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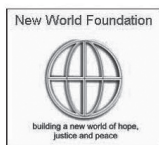
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# **Inclusive Communities and the Churches – Realities, Challenges and Visions**

Documentation of the UEM International Conference  
in Stellenbosch, South Africa, November 2014

Edited by Jochen Motte and Theodor Rathgeber



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# Foreword

# Introduction





# „I was a stranger, and you invited me“

## Inclusive Communities and the Churches – Realities, Challenges and Visions

In November 2014, 26 representatives from UEM member churches in Africa, Asia, and Germany met in Stellenbosch, South Africa to share how churches can become models for inclusive communities. The seminar was hosted by the Rhenish Church, the Uniting Reformed Church, and the New World Foundation.

In a world torn apart, where millions of people are marginalised, rejected, excluded, or even eliminated, the participants encouraged each other to explore new ways of becoming inclusive in the way Jesus showed in his life and his proclamation of the imminent Kingdom of God.

Jesus overcame barriers and boundaries of tradition, culture, and even religion, reaching out to the people at the margins and promising the blessing of God to those who were not considered to belong to the religious, economic, and social institutions of the time. He is an inspiration to the participants, who believe it is imperative to continuously reflect in a self-critical way on where exclusion is practised in our own church life and diaconic work, as well as in the local and global societies of today.

When the international UEM was founded in 1996, its member churches committed to strive for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation (JPIC). Since then, members of the UEM communion have gathered at different places and in different countries to strengthen and empower each other by learning how churches struggled to overcome ethnic conflicts in Sri Lanka in 1995, advocated for human rights in the Philippines in 1998, worked for reconciliation and justice in Namibia in 2000, saw the impact of globalisation in Germany in 2004, assisted female workers in a free trade zone in Batam, Indonesia in 2008, and fought extreme poverty by introducing a basic income grant in Namibia in 2010. They also sent international ecumenical teams to Indonesia in 2012 to visit indigenous people in Papua and communities in Sumatra that had been affected by land grabbing, palm oil production, deforestation, and mining.

In 2008, the UEM General Assembly adopted a new corporate identity on mission reconfirming work for JPIC and diaconic action as an integral part of the mission of the UEM and its members. Both programmes – mission and diaconia – are part of the advocacy work at the UEM.

The JPIC and diaconia programmes launched a joint human rights campaign in 2012–13 to promote disability rights and inclusion. The two programmes then collaborated on examining the issue of inclusion more broadly to determine where churches in the UEM communion can be more active and innovative in reaching out to people who face various forms of exclusion, discrimination, or even complete rejection.

The concept of inclusion may offer a new perspective on issues such as injustice, violent conflicts, and poverty. When we look at biblical tradition and the life of Jesus

Christ, it becomes obvious that understanding inclusion as merely an academic or legal exercise is not enough. Jesus lives and acts inclusively by building relationships that overcome exclusion in different regards and creating new communities and communions.

The participants of the seminar and the representatives from the hosting churches used this perspective to share stories of the exclusion of people through South African apartheid in South Africa and restrictive refugee policies in Europe. They recounted discrimination against women and children in Cameroon and Tanzania due to cultural practices, discrimination in Sri Lanka due to ethnic and religious origin or affiliation, exclusion in Indonesia and the Philippines due to economic injustice and the failure of state institutions, and exclusion from political participation in Hong Kong.

They also shared stories of hope, of churches and diaconic institutions launching inclusivity initiatives to welcome those who have historically been excluded. Participants had the opportunity to witness stories of inclusion in the post-apartheid context in South Africa, where they were able to visit projects and programmes centred on inclusion that have been implemented by the Rhenish Church, the Uniting Reformed Church, and the New World Foundation.

This publication documents the presentations on inclusiveness from the seminar, as well as those from members of the UEM communion who were not able to be present. The UEM website also has coverage of these contributions and the message of the seminar.

It is our expectation that these writings will encourage others to share and post their own stories of hope: accounts of how, through their diaconic service and action, churches can build inclusive communities in congregations and societies as living witness of the inclusive communion of God and his people.

Further contributions will be added to the website ([www.vemission.org/inclusive\\_communities](http://www.vemission.org/inclusive_communities)) as they become available.

We, the organisers, express our sincere thanks to all authors as well as to the representatives of the hosting churches and organisations in South Africa who opened their doors, welcomed us as strangers, and made it possible for us to continue our common journey towards building an inclusive community that encompasses the UEM and its followers and friends.

What experiences do you have with inclusion in your churches and congregations? Let the UEM communion take part in them! Anyone who would like to is invited to send their stories about inclusive action and inclusive community to [jpic@vemission.org](mailto:jpic@vemission.org). They will be published on the United Evangelical Mission website.

*Jochen Motte – Jörg Oelmann*

# Inclusive Communities and the Churches – A Momentous Meeting in South Africa

The church must be recognisable as God's residential address in this world. This is achieved through the church's unconditional obedience to God's Word in its life and teachings as a religious institution. Theologians believe it is integral that the church be a second home for people, a place where they can join in, give assistance, and support each other. Biblical scholars would argue that part of the mandate of the church is to seek justice for the victims, liberation for the oppressed, and reconciliation as the Lord has, as well as to be involved in works of mercy. Sharing in God's mission is an expression of the commandment to love our neighbour as ourselves. Whenever human life is threatened by evil, the church is by necessity a part of the struggle for victory, for a better world and human dignity for all, since the church must combat any form of destruction.

Jesus expanded the existing definitions of community by including the seemingly useless people who were normally excluded: the blind, the lame, and the lepers. He cut across the fabric of a civilisation borne on the backs of slaves, of gender inequality and racial division. His new community included the traitors and the exploiters, as well as the Samaritans and Romans who were traditionally seen as enemies of the Jews. This inclusive community was intended to serve as an example of what the world could look like.

The reality in South Africa as well as in the rest of the world is that we are daily witnesses to the traumatic results of exclusion, discrimination, marginalisation, segregation, and acts of violence. South Africa has multiple crises to deal with, including deepening inequality and grinding poverty, and these have exploded communities and led to violence. Such issues can only be dealt with if government and society remain in peak operation mode.

In November 2014, the Rhenish Church, the Uniting Reformed Church, and New World Foundation hosted a conference on inclusive communities and the churches, exploring the adverse impacts of exclusion. The conference theme, "Inclusive Communities and the Church", was based on the text in Matthew 25:35(b), "*I was a stranger and you invited me in*".

Twenty-six representatives from member churches of the United Evangelical Mission (UEM) in Africa, Asia, and Germany attended this conference and were asked to share experiences from their respective contexts as related to the theme. The conference hosts arranged for participants to visit their projects in the community, with the intention of exposing delegates to the harsh realities of what these churches must deal with, a result of the apartheid system where people were systematically excluded by law. One goal of these visits was to allow attendees to see how people at the grass-roots level are responding to the different church initiatives

to counter injustice, violence, exclusion, poverty, and the violation of basic human rights. Beyond the particularities of each of the examples, we learned that inclusive societies are usually a never-ending learning process.

The church leaders, representatives from diaconic institutions and foundations, pastors, theologians, and experts at the conference shared stories and models of how churches from different parts of the world are working to become inclusive communities. We heard moving accounts about the restrictive treatment of refugees in Europe, discrimination against women and children in Cameroon and Tanzania, acts of violence against religious groups in Sri Lanka, exclusion by failing state institutions in Indonesia and the Philippines, and repressive exclusion from political participation in Hong Kong.

