poor are lost, and the kingdom is coming; with Jesus' second coming (which is imminent) the poor need to be saved.
- Christians are compelled by love to share, and declare the Gospel through their lives, words and deeds by testifying of Christ's victory over all evil.

#### *The fundamental nature of poverty*

According to Myers (1999:4, 65-66), poverty entails more than a mere material condition; and implies the absence of things such as money, water, food, housing and the lack of social systems, skills or knowledge. Poverty is also a deficit or a lack where poor people for example, do not have enough to eat or a place to sleep, or clean water. Poverty is associated with low-income where people feel inferior to others. Shame is also a major part of the brokenness that low-income people experience in their relationship with themselves. Such people do not view themselves as created by God.

Corbett and Fikkert (2012:59) indicated that relationships play a major role in poverty. According to them, poverty is the actual result of relationships that did not work, are not just, are not for life, and are not harmonious or enjoyable. For these scholars, such relationships are typified by the absence of *shalom* (all-encompassing peace) in all its meanings (Myers, 1999:86). It is important, however, not to focus only on life's worse-scenario cases. The reason is that Jesus Christ holds together all things and sustains them by His powerful word (Col 1:16-17). The earthly ministry of Jesus Christ focused on people who are in need, poor people, people who suffered. This provides good news for the poor as well as for the rich, the sick, or strangers, et cetera. Jesus Christ died for believers and non-believers, and His mercy and grace is for all men (Bosch, 1991:18; cf. Lk 4:18; Is 61:1; 58:6).

### 2.3.3 *The causes of poverty according to Myers*

Myers (1999:83-86) identifies the following causes of poverty:

- Physical – people require food, clean water and shelter, the basic needs according to Maslow. Money, land, and livestock are helpful assets to have and if absent, poverty is the result.
- Social – the physical aspect is intensified by the social causes of poverty.
- Mental – certain causes of poverty are linked to the mental condition of the poor. Poverty is caused by lack of knowledge and technical information. Mental states are due to poor nutrition, illness, alcohol or drugs.
- Mentality – poverty can also exist within the mind and spirit in the form of a poverty of being, for example if people lie, they disempower themselves.
- Spiritual (Van der Walt, 2008:167-168) – worldviews inevitably cause poverty. Miller, Moffet and Scott. (2005:16-17) define a worldview as the total set of assumptions about the world and how it works, and sometimes it is termed a “belief system” or “mind-set”. Van der Walt (2001:58) argues that a worldview is people’s perspective on created reality, a place in the world where they have to fulfil their cultural task. A Worldview can be contributing or detrimental and can have positive or negative consequences. In other words, it can light up a person’s life, or darken it (Van der Walt, 2008:2, 58). Van der Walt (2001:58) raises a concern that a worldview can be complicated. The reason is that it can degenerate into an ideology, which is an absolutised, hardened, closed, dogmatic orientation about the world. Van der Walt identifies the

risks of a worldview. However, despite its definition and dangers, a worldview is important (Miller *et al.*, 2005:19; *cf.* Van der Walt, 2008:2). In the context of this article, a biblical worldview (Miller *et al.*, 2005:12), or Christian worldview (Van der Walt, 2008:230-278; Van der Walt, 2010:46) is recommended. However, even these worldviews can be detrimental if it has become an ideology (Miller *et al.*, 2005:34, 58). Thus, people have to repent or accept Christ as their Saviour so that our mind-sets can be renewed. Believers must have the mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:16). Repentance in this context, means viewing the world the way God created it. This means they must not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of their mind (Rm 12:2) (Miller *et al.*, 2005:13; Van der Walt, 2001:111; Van der Walt, 2008:111).

Among the African cultures, poverty increases by the day due to a distorted worldview and a lack of knowledge. To prove this statement: Money is often spent on charms for protection, and spiritual causes of poverty are often overlooked by development aid organisations. Academics often ignore the power of the spirit world where phenomena exist such as witchcraft, ancestral and other spirits, fear of demons and evil. The cause of poverty is fundamentally spiritual:

- What causes injustice in human relationships?
- What stands between God and people?
- What works against life, against *shalom* (peace)?

The root cause of deception, distortion and domination is *to miss the mark* ( $\sin^2$ ). It should be realised that every aspect of human life, including the body, mind, will and the emotions, all of life and all the earth, has been distorted and damaged by sin. This has alienated men and women from God, themselves, others and from the environment. Therefore, since the fall of Adam and Eve, futility is built into the universe and sin is a universal trait of humanity – rich and poor alike. Sin also penetrates people's cultures and societies, affecting their social, economic and political systems. Poverty, unemployment, HIV/Aids and its consequences are mere symptoms of total depravity (MCDC, 2007a:1; MCDC, 2007b:1; MCDC, 2008:1; MCDC, 2009:1). The suffering caused by these symptoms are experienced as consequences of personal sins, but sometimes people are victims of sins caused by others.