Based on our experiences, biblical reflections, and deliberations during the conference, the member churches were called upon to strengthen their resolve by word and action to make inclusive communities an ecclesiastical and institutional reality. We are aware that *the church still has much left to do!*

In some ways, this conference served as an awareness campaign for the churches, in the sense that soon after it began, the participants, as foreign nationals, were exposed to acts of xenophobia in South Africa. The result was that we all ended up singing from the same hymn sheet, along with the rest of the country's leaders, to bring an end to the xenophobic violence.

While the attacks caused the displacement of thousands of people and heaped shame upon South Africa on the African continent and across the world, they also altered the normal pattern of business as usual. Parliament postponed its programme so that MPs could go to their constituencies and participate actively in campaigns against xenophobia. A multiparty committee with representatives from the National Assembly and the National Council of Provinces visited hotspots to investigate the cause of the violence in those areas.

Using the conference theme as a basis, the church was able to voice concerns and call upon members with statements such as this one:

The church condemns the xenophobic attacks against a defenceless people in the strongest possible terms. These shameful actions bring disgrace to a proud nation such as ours. This senseless wasting of precious life through brutal and deadly attacks is the work of cowards. No decent human being with moral values treats another person like this. There is no justification at all for this kind of inhumane behaviour.

We call on Christians to remember that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ was once a refugee, who fled with his parents from the land of His birth. As Christ became stateless and homeless, so did the refugees in our midst. We must have compassion with them, as Christ had compassion on us. We are bound together in a common humanity.

On behalf of the hosts, I would like to express our sincere thanks for the opportunity to have welcomed you to this conference. We trust that the South African Rainbow Nation's hospitality has served you well.

*Ashley Fransman – Pieter Grove – Tommy Solomons – Marius Bluemel*

# Introduction

## Inclusion – A Lasting Challenge Viewed from a New Dynamic

*Theodor Rathgeber*

The “Inclusive Communities and the Churches – Realities, Challenges and Visions” conference at Stellenbosch in November 2014 revealed “that the concept and term ‘inclusion’ has a long-standing history attested to in the Bible”. Inclusion also gained additional prominence in the general public with the adoption of the UN *International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (ICRPD) in 2006, which entered into force in 2008.<sup>1</sup> The participants at the Stellenbosch conference understood inclusion as principally a collective process of self-determination and individual autonomy that at the same time challenges the state and society to organise an appropriate and free social environment. The term “inclusiveness” evolved in order to identify the various steps in development, policy-making, and individual actions needed to make the concept of inclusion a societal reality beyond persons with disabilities. The concept of “participation” was frequently used in this discussion in order to call attention to existing barriers (“exclusion”) and advocate for a free, transparent, and comprehensively inclusive society. Most of the experiences recounted by the participants involved the concept of diversity and/or its opposites, “marginalisation” and “xenophobia”.

A second major field at the conference involved the conceptualisation and implementation of inclusion, in the form of discussions about creating inclusive societies as a learning-centred process. This process must occur in parallel with policy-making in order to transform historic and cultural patterns of perceiving one’s general environment, including reflections about everyday language. Conference participants used a methodology of both macro- and microscopic perspectives to encompass the full range of options and include both individual and institutional viewpoints. For example, xenophobia may sometimes require criminal penalties, but this conference instead concentrated on developing and sustaining alternative speech against exclusion. As the presentations demonstrated, the Old and New Testament are full of examples on how the Bible can help us to develop inclusive communities and societies. Finally, while it is true that both legislation and an ongoing discourse on diversity and inclusiveness can help to change people’s mindsets and attitudes, having an abiding respect in daily life for the other and their dignity remains a challenge.

The conference programme tackled a large variety of issues, particularly experiences of exclusion, while the discussions aimed to identify ways to overcome the

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<sup>1</sup> I.e. Article 3, General Principles, “The principles of the present Convention shall be: (...) (c) Full and effective participation and inclusion in society; (...)”; see further Art. 19, 24, 26.

obstacles to inclusion and re-establish the vision of an inclusive society. *Jochen Motte* started with biblical passages and ecclesiastical documents, such as the message from the 2014 General Assembly of World Council of Churches (WCC) in Busan. He advocated a broader understanding of inclusion, referring to sociological theory from the 1970s that addressed inclusion as a process of increasing the participation of all members of modern society. *Bishop Malusi Mpumlwana* reflected not only on his experience with the segregation policies of the apartheid society in South Africa, but also on phenomena of social exclusion within the Church. Based upon those experiences, he offered some general explanations of social exclusion with special reference to the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, underlining that such exclusion must be handled “*with*”, and not “*on behalf of*”; the excluded, including within the realm of the Church. *Wilfred Jebanesan* introduced an Asian understanding and perspective of Christianity. He stressed that theology brought by Western Christianity to Asia had totally rejected the existing Asian religions, and because of this has remained somewhat incognisant of Asian realities to this day. There are incongruent perceptions to be considered when co-operation is sought, particularly with faith-based institutions. Ignoring this background will have adverse effects on local collaborations intended to overcome exclusion.

*Thomas Fender* highlighted some aspects of the church’s self-conception as a community where people with different backgrounds are on equal footing. In terms of theology, he mentioned that Genesis tells us that “from the very beginning in life, human beings have met each other in their otherness. Diaconic service has carried out this teaching to a certain extent. This otherness is also illustrated in the story ‘Lunch with God’”. *Hendrik Meisel* drew attention to the perspective of youth in general and – relating to his personal experience – to a young person’s everyday life when reflecting on inclusiveness. He presented theological justifications as well as linguistic and practical ways to care for “our “brothers and sisters in Christ”. *Theodor Rathgeber* gave an introduction to the system of international human rights standards and its instruments and mechanisms. The comprehensive approach of human rights standards defines inclusion as accepting difference, dissent, and even aberration from the “norm” as an intrinsic part of life and human society. But while such international standards may be a genuine tool in enabling people to speak for themselves while promoting those ideas, proactive institutional engagement is required as well, for instance by the churches.

Turning to the South African context, *Paul Verryn* presented an overview of his experience with apartheid and post-apartheid society in South Africa, including continuing segregation within the churches. Elaborating on examples given by Jesus, he showed how the Christian faith made sense to fishermen – the rejected, the violated, and the dispossessed – and that a new Kairos looms. *Nadine Bowers Du Toit* noted that the rainbow nation heralded by Archbishop Tutu has not yet been realised. She analysed the growing restlessness produced by an increasing lack of social power and social protest, and most acutely felt by those in poverty. She called for a radical re-envisioning of the love of one’s neighbour in order to generate an authentically inclusive society. *Marius Blümel* presented a history and overview of his institution, New World Foundation, in the marginalised region in and around

the Cape Flats township of Lavender Hill. He described the variety of its current actions to diminish poverty and unemployment in the area, as well as address the poor educational levels, housing, living conditions, and health and health care facilities. New World Foundation reaches 8,000–10,000 people per annum.

Related to the African context, *Esther Ngalle Mbonjo* illustrated the situation of violence against widows in Cameroon and the position of the Evangelical Church of Cameroon in this regard, including the renewal of church structures in order to address the problem. *Marina Muteho Kasongo* reflected on the question of whether it is possible to have a community that may be inclusive while facing discrimination and violence, as exemplified in the situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Along with her case study on survivors of rape and child abuse, she illustrated how far the church can be inclusive and ready to restore dignity to victims. *Paul Hatani Kisting* contributed with a written statement on the question of what is needed to drive the agenda of inclusive communities within the Church in the midst of human fragmentation, isolation, rejection, neglect, and abandonment, and presented some pertinent examples. *Sr Adventina Kyamanywa* drew attention to the implementation of inclusiveness among Tanzanian children living on the streets. Against the background of 104 years of active involvement with social services, she underlined her church's contribution to human development, especially its current educational and medical work.

The Asian context was first addressed by *Milton Chang*, who dealt with inclusiveness in the urban area of Hong Kong. Beginning with the major problem of Hong Kong, its scarcity of land, he described the situation of migrant workers, with emphasis on their needs and how they have been supported by, among others, the Chinese Rhenish Church Hong Kong. *Jan S. Aritonang* noted that for a long time, many churches in Indonesia did not consider inclusion their problem and instead stressed spiritual and heavenly salvation. Beginning in the 1970s, however, churches became aware of these problems and started to understand them as part of their missionary and diaconic calling, with the help of ecumenical bodies like the WCC and the UEM. *Wilfred Jebanesan* provided an introduction to his church's active engagement in Sri Lanka to promote and organise an interreligious dialogue in a situation where religious affiliation has been misused to polarise the rifts in society. He stressed that the dialogue had been successful and that the actors who took part now articulate their respect for other religions and their practices, value the cultures of the different ethnic groups and faiths, and understand the utmost relevance of reconciliation. *Edna J. Orteza* presented the complex situation in the Philippines, where many problems in relation to social issues, environment, access to land, infrastructure, and cultural behaviour are exclusively understood in terms of power and armed resistance. With the brutalisation of everyday life, the Church tries to promote civil and peaceful conflict settlement, including civil disobedience.

In relation to the European context, *Regine Buschmann* contributed a written statement highlighting the engagement of the "v. Bodelschwingh Foundation Bethel". The foundation is one of the largest social welfare institutions of the Protestant Church in the world and was among the first to introduce the concept of inclusion in the sense of bringing together people with and without disabilities. *Thomas Fender*



began with the subject of globalisation, which has affected churches and the relationships of churches in the North with those in the South. He presented some glimpses of hope and change in an initiative called CAP Camp. He described the most recent camp, in 2014 in Germany, as well as the Bible studies there and the overall attempt to strengthen intercultural and ecumenical relationships. *Silvia Scheffer* presented the circumstances faced by asylum seekers and migrants in rural Germany. While business even at a very local level tends more and more to be international, the social relationships between these international actors are fragmented and will remain so unless people and – Christian – communities take steps to make communities inclusive in a comprehensive way. *Johann Weusmann* went into detail about the restrictive migration policy by German governments that goes against the country's own history over the past 60 years of economic, demographic and humanitarian development based significantly on immigration. More than 14 million people living in Germany now have a migration background.

The conference concluded with a number of summaries wrapping up one or several sessions. These summaries were based on personal impressions and reflections and therefore again provided a diversity of viewpoints on dealing with the issue of inclusion and inclusiveness. The final contributions to the conference included a meditation and liturgy to centre participants' reflections on theological insight and knowledge.

This reader provides a rather broad view of inclusion and inclusiveness. Even in terms of methodology, the reader presents a large variety of particular approaches by each of the authors, starting with the different use of, for instance, the term apartheid. The format of the articles also varies, whether they are essays or academic presentations. We, the participants, learned to value all of the formats, and, instead of streamlining, to deliberately keep these particularities. As we frequently have underlined, inclusion and inclusiveness request, first of all, to fully respect diversity: this central message is reiterated in the outcome document.

The Foreword and Response from the hosting churches have already acknowledged the organisers and the people who conducted the conference process. It is my great pleasure here to express my sincere thanks to those who made this reader a reality. In South Africa, Ashley Fransman, Pieter Grove, and Tommy Solomons again were crucial to making the contributions available for the editing process. Their additional remarks on the form and substance of this reader provided important guidance in the editing of the texts. In Germany, a highly committed team consisting of Brunhild von Local, Jochen Motte, Theodor Rathgeber, Jörg Schmidt, and Marion Unger made the process of editing, layout, and print a rather encouraging exercise to further deal with the subject of inclusion and inclusiveness and to make it a reality. May this spirit of worthwhile endeavour be transferred to the reading audience as well.

# Reflections



# Biblical and Theological Perspectives on Inclusive Communities and the Churches

*Jochen Motte*

Rejection and exclusion as part of human realities in this world

Right now, millions of people are facing rejection, exclusion, and elimination in the Middle East. They have fallen victim to the wars in Iraq and Syria and their gross violations of human rights, to the ethnic cleansing and persecution of Christians and members of other religious minorities in this region. At the same time, rejection and exclusion are still a sad reality for billions of others all over the world. They live in extreme poverty and are not able to enjoy basic economic and social rights.

When we look back at the history of the international United Evangelical Mission (UEM) since its founding in 1996, we see that many people in the UEM communion have become victims of marginalisation, discrimination, exclusion, or even elimination within their respective communities, societies, and nations.

In 2014, the UEM collaborated with other partners in the Central Africa ecumenical network and church representatives from Germany, Rwanda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to commemorate the 1994 Tutsi genocide in Rwanda, in which more than one million people were killed. Victims and perpetrators lived side by side at the time, as neighbours, still part of the same communities and even sharing the same faith and belief within the same churches.

Violence, exclusion, and rejection: the people of Rwanda are not the only ones to have experienced this over the last 20 years. Many of the UEM member churches have also suffered. Millions have been killed in the DRC, especially in the east of the country, during the wars and violent conflicts that continue to this day. Thousands of women who have been raped are being excluded by their communities, where they are rejected even by their own families. Children have been abducted and abused as child soldiers or sex slaves.

In Sri Lanka, the question of exclusion and discrimination has been part of a long-standing conflict between the ethnic groups of the Sinhalese and the Tamils. After the end of the war and the defeat of the Tamil Tigers of Eelam (LTTE) by the Sinhalese Army in 2009, the rights of ethnic and religious minorities as well as basic civil and political rights have been fundamentally threatened and disregarded.

The indigenous peoples in Papua, Indonesia have also felt excluded and marginalised for many years. Papuans have been suffering from human rights violations committed by the Indonesian armed forces and the police for more than 50 years, since Papua became part of Indonesia in 1963. The *Special Autonomy Law*, which

was introduced by the Indonesian Government in 2001, has not enabled Papuans to enjoy their rights of self-determination. Indigenous Papuans lag far behind other regions in Indonesia in terms of development parameters, for example with regard to health and education.

Exclusion, marginalisation, and discrimination, especially against vulnerable groups like women and children, occur in many communities, for a variety of reasons, including customary law, traditional practices, religious convictions, and male dominance. Domestic violence against women is still a common phenomenon in many societies, and other forms of sex discrimination are still in practice in Asian countries like Indonesia or African countries like Cameroon, where widows face particular difficulty.

The legacy of colonialism, apartheid, authoritarian rule, and dictatorship, in combination with current economic policies and the global market system, has helped to exclude millions of people in Indonesia, Namibia, the Philippines, and elsewhere. Families' livelihoods are being endangered by land-grabbing, mining, and the destruction of the environment. Extreme poverty is endemic in communities in rural as well as in urban areas. Civil society and human rights advocates trying to defend people's rights often face personal threats. They may even pay with their lives, as in the Philippines, where more than 25 pastors, church elders, and congregation members have been killed for political reasons since 2005. These global phenomena of segregation and marginalisation have become manifest in almost all the regions where UEM member churches exist.