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2 Both Hebrew (*chata* and *het*) and Greek (*hamartia*) has the meaning of *missing the mark, go wrong, to err, to fail, guilt, fault* (aiming for the wrong target or not hitting it at all) (*Baker illustrated Bible dictionary*, 2013:1546; *cf.* also Ex 34:9; Dt 9:18; Lv 4:2-31; Nm 15:30.)

The researcher's understanding of this universal effects of sin led him to view community transformation as the reversal of sin and its consequences, and the restoration of God's order in creation, including God's intent for humans to live as his image bearers in all aspects of their lives. The transforming grace of the Holy Spirit works powerfully through the Gospel that are conveyed to people through word and deeds. Such transformation will turn people into worshippers of God, and thereby, make them fully human.

Doing missionary work, based on the presupposition of the reality of total depravity, leads to the understanding that transformation of individuals and poor communities must reach much deeper than merely *changing conditions of poor socialisation, releasing untapped potential in people and communities or changing environmental conditions*. Presuppositions that merely focus on superficial transformation in community development are in danger of not being holistic, comprehensive, long lasting and sustainable. An unbiblical and limited understanding of the causes for people's problems will misdirect the church in its approach to community development.

The church should avoid imposing a framework based on reductionist presuppositions foreign to the Scripture's message about the brokenness in communities and the lives of individuals. Such an approach can inevitably lead to a disregard for and even the discarding of particular needs that do not fit into such a framework. The correct, biblically sound presuppositions are outlined below.

In obedience to the commission of God, the church should integrate words as well as deeds of God's love in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit to all people crossing their way. This should be done through the following actions:

- Present the Gospel, calling people to repentance, faith and eternal reconciliation with God through Christ.
- Show deeds of mercy and compassion, extending the goodness of God's kingdom on earth in the name of Christ. This example was set by Christ himself. It conveys the message that believers are being conformed to the image of Christ and have received the Holy Spirit as the first fruit and guarantee of God's new creation.
- Disciple new Christians and plant churches that will be lighthouses of God's transforming grace, by providing an atmosphere of mutual care and fellowship and provide a foretaste of God's new creation.

- God commands the believers to clothe themselves with compassion. This is a calling to walk with the poor and suffering, and convey the transforming grace of God through a quality spiritual life that allows them to serve their community, not as saviours, but as servants of Christ, the one, true Saviour.
- Through Jesus Christ there is good news since there is a way to overcome sin toward transformation. However, the bad news is that this news is not accepted, seeing that people refuse, therefore they remain in chains of self-imposed limitations (Myers, 1999:88-90).

#### 2.3.4 *The true identity of the poor*

The poor as is the case with all people bear the image of the Creator. Thus, treating the poor with respect means enabling them to function as architects of change within their impoverished communities (Micah Declaration on Integral Mission, 2001:2). Myers (1999) addresses poverty and human transformation from a Christian perspective. Every human being is poor due to the affect and nature of the Fall in the beginning (Gen. 3) in the sense of not experiencing the four basic mentioned relationships as God intended. In this regard, poverty is physical, spiritual and social (Myers, 1999:64-65).

From a Christian view of the poor in the above, it is evident that every human being is suffering from a poverty of spiritual intimacy, of being, of community and of stewardship, however, Christ's redemption plan should be an answer to this condition which can be both for poor and affluent communities. Although the affluent communities are better off in terms of wealth and progress in life, they are in need of the redemption plan of Christ. All humans are incapable of being what God created them to be, and are unable to experience the fullness of joy that God designed for them through the four basic relationships (Corbett & Fikkert, 2012:59). Human beings are embedded in families, communities and social systems. They are created in the image of God and have gifts, skills and potential to become part of the kingdom of God.

The poor are also part of households, which are the building blocks of larger social systems. The poor are those who are always among others who are not poor. They do not only attend certain, impoverished churches. In this regard, poverty and poor people can only be understood by keeping the relationships between the poor and the none-poor in mind (Myers, 1999:61-64). In this context of this article, it is thus necessary to examine the concept *transformational development*.