Many people from the Global South are trying to escape their desperate situations of conflict, war, and poverty by moving to Europe for the chance of a better life. There again, they are rejected. Many pay with their lives, dying at sea, while others are detained under inhuman conditions. Those who do manage to cross the borders are confronted with European and German refugee policies that are not designed to protect but to repel. Refugees often face hostility, discrimination, racism, and rejection, not only from the local population but also from state officials or state-ordered services, as in a recent case where security personnel harassed asylum seekers at their shelter in western Germany.

## Overcoming barriers and boundaries – biblical and theological perspectives

Where do we find ourselves as church people coming from different parts of the world in the midst of stories of rejection and exclusion? Does the Bible give us orientation and direction as church people? It would be too easy just to refer to the Bible as a whole. Realities in the time of Israel and early Christianity might not have been so different from today. There are numerous stories of rejection in the Bible, and we can identify many more by looking at the post-biblical times in the Church's history until today. Nevertheless, the question remains whether there are indicators that could give us some orientation. Are there any hints and signals in the Gospel that might be linked with today's discussion on inclusion and inclusivity and could

help Christian churches and communities to define their role – or better yet, their calling – in this world and for this world? In other words, are there traditions in the Gospel that justify our language of inclusivity in the person of Jesus, who represents and proclaims the coming Kingdom of God?

*“Blessed are those” (Matt 5:1-11)*

According to Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount in Matt 5:1-11, God’s blessing is with those who are poor in spirit, those who mourn, those who are meek, those who hunger for righteousness, those who are merciful, those who are pure in heart, those who are peacemakers, and those who are persecuted for their righteousness. They are called lucky.

But who are those being blessed? Can they be defined clearly? Are there indicators telling us who is part of this community and who is not? Actually, this seems not to be the case. There is no regulation on membership which allows us to place boundaries between those who are blessed and those who are not. It cannot be said that these blessings include only those who are members of our faith-based communities and churches. Those who are called lucky can even exist outside the Church and Christian belief. We cannot limit or encase the blessing Jesus is proclaiming. Those to be blessed can be everywhere. The invitation expressed in Matt 11:28 mirrors the boundlessness of the communion into which God is inviting people. “Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” The invitation is not limited to a certain group of people with a specific confession; it says “Come to me, all”.

It seems, at least, that the people to whom this invitation is chiefly directed are not those who usually are considered strong, powerful, and self-confident. The invitation goes beyond those who have already arrived, the big shots in our communities and societies who are the leaders and representatives of our social, economic, political, and especially religious institutions. The call of Jesus reaches out to the ends of the world, to those who are not in our focus, but who are located at the margins, those who are rejected and excluded.

It should also be noted that this message of inclusion, which is at the same time a reality Jesus is proclaiming, bypasses those closest to him. The message does not depend on Jesus’ disciples, who are listening to his preaching and consider themselves true followers of his message.

The proclamation of a reality of salvation for those who are heavy laden is not to be understood as the message of mercifulness that currently brings in new members into our communities whom we must care for. On the contrary, it seems that the inclusive community Jesus is proclaiming is constituted by the communion of God with those human beings who are the most excluded in our societies.

This perspective redefines communion, dignity, and restoration against existing human value systems that depend on criteria allowing us to distinguish between those who belong to our community and those who do not: those who are the top performers and those who are not, those who have and those who have not, those who stick to the rules and those who do not, those who are foreigners and those who are real citizens, those who are enabled and those who are disabled, those who are

called to dominate and those who are called to obey, those who are united and those who are diverse – in short, those who differ from the majority culture.

Nevertheless, it also must be mentioned that Jesus, in his preaching on the mount, is not placing a new boundary between those who are blessed and those who are not blessed. We cannot take the Sermon on the Mount as a reference in order to set up new borders or to exclude people we consider not to be blessed by these proclamations, but this does not exclude the possibility that there are people who indeed exclude themselves by rejecting and excluding others.

A closer look into at least some of the stories about Jesus' life and some of the witnesses to his proclamation of the coming Kingdom of God, especially his parables, may show how Jesus crossed boundaries and constituted inclusive communities against exclusive realities, habits and traditions. Analysis of these parables may help us see how, through his preaching, he set the vision of inclusive communities as a life-transforming reality against existing social models that tend to separate, exclude, and reject.

*“Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him” (Matt 8:1–4)*

Jesus is approached by a leper who asks Jesus to “clean” him (8:2). In response, Jesus “stretched out his hand and touched him”, saying, “I will; be clean” (8:3). The leper lives outside the community. He is an outcast, suffering from leprosy, an infectious disease that causes severe, disfiguring skin sores and nerve damage in the arms and legs. Stigmatised by the disease, he has been excluded from the social and religious community as well, since he is considered impure. Jesus' response of touching the leper not only poses a risk to Jesus himself, but also manifests that Jesus both spiritually and physically re-establishes the communion with one of the excluded. It is significant for this story that the healing does not precede Jesus touching the leper and calling him back into the communion, but that Jesus first crosses social boundaries and reaches out to the leper by touching him. By doing so, he establishes a new communion between him and the leper while at the same time restoring the social communion the leper has been excluded from. After this, it is said, the leprosy was cleansed. What does this mean for healing ministries today? It seems that healing is taking place in the restoration of the communion with the outcast: the recovery from the disease is just a second and welcome aspect in that process. In view of phenomena like the Ebola crisis in Africa, this question may be quite relevant today.

*“I have compassion on the crowd, because they ... have nothing to eat”  
(Mark 8:1–9; Matt 14:13–21)*

According to the tradition of the story by Mark, Jesus is moved by the fact that the people around him are hungry and that some could even die on their way home. Jesus recognises the basic needs of the people and feels responsible for addressing them. The communion he has invited people to join is not just a spiritual communion; since food security in the community is endangered, it is Jesus' foremost concern to take care of it. It seems to be impossible for the disciples to address the needs of the people, but at the end it turns out that there is plenty for all. Seven loaves of bread and a few fish are blessed and shared by Jesus until finally everyone among the

crowd of 4,000 people is satisfied. The situation reminds us of the sharing of bread and wine at the Last Supper. Again, the communion with Jesus here is inclusive in a way that not a single person is left out: everything that is available is shared in a just way, and there is sufficient food for all. This, in the eyes of the people, turns out to be a miracle, since it goes against their human experience where food is plentiful for some while others remain hungry.

*“Lord, help me” (Matt 15:21–28)*

Jesus, who has moved abroad into the area of Tyre and Sidon, is approached by a Canaanite woman who cries out and asks Him to have mercy on her and heal her daughter. In the context of the time, the fact that the woman talked to Jesus could be considered an insult and affront. Canaanites had a long tradition of hostility to their Jewish neighbours. They were Gentiles, and women did not have the right to approach men.

Jesus does not respond to the plea of the woman at first, and when his disciples ask him to respond, since they fear that the woman will continue crying, he argues that his mission is limited to Israel. This sparks an exciting dispute between the woman and Jesus. When he tells her that it is not fair “to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs” (15:26), she responds that “even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table” (15:27). Jesus then answers: “O woman, great is your faith!” (15:28), and her daughter is healed. In the process of the discussion, Jesus overcomes the barriers of culture and religion because he is touched by the hope and trust of a woman who asks him for help. His diaconic healing action extends not just to the Canaanite woman but also to her daughter, whom he has never seen or met but who is the one to be healed. The plea for help with a threat to the daughter’s health is answered by Jesus. Over the course of the encounter, the story moves from rejection to inclusion.

The story of the Canaanite woman also tells us that those who live at the margins and are not part of our community are not considered powerless. By arguing with Jesus, the woman brings about a change. In this story, Jesus first rejects inclusive action, but when the woman insists that Jesus’ mission is broader than even he himself is aware of, she is the one to bring about a change so that Jesus’ mission can reach out to her and overcome barriers of religion and ethnicity.

We should also note that inclusive action does not preclude diversity. The woman does not follow Jesus; she does not leave her cultural and religious context. Inclusive action takes place when diversity is accepted as part of the communion.

*“See that you do not despise one of these little ones” (Matt 18:10–14)*

In this parable, there are a hundred sheep, and one has been lost. Economically, that loss would not have ruined the shepherd at all. It might even be more advisable to stay with the 99 sheep and not take another risk. But for the shepherd in the parable, each sheep counts. Inclusion in this sense takes into account each individual. The communion is only complete if each and every one is a part of it. This drives the shepherd to search for the lost sheep till he finds it. The parable does not say anything about why or how the sheep got lost; it does not blame the sheep. Perhaps



the sheep was too weak to follow the others, or lost its way, but what counts in the end is that it has been found, and that is reason for joy. We may be reminded of the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32): when the prodigal son returns, his brother rejects him. But for the father, it is a great reason to rejoice and to welcome him by celebrating and officially reconfirming the lost son as part of the family. The joy and action of the father are inclusive, as are the joy and action of the shepherd. Friedrich Duensing, an exegete of the parable of the lost sheep, drew the following conclusion: “The parables of Jesus presuppose his own behaviour. His church might only be successful in preaching these parables if, through the action of the church, the churches, and that of the Christians in relation to those who are lost in whatever way, something of Jesus himself becomes visible and tangible.”

*“Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them” (Matt 19:13–15)*  
“Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them” (Matt 19:14). These well-known words of Jesus, correcting his disciples who do not want Jesus to be disturbed by the children again, tell us how Jesus invites inclusive community. Here is another group of people who, in the eyes of the adults, have to be placed not in the centre but at the margins of the community. In this case, they are not considered important enough to come close to Jesus. Jesus prevents his disciples from establishing a barrier, so that the children are able to join his communion and be part of his blessing presence.

*“When he saw him, he had compassion” (Luke 10:25–37)*  
“Who is my neighbour?” (Luke 10:29). This question is asked of Jesus, who responds by telling a story: A man has fallen victim to a brutal crime. He is lying on the ground severely wounded and near death. First a priest and then a Levite, representatives of the religious institutions and ideals of their communities, come across the man, see him lying in his own blood, and pass by without any reaction. Although the priest and the Levite seem to belong to the same people and religion as the person on the ground, they exclude the victim from the community by denying him life-saving solidarity and help. In absolute contrast to them, a Samaritan, who is a foreigner with a different cultural and religious background, stops on his way, offers first aid by dressing the wounds and giving medical treatment, and furthermore transports the victim to a safe place where he can stay and recover. The Samaritan even pays for the accommodation costs. The victim may not have been conscious of what happened, but has in fact been saved, since the Samaritan offered communion to him when the priest and the Levite had refused it.

Perhaps the two who passed by and did nothing had good reasons; touching blood would make them impure. The priest and the Levite recognised the boundaries that separated them from this vulnerable person in need. On the other hand, the driving motivation for the inclusive action of the Samaritan is contained in the word “compassion”. In the end, the answer to the question of who counts as a neighbour is not given in this story. It is neither a question of distance to be measured nor a legal obligation, although today the passivity of the priest and Levite would be considered by the state as a failure to render assistance in an emergency. It is the Samaritan’s emotional reaction to the obvious need of the helpless person that drives this

stranger to offer help and take inclusive action, beyond existing cultural and religious boundaries, action that in the worldview of the listeners is totally unexpected.

In this regard, inclusive action involves a risk for the Samaritan actor: the potential for conflict with institutions, customs, and traditions; financial risk; and delay of his journey. But he takes the risk because he feels compassion. Jesus is not only answering the question of “Who is my neighbour?”; he is also challenging those who raise the question, by saying that only those without compassion cannot recognise who constitutes their neighbour. Inclusive action towards those who are excluded requires compassion. Similar to the story of the Canaanite woman, in this parable no attempt is made to introduce the Samaritan as the true Jew. On the contrary, inclusive action is taken by someone who is different and continues to be different. As a member from another community with a different religious background, the Samaritan represents the will of God, since he recognises who his neighbour is.

*“Do you begrudge my generosity?” (Matt 20:1–16)*

A master of the house goes out early in the morning and hires labourers to work in his vineyard. He agrees to pay them one denarius a day. He then goes out another four times to hire more workers. Those he approaches at the eleventh hour, when the day is almost over, he provokes by asking, “Why do you stand here idle all day?” (20:6). They answer him: “Because no one has hired us” (20:7). While this answer may reflect the economic realities of the time, the circumstances do not seem so different from what many people encounter in today’s world.

When the day ends, the master pays the denarius to those he hired first, as promised. Surprisingly, however, he pays the same amount to the others, even those who worked only for an hour. Those who worked the whole day in the heat start complaining, because they consider the equal treatment of all to be an injustice. The master replies: “Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what belongs to you, and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?” (Matt 20:14f.)

What looks unjust in the eyes of those who have worked the whole day is justice from the perspective of the master. A justice again driven by compassion or, as it is called here, by generosity. If he had paid all workers by the respective hours of work, then those who came later, and especially those who were the last to be hired, would not have earned enough to feed themselves and their families. At the end of the day, all workers get the same pay, which lets them all end the day without going hungry. The master acted in an inclusive way, calling the workers into a communion where he ensured that each and every one of them could end the day in dignity with their basic needs satisfied. Inclusion in this parable goes along with generosity. Similar to the brother of the prodigal son in the parable of Luke 15:11–32, the worker and the brother are those who want to act in an exclusionary way in line with the institutionalised laws, customs, and traditions of the time. Jesus, through these parables, tells us what the Kingdom of God is about, and by doing this gives his listeners new perspectives on inclusive action, embracing those who are separated from the communion and lack the life-saving resources available to its members.

*“I was a stranger and you invited me” (Matt 25:31–46)*

In this passage, which is usually called “the final judgement”, Jesus confronts his listeners with a surprising message. Those who will be blessed and inherit the kingdom are not necessarily those who belong to the Jewish community or the institutional Church, or those who want to meet Jesus by worshipping. The ones who will inherit the kingdom have given food to the hungry and water to the thirsty. They have welcomed the stranger, given clothes to the naked, and visited the sick and imprisoned. All who are mentioned here are later defined as “the least of my brothers”. Jesus, in Matt 25, is called “Son of Man” and “King”. As the resurrected Christ, he appears as Lord and Kyrios. And this Kyrios, who judges the congregation, identifies himself with those who live in utmost exclusion. If the notion of “God’s option for the poor” has any biblical origin, it is in these words from Matt 25. Those who are the least, the most disadvantaged people, are closest to him and called his brothers and – let me add – his sisters.