### 2.3.5 *What transformational development entails*

Transformation implies the changing of people's choices, and the aspects underlying those choices. This also entails a worldview (mind-set), and the values flowing from it. As indicated by Romans 12:1-2, believers should present their bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which practically implies their reasonable service. Believers should be transformed and their minds renewed to assess what the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God entails for their lives. Therefore, transformational development should reflect the church's concern for positive change in the whole of human life, namely materially, socially, and spiritually. Transformational development is a lifelong journey, and does not end in this life (Myers, 1999:3).

### 2.3.6 *Who the poor are not*

Many view the poor as merely lazy, fatalistic, improvident, ignorant, and arrogant, but this is a misconception. Interestingly, all people suffer from these problems, poor and non-poor alike (Myers, 1999:64). God is deeply concerned about the poor. This concern is summarised in Deuteronomy 15:11: "There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore, I command you to be open-handed toward your fellow Israelites who are poor and needy in your land" (cf. also *Baker illustrated Bible dictionary*, 2013:1339).

Poverty entails pain since such people such as vulnerable children suffer physical pain, for example, scarcity of food to feed the family, and humiliation from others. The church should show compassion for poor children and youth in their communities because as believers they are urged by the love of Christ to be a blessing to others, concretely (*Baker illustrated Bible dictionary*, 2013:1339; cf. also Job 29:12; 30:25; 31:16; Ps 112:9; Pr 19:17; 22:9; 28:8, 27; Is 58:5-7; Jr 22:16).

### 2.3.7 *Vulnerable people*

Sin disturbed the splendour of creation. People fell outside of familial bonds and became victims in a broken world. These are the fatherless, widows, orphans and foreigners (Yeats, 2011:9). However, these victims should be moved by actions of love that break down the differences within human society (Nwaigbo, 2015:98). God has a particular concern for the poor, orphans and widows who are in need. In this regard, it should be noted that "poor" is an umbrella term for those who are physically impoverished or of diminished spirit, which include most orphans and widows (*Baker illustrated Bible dictionary*, 2013:1339).

Love should be the primary action by which God empowers and develop poor and disadvantaged communities. Poor and disadvantaged people are affected the most whenever destructive conduct are promoted such as hate. Evidently, society views and treats them differently (Swart & Yates, 2012:1). The poor are often viewed as estranged, hurt, marginalised and alienated. Therefore, several ministries and development programmes advocate a “care-filled” ministry (Blevins, 2014:13). Notwithstanding these initiatives, the victims still remain marginalised in society, are often abused, exploited, demeaned and constantly at risk (Greener, 2016:161; Knoetze, 2015:220). Irrespective of how the poor are viewed and treated, they seemingly are the “great omission” in theology (Botha, 2016:1; Rosalee, Ewell & Konz, 2014:10-20). In James 1:27, believers are commanded to care for the widows and the orphans. In the same vein, the community are also commanded to protect the rights of the orphans (Yeats, 2011:10; cf. Dt 26:12-13; 16:11, 14). Care for the widows and the orphans in practice implies social justice or hospitality but Paul shifts the notion to make the rationale of this argument a biblical framework of redemption (Yeats, 2011:10).

### 2.3.8 *The church's missional contribution*

The church must respond to the *missional* call of God. Therefore, it is important to do training and transformation from the *missio Dei*. The researcher is fully aware that the stakes are too high for communities to follow the status quo where the poor and destitute are concerned. Christians must become involved to give hope for these vulnerable poor people that are facing Africa and other regions (Singletary, 2011:103).

The church should learn to be faithful to God's call since it is the duty of Christians not to sit idle while children struggle to make it in life. The role of children in the church, which is part of youth ministry, is important. However, at present that role tend to disintegrate into issues with poor people, and they become more vulnerable (Makant, 2012:4). But there are poor people who are not even involved in churches, and the researcher's immediate question is: What should be done? The complex answer is outreach through *missio Dei* developments, interventions, training and equipping as well as education in mission. The church should embrace development on a psychological, social, and spiritual dimension with regard to the poor (Going, 2011:50; Greener, 2016:161). Leaders should be developed to help the church grow. Poor children and the youth are the future of the church, and this

institution is of intrinsic value to God. However, churches often fail to develop them (Bergler, 2010:7; 21).

**Spiritual development** is of essence to all people. The significance of spiritual development is a change in the individual's awareness of and relationship with God as Father. Such development deals with identity of the individual, and accepts that each relationship with God is initiated by God in Jesus Christ through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Since spiritual development is unique, it provides an anchor to all human development (Greener, 2016:161). Developing people relies on the activities of the church to support and assist them in their moral and spiritual growth (Roebben, 2012:194).