*God’s inclusive loving being as precondition for his inclusive mission to all of creation and all people, especially those who are called “the little ones”*

The aforementioned texts on the inclusive mission of Jesus to this world, from the Gospels of Matthew, Luke, and Mark, show a God who reaches out to this world by identifying with those who may be excluded from our societies, but are his brothers. He includes them in his communion. What is the driving motivation for this inclusive mission? The parable of the Samaritan has already given us the answer, which is expressed there in the word “compassion” – we could, in other words, call this love.

In Christian theology, the doctrine of the Trinity of one God, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is often considered to be a construct influenced by Greek philosophy. The doctrine of the Trinity offers the opportunity to comprehend God as a God existing in relationship within himself, and as a God who is therefore inclusive within himself. Jesus’ mission to the world, and to those in it who are the most excluded, can be understood as a mission of inclusion; Jesus was excluded and rejected himself, ultimately dying on the cross and consequently delivered to the most extreme form of exclusion imaginable: death. In his mission, Jesus is overcoming exclusion, rejection, and death by staying by the side of those who are called “the least of these my brothers” (Matt 25:40). The inclusive bonds of love between Father and Son through the Holy Spirit are even stronger than the exclusive power of death. Since early Christianity believed that Jesus had been resurrected by the Father and was alive in close relationship and community with the Father and the Holy Spirit, early Christians began to look at his life, mission, and action, to collect Jesus’ stories and his message and to pass it on to the world.

The question may be raised as to whether the story of the final judgement is not also a story of exclusion, since those who did not welcome the stranger are rejected. It is true that this cannot be ignored with regard to Matt 25. Nevertheless, we may ask whether those excluding others by rejecting them do not exclude themselves as well. In the parable of the prodigal son, the brother excludes himself from the community, which is celebrating the return of the prodigal son.

When we look back at the passages where we have tried to find orientation and understand how we can see Jesus as acting in an inclusive way or proclaiming the Kingdom of God as an inclusive community, we might realise who are the ones being excluded. It turns out that those who intend to exclude others are the ones excluding themselves from being part of the community that Jesus is inviting people to join. They do this by keeping their distance from the leper, the hungry people around them, the foreign woman in need, the lost sheep, the victims of crime, the children who want to come, the labourers and unemployed who do not have sufficient means to survive, the hungry, the thirsty, the migrants and refugees, the homeless, the sick, the detained – in other words, from the many vulnerable people who live at the margins. It is even worse if exclusion and rejection are enforced by violence against others that takes people's lives, which is the final and most extreme form of exclusion. By their own actions, the perpetrators of violence and exclusion exclude and separate themselves from the communion Jesus is proclaiming and representing, and bring judgement upon themselves for their actions.

Furthermore, the stories and parables of Jesus may bring us back from an ecclesiological understanding of the Church that tends to define communion mainly in relation to the Church as an institution. From Matt 25, it appears obvious that those who will be chosen to be part of the eternal communion have met Jesus without being aware of him, by acting in a compassionate and inclusive way towards “the least of these” [i.e. his brothers].

The biblical passages we have reflected upon confirm what was expressed in the declaration adopted at the World Council of Churches (WCC) General Assembly in Busan in 2014, “Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes”. It states: “The good news of God's reign is about the promise of the actualisation of a just and inclusive world. Inclusivity fosters just relationships in the community of humanity and creation, with mutual acknowledgment of persons and creation, and mutual respect and sustenance of each one's sacred worth. It also facilitates each one's full participation in the life of the community. Baptism in Christ implies a lifelong commitment to give an account of this hope by overcoming the barriers in order to find a common identity under the sovereignty of God (Galatians 3:27-28)” (Resource Book, WCC 10th Assembly, Busan, 2013, p. 61).

## Church and society – Towards inclusive communities

### *Inclusion as a modern notion used in different social discourses*

The term “inclusion” is used in a variety of contexts today. It has become most popular in the area of educational systems related to people with disabilities. The term is also often used to address the issue of diversity and discrimination in a broader understanding, not limited to people with disabilities, but also addressing ethnic diversity and participation in political decision-making processes. The term “inclusion” plays an important role in the sociological theory introduced by Talcott Parsons in the 1970s, which describes inclusion as a process of increasing participation by all members of society within the respective subsystems of society. This process takes

place within modern societies and enables each individual to participate socially, politically, and legally. Niklas Luhman further developed and changed this concept in his theory of functional differentiation, including by disconnecting the concept of inclusion from the modern state. Sina Farzin has pointed out that neither sociologist, surprisingly, introduces the corresponding concept of exclusion, especially social exclusion. The debate about social exclusion only started about fifteen years ago, when questions of social disparity and marginalisation became increasingly relevant.

A search for definitions of inclusion will bring numerous results. It seems, therefore, that the concept of inclusion by itself invites all who participate in the debate to contribute their own understanding of inclusion, as related to their own experiences. The following are only a few examples of the various definitions of inclusion:

- “Inclusion embraces diversity. Inclusive communities adapt their ways so that all members whatever their diversity can belong and be full participants within them.” Paul A. Bartolo (2003)
- “Inclusion expresses a philosophy of the equality of each human being, respect for diversity, solidarity in the community, and diversity in expressions of life.” Monika Seifert (2006)
- “Inclusion is recognising and striving for an equal access for all to all services and opportunities in the neighbourhood community, independent on [sic] the person’s abilities, language, cultural background, sex, sexual orientations, age, ethnicity etc.” Aija Saari (2009)
- “Inclusion means being welcome!!” Society for Learning Together (1984)

It is not by chance that the term “inclusion” has also influenced ecumenical discussions within churches, where it has been taken up in programmes as well as political statements. Since 2009, the WCC has been developing a project called “Towards Just and Inclusive Communities” that brings together different issues such as racism, migration, indigenous peoples, Dalits, and people with disabilities. The aim is “to encourage churches to learn from experiences of advocacy by and on behalf of people who experience discrimination and exclusion”. The use of the term inclusion in the “Together Towards Life” declaration has already been mentioned.

In a letter sent by Pope Francis in January 2014 to the president of the Global Economic Forum, Professor Klaus Schwab, on occasion of the annual meeting of the forum, Francis wrote: “In the context of your meeting, I wish to emphasise the importance that the various political and economic sectors have in promoting an inclusive approach which takes into consideration the dignity of every human person and the common good.... Those working in these sectors have a precise responsibility towards others, particularly those who are the most frail, weak, and vulnerable.” The Pope then explicitly mentions those who die of hunger, suffer poverty, or live as refugees, finding neither hospitality nor a place to stay.

These two examples illustrate that the dimensions of inclusion described above have influenced theological reflections, debates, and even programmes of action. Nevertheless, it is much more important for us to recognise that overcoming boundaries towards inclusive communities is a reality of the coming Kingdom of God as represented in biblical witness itself, especially from the Jesus traditions.

### *Inclusion and human rights*

In present discussions in the context of human rights, the term “inclusion” has been widely used and gained popularity in relation to the UN *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, which was adopted in 2006 and came into force in 2008. The convention directly links inclusion with education: Article 24 stipulates that “States Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels” and therefore shall ensure that “Persons with disabilities are not excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability”. In Germany, hardly any other international human rights convention has been taken up by the broader public to the extent that this one has; it has already influenced the entire debate on education and changed the politics around it, although it will take years or even decades before the convention is fully implemented. The objective of the convention, expressed in the term “inclusion”, is the full participation in the education system of persons with disabilities. Unlike the German term “Integration”, “inclusion” does not require that persons with disabilities adapt themselves in order to fit into a school system or other context, but that persons with disabilities are part of the system from the beginning, without being stigmatised at any point, and that the system adapts to the respective needs of all who are part of it. It is highly appreciated that, through the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, inclusion in the education system has triggered a global discussion that goes far beyond the question of how education systems can become inclusive.

Nevertheless, in this context it is even more important to look at the notion of and history of human rights in a broader context. The *Universal Declaration on Human Rights* (UDHR) by the United Nations General Assembly on 10 December 1948 enshrined into international law that all human beings “inherit dignity and inalienable rights” (Preamble): “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” Article 2 more explicitly states that all human beings in all their diversity are included in the ownership of these rights: “Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.” It has been a long road from 1948 to today, not only to further develop these rights in various conventions, but also to clarify these rights for certain groups of people who were still being excluded from their full enjoyment. Such conventions include the following:

- Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951)
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965)
- Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid (1973)
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979)
- Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (1989)
- Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (1990)
- Convention on the Rights of the Child from 1989 and three optional protocols (2000 and 2014)
- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006)

Even with the adoption of the conventions mentioned above, many of them have not yet been ratified by member states. Germany, for example, still refuses to ratify the Migrant Workers Convention. Since states, as members of the UN, are responsible for guaranteeing human rights, the reality today shows that many people are still being de facto excluded from fully enjoying these rights. It must be emphasised that discussion of human rights includes civil and political as well as economic, social, and cultural rights. The two covenants on these fundamental rights were adopted in 1966 and came into force in 1976. The realisation of human rights so that all people are included and protected is an ongoing process. While much progress has been made at the normative level, implementation gaps and deficits have actually increased in recent years.

The churches were critical of the concept of human rights until the middle of the last century, viewing them as a secular approach to human emancipation that included emancipation from God. In 1948, however, the World Council of Churches took an active part in the drafting of the UDHR, and in later years was a pioneer in promoting human rights through inspiration from liberation theology and participating in the struggle against apartheid.

In recent years, human rights and their universality have been questioned in ecumenical debates and labelled as a Western concept that does not recognise cultural diversity and values. It seems that today some churches would like to narrow the definition of human rights in church advocacy to the right to religious freedom. This discussion is occurring in a context where the image of the Western states with regard to their own human rights records has been severely damaged since 2001. Western states are advocating for human rights outside their own borders, while at the same time they tolerate and even justify torture, the disappearance of people, illegal detention, and unlimited spying and privacy violations where their own security interests are concerned.

It is regrettable to see that many non-Western states often make use of this Western hypocrisy in order to justify the human rights violations that are committed or tolerated in their own countries. Of course, not all debates on human rights today can be divided into Western and non-Western states. For example, a resolution calling for a study on discrimination and sexual orientation was submitted to the UN Human Rights Council by South Africa in 2011 and has since been adopted by a vote of 23 for to 19 against, with 3 abstentions.

It is an open question where churches and ecumenical bodies will position themselves on these debates in the future, and to what extent they will speak with one voice. It might be worth remembering the meaning of the legal traditions in the Old Testament: the law and regulations in connection with the Covenant have to be seen as part of the revelation of a God who liberates his people from slavery. This law was put in force to protect people, especially those who belong to vulnerable and marginalised groups such as widows, orphans, and foreigners. When this law is abused and people are exploited by those in power, the relation between God and Israel is at stake (Amos). From that tradition, the function of the law can be described as inclusive. It should guarantee the unity and integrity of God's people in relation with each other and with God.



But what consequences can we draw from our biblical reflections on New Testament traditions for church life and action today, in and for this world?

## Christian faith and action – How churches can act as models for inclusive communities in their respective societies

We have now reflected on the stories and parables of Jesus and have seen how Jesus invited an inclusive community by overcoming barriers and boundaries of tradition, culture, and even religion, reaching out to people at the margins and promising God's blessing to those who were not considered representatives of the religious, economic, and social institutions of the time. He undertook this inclusivity with an awareness of the coming presence of the Kingdom of God, which offers participation of life in fullness to all people.

Christian traditions have interpreted the life and resurrection of Jesus, who is called Christ and Kyrios later on, as God's loving mission to all people. This mission overcomes the exclusionary economic, social, and cultural boundaries that separate people, and even surpasses death, the utmost form of exclusion.

The traditions discussed above also show that Jesus was not interested in institutions or social orders and that his message was not directed towards institutional or social reforms. Jesus did not propose universal human rights, a reform of the health system or welfare system, interreligious dialogue, or protection mechanisms for victims of crime and human rights violations. In his life on earth, Jesus was interested in meeting people, in having personal encounters and inviting those he met to be included in a healing community with God. This interest, especially in "the little ones", is driven by love, compassion, and generosity. When Jesus responds to the question of "Who is my neighbour?", he is not interested in the religion of the Samaritan. He does not care about the religion or culture of the Canaanite woman. He is not interested in debating about the economic system in the parable of the workers in the vineyard, or discussing food security when he provides food to the people who are sharing communion with him. Jesus' dialogue with the people, therefore, is not guided by any interreligious, intercultural, intersocial, interethnic or other interest. It is simply interhuman. He seeks a direct, personal, inclusive, concrete community that overcomes existing exclusion caused by social and institutional boundaries and barriers; he cares for the spiritual and physical needs of all those who share communion with him.

What consequences might we draw with regard to the question of how churches as institutions can be models for inclusive communities, and what churches and congregations might contribute to their societies so that they become inclusive?

1. Christians should keep in mind that according to Jesus' proclamation of the presence of the Kingdom of God, personal encounters and relationships are indispensable in order to build inclusive communities, and they requires an attitude or a spirit of love, compassion, and generosity. Building inclusive communities therefore always begins with the self. The King does not ask the state or the system whether they have invited the stranger: he asks me and you.



2. This is why Christians who live within institutions that are considered persistent structures of social order and govern behaviour will always judge such institutions by whether they support people and enable them to live, whether they act inclusively or even actively prevent inclusion. If these Christians are prohibited from questioning such institutions, they will resist, and may even reject such institutions if they are legitimised by ideologies that may then turn out to be exclusive and oppressive: Christians will be critical of ideologies that encourage inclusion. In the end, theoretical goals and objectives that become institutionalised have to prove that they serve each individual by enabling participation in human relationships.
3. Christians will always assess existing institutions by starting with their own institution, which is the church or the respective churches we are part of. Where do we find barriers and boundaries within this institution that hinder us from building new relationships and from being inclusive, especially to those who are called “the little ones”? Where do these institutions hinder those who are outside the institution and would like to join in communion with us? Where do we find models of inclusive communities within our churches and church institutions?
4. Christians should always support the legal, political, and social institutions established and developed to protect the dignity of the people, especially “the little ones”, and to guarantee universal human rights for all human beings. This means that Christians will also advocate for the full enjoyment of universal human rights for all people, by raising their voices if states and international institutions do not fulfil their obligations or violate these rights. At the forefront of these institutions, churches should therefore be the advocates of those who have become victims of exclusion and rejection.
5. Christians will get involved in action supporting justice, peace, and the integrity of creation so that people who are hungry and thirsty, who lack proper clothing and live in extreme poverty have sufficient means to manage their lives in dignity. People who have to flee their homes because of wars, conflicts, natural disasters, and poverty find places where they are welcomed. People who are sick will receive necessary and sufficient health treatment. People who are rejected because of their different gender, race, ethnic origin, age, etc. will be accepted.
6. Christians will also advocate for accountability from those who hinder the establishment of inclusive communities by excluding prospective members through discrimination, exploitation, or even elimination. The perpetrators who have separated themselves from the community by their own actions have to be prevented from continuing their exclusive action, if necessary, by state force.
7. Christians will contribute to inclusive institution-building through their awareness that all such institutions, e.g., the human rights system, are ultimately unsustainable unless people in general – be they Christians or people of any other religion or conviction – act inclusively as individuals driven by compassion and generosity, like the Samaritan who saved the life of “the man who fell among the robbers”. Indeed, one of the definitions of inclusion above expresses this very

finding: "Inclusion means being welcome!!" The continuing development of institutions like churches and even states must enable and enact inclusive relationships among the people.