**Intervention** that supports the efforts of guardian families in communities is also needed for the orphans and vulnerable people (Olsen & Hybels, 2011:78). By remaining within their communities, these people retain a sense of belonging and identity, and benefit from the support against risks within the community (Singletary, 2011:102).

**Training and equipping** is crucial to people. It teaches them personal and social responsibility, accountability and citizenship. People must be trained and equipped to exercise their responsibility within the community (Bergler, 2010:21). They should be trained, equipped and empowered to use their gifts in honouring God by serving their community. They have to be trained and equipped to cope with difficult situations and dilemmas. In order for them to grow, they should be guided by the Word of God. This will teach them to be resilient, spiritually strong and confident (i.e. in faith) that their situation and circumstances will be changed (Dillen, 2012:62). Building and understanding resilience is an important aspect in the context of this article. Resilience is the motivational force within each individual that drives him/her to pursue wisdom, self-actualisation and altruism, and to live in harmony with a spiritual source of strength (Richardson, 2002).

**Mission education** in this context means conveying the Gospel of Christ to people and make them aware of the importance of *missional* work. Furthermore, it is to educate them about God's Great Commission, involving their lives and their salvation through Christ. The topics should include repentance, baptism and how to be a living testimony for Christ. In this regard, the church is supposed to play a vital role, seeing that it is the locus of God's renewing work (Goheen, 2011:192). If the churches are committed to their people, then it follows that mission education is an important element in the church for the

sake of this group. The reason is that they are affected and shaped by their environment and are surrounded by external influences such as the media, electronics, digital appliances, et cetera (Ayo-Obiremi, 2010:183). It is the researcher's view that poor and disadvantaged people should be educated *missionally*. This will help them understand mission better, and empower them to use their gifts in the service of the *missio Dei* (Shaw & Constantineau, 2016:208-209). It is therefore crucial that the church should do everything in its power not to lose the initiative and commitment of poor and disadvantaged communities. To win the hearts of poor and disadvantaged people, they should be loved unconditionally (Vallgård, 2015:595). Jesus loved them and the church should follow suit. This theme is prevalent in the biblical testimony.

Compassion is important in this context since it originates from God's character. All virtues begin with God, who is the essence of goodness, according to Mark 10:18. For example, goodness, mercy and grace indicates love, and compassion, which is an element of true goodness – one of the attributes the Scriptures ascribes to God. Compassion also refers to feelings of love, pity, kindness, tenderness to others (i.e. the poor; the orphans, the widows, the fatherless, etc.) who are in distress (Brown, 2011:44-45; cf. Is 54:8). According to Deuteronomy 10:17-19, God provides justice for the fatherless and the widow.

God is not only concerned about the children, the orphans, the poor, and the widows. According to the biblical testimony, God also cares and provides for them in unusual ways due to his compassion for them. However, God also requires from them to live holy and act righteous in their ways before him and others.

God set the example of compassion for the poor, the orphan and the less fortunate. This example is where God points the way for humans to act caring towards others, thereby following the way of the Lord. Furthermore, God motivates people through his Word to help the disadvantaged, the poor, the children and orphans (Brown, 2011:51-52).

The main focus of this discussion on compassion is the fact that Jesus Christ's ministry was centred on this act (Brown, 2011:47; cf. also Mt 9:36; Mt 20:34; Mk 1:40; Mk 5:19; Mk 6:34; 9:32; 15:32; Lk 7:13). Jesus related to the poor, especially children and they formed an integral part of His ministry (Grundmann, 2016:165; cf. also Mt 18:3-5; 19:14; 21:15-16).

Thus, in this article it is important to remember that poor people often are the unfortunate omission in missiological studies. In this regard, caring for widows and orphans signifies true Christianity, love for God and a relationship with God (Ja 1:27).

Part of mission education is that affected communities should awake from their spiritual “death” which is a result of poverty, and deal with these problems in order to liberate people (DeBorst, 2007:30-33; *cf.* also 2.4.1; 2.4.2). Spiritual death can be detrimental for the progress of the community. If a community is spiritually degenerated, the best way for renewal is revival. Buys (2011) explains that a renewal is described several times as a resurrection from death. He proposes *revitalisation* as a comprehensive term for revival, repentance, transformation and reformation.

It is a tendency to view mission as an initiative that begins with the church, and a task which individuals as missionaries performs (Messenger, 2004:27). However, it is evident that mission is an action from God, and thus originates from God (De Beer, 2012:47).

Within this context, Christians must serve through word and deeds, and apply justice where injustice took place (Jansen, 2015:21; *cf.* Keller, 2011:216-218). Word and deeds are inseparable combined in the mission of the church, and is an integral part of *missio Dei*, by focusing on each individual's place in God's mission. This unity points to a lifestyle that could fit into God's mission, and functions to the benefit of creation as a whole (Jansen, 2015:20-23; *cf.* Buys & Jansen, 2015:225-227).

Integral word-and-deed ministry considers the contextual application of the *missio-Dei* motive and challenges the listeners to submit the different areas of their lives to God's kingdom (Jansen, 2015:24-25). Integral mission entails the proclamation and demonstration of the Gospel, that call people to love and repentance in all areas of life (Micah Declaration on Integral Mission, 2001:1). The church is an instrument in the *missio Dei* and functions as a holistic body of God through heart, voice and deeds. One of the main functions is to bring love, hope and peace to a lost and broken world. Reconciliation between God and people, in this context, the poor and disadvantaged communities is still a high priority in the *missio Dei*. Disadvantaged and poor people should be motivated and taught to live through word and deeds in their own context and workplaces (Doornenbal, 2012:19).

A church that declares mission as priority should integrate evangelising into its compassion ministry (Ja 1:19-27; 2:14-26). The reason is that mission and evangelising are God's ways of handling the problem of broken people in a spiritual and practical way (Wright, 2011:328).

The preaching of the Word focuses on the life of human beings as well as forgiveness of sin. Suppression and injustice exist globally. In contrast, the plan of God for impoverished communities is justice and righteousness since these communities can also be a blessing to the nations (Wright, 2011:369). Therefore, it is crucial to teach poor communities the following truths:

- Who is God?
- What is the purpose and will of God for their lives?
- How does God look at people and what does He expect from them?
- The importance of families.
- The plans of God for people (Jr 29:11).
- Bring the light of God to people who are living in darkness (1 Pt 2:9).
- Empower people through the guidance of the Holy Spirit and enlighten their mind about the bestowing of spiritual gifts (Ac 1:8); help them understand that God shares power with human beings to help them participate in His mission.
- Train people to be strong in times of adversity and during crisis circumstances because mission is Word-based and God's Word sustains life (Is 55:10-11).
- Equip people for every good work (2 Tm 3:16).
- Transform people's lives and reconcile them with God (2 Cor 3:18).
- Introduce people to God's restoring relationship (2 Cor 5:19).
- Proclaim service as an integral part of mission and an essential expression of *diakonia*, which is interrelated with *koinonia* (sharing at the table), by tackling poverty (Messenger, 2004:37).

### 3. Findings

Poor and disadvantaged communities are part of the good world that God created and still sustains. Christ has not been introduced to poor communities only during his life on earth. The Lord has been active in all of creation (including such communities) since the creation of the world, and is sustaining them through his powerful Word, according to Hebrews 1:3 *Missio*

*Dei* is the mission of God and not the mission of the church. This mission is rather assign to the church to reach the world. The *missio Dei* is an instrument for a broken and lost world. Hence, poor and disadvantaged communities should awake from their spiritual “death” which is a result of poverty. Spiritual death can be detrimental for the progress of the community. Poverty is the result of a distorted relationship with God. To have a relationship with God, it is important to study His Word. God reveals Himself mostly, and specifically in and through his Word. People can understand God by knowing what is written and is revealed about God in Scripture. Poor and disadvantaged people, including orphans, vulnerable children and youth who are living in extreme poverty conditions in their respected communities should be a deep concern for churches, NGO’s and governmental entities, and in all this, the *missio Dei* should not be out of account.

#### **4. Recommendations**

A missional approach should allow the mission of God to permeate all aspects of life. Training, equipping and developing can help teach poor and disadvantaged communities about God’s redemptive plans for their lives. When it becomes a missional community, they should regard the *missio Dei* as an important intervention in their lives. This should lead them to become witnesses with testimonies that concretely reflect in this article. Poor and disadvantaged communities should not only turn back to God, but grow towards the *missio Dei*. Further, they need to reform back to the Scriptures to fulfil their true calling in life.

#### **5. Conclusion**

Poor and disadvantaged people should be encouraged to live a life devoted to God’s vision for all humans, and they should be encouraged to live a more spiritual life for God. If a community is spiritually degenerated, the best way for renewal is revival. God’s work of reconciling the whole creation to himself should be a main concern as well as an instruction that could stir the belief in Jesus Christ.

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