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# On the Challenge of Social Exclusion

Reflections at the International Seminar of the United Evangelical Mission

*Malusi Mpumlwana*

It is a special honour for me, on behalf of the ecumenical fellowship of Christian Churches in South Africa, to greet you this morning as an international missionary fellowship with an unambiguous two-way South/North evangelical commitment. For indeed, in today's global village, the Macedonian Call comes from all corners of the world.

I have been asked to reflect with you this morning on a subject that speaks to so much of my life, so much of the South African experience, that it may be hard to have a disciplined conversation. My own church background in the Ethiopian Episcopal Church is a story of social exclusion and the struggle to relate to the God of Jesus Christ despite the challenges. I often tell the story that I studied theology in part to answer the question for myself of what it means to be created in the image of God if you are black in apartheid South Africa.

Yet because the challenge of social exclusion is a phenomenon of human living that will always dog the human condition this side of eternity, the South African experience is never going to be unique. Thus what I say must resonate with your experiences too, in the different parts of the world that you represent. I invite you, therefore, to engage with me so that we can bring our experiences to a common platform. The present-day heritage of South Africa's apartheid and the segregation policies of the pre-apartheid colonial era must be reviewed in the context of the world's appreciation of exclusion. To that end, we reference a report on health inequalities that you may be familiar with, written on behalf of the Social Exclusion Knowledge Network and commissioned by the WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health. It offers this definition of social exclusion:

Exclusion consists of dynamic, multi-dimensional processes<sup>1</sup> driven by unequal power relationships interacting across four main dimensions – economic, political, social and cultural – and at different levels including individual, household, group, community, country and global levels. It results in a continuum of inclusion/exclusion characterised by unequal access to resources, capabilities and rights which leads to health inequalities.<sup>2</sup>

The complexity of the phenomenon is expressed in the words: dynamic, multidimensional processes, interacting across a number of dimensions: economic, politi-

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1 Our emphasis.

2 Jennie Popay et al., Final Report to the WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health From the Social Exclusion Knowledge Network, February 2008, p. 2.

cal, social, and cultural. This complexity is further manifested in another report, this time from the University of Bristol (2007), *The Multi-Dimensional Analysis of Social Exclusion*.<sup>3</sup> The Bristol report, produced for the Social Exclusion Task Force of the Department for Communities and Local Government, offers a range of definitions gleaned from diverse sources. Here are some of these, on what “social exclusion” is:<sup>4</sup>

- It is shorthand for what can happen<sup>5</sup> when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health, and family breakdown. This is the lot of a kid like Johnny, who lives in the Cape Flats of Cape Town with his unemployed and HIV-positive mother and two siblings: poor skills all round, the only sure income being the government’s children’s grants for the three kids, dwelling in a shack that is flooded by water almost every wintry rainy season. Johnny lives in exclusion, and while the new South Africa offers some respite with the children’s grants and antiretroviral medications for his mother, Johnny does not know the meaning of an inclusive society.
- It is what occurs when different factors combine to trap individuals and areas in a spiral of disadvantage. Johnny of the Cape Flats has few options in his life but to align with the gang leader who rules the roost in his drug-infested neighbourhood. Johnny is trapped in a spiral of disadvantage. But Johnny’s trap is not unique to him. A 2004 study conducted by the University of KwaZulu-Natal and the University of Wisconsin, in collaboration with the International Food Policy Research Institute,<sup>6</sup> concluded that “large numbers of South Africans are indeed trapped without a pathway out of poverty”. South Africa has “a legacy ... of blocked pathways of upward mobility that leaves large numbers of people trapped in poverty”; “the broader problem of poverty alleviation seems unlikely to be resolved *until deeper structural changes make time and markets work more effectively for the broader community of all South Africans.*”<sup>7</sup>
- It is the dynamic process of *being shut out from any of the social, economic, political, and cultural systems* that determine the social integration of a person in society.
- It is when an individual may be socially excluded even as (a) s/he is geographically resident in a society but (b) for reasons beyond his or her control, s/he cannot participate in the normal activities of citizens in that society, and (c) s/he would like to participate.
- It is inadequate social participation, lack of social integration, and lack of power.
- It is a broader concept than poverty, encompassing not only low material means but the inability to participate effectively in economic, social, political, and cultural life, and, in some characterisations, alienation and distance from mainstream society.

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3 Ruth Levitas et al., *The Multi-Dimensional Analysis of Social Exclusion*, January 2007.

4 Ibid. Table 2.1, p. 21.

5 Our emphasis.

6 Adato et al., *Exploring Poverty Traps and Social Exclusion in South Africa Using Qualitative and Quantitative Data*, December 2004.

7 Our emphasis.

- It is an accumulation of confluent processes with successive ruptures arising from the heart of the economy, politics, and society, which gradually distances and places persons, groups, communities, and territories in a position of inferiority in relation to centres of power, resources, and prevailing values.

In contrast, the EU Employment and Social Affairs Directorate defines social inclusion as the development of the capacity and opportunity to play a full role, not only in economic terms, but also in social, psychological, and political terms.<sup>8</sup>

As the Gospels tell it, the story of the mission and work of Christ is about the life conditions of the excluded. This emphasis on Christ's intervention in the human situation is more pronounced in Luke:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

(Luke 4:18–19)

In the spirit of this manifesto, Jesus, in Luke's account, gets to be much more pointed when he says:

“Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

“Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled.

“Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.

“But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.

“Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry.

“Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep.

(Luke 6:2–21, 24–25)

The Bristol Multi-Dimensional Analysis of Social Exclusion talks of social exclusion as “a complex and multi-dimensional process”:

It involves the lack or denial of resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to the majority of people in a society, whether in economic, social, cultural or political arenas. It affects both the quality of life of individuals and the equity and cohesion of society as a whole.<sup>9</sup>

In this context, the Bristol researchers have offered a multidimensional matrix with ten domains:

- Domain One refers to material/economic resources, featuring incomes, possession of basic necessities, home ownership, etc.
- Domain Two refers to access to public and private services, featuring access to essential public services like health, education, recreational amenities and other public services like electricity, water and sanitation, transport, and access to financial services, etc.
- Domain Three refers to social resources, featuring availability of family care and support or lack thereof.
- Domain Four refers to economic participation, featuring joblessness, lack of incomes, and the attendant quality of life issues.

8 Quoted in Ruth Levitas et al. (Bristol Report), op. cit., Table 2.1, #11, p. 21.

9 Ibid. p. 86.

- Domain Five refers to social participation.
- Domain Six refers to culture, education, and skills. I shall come back to this one because of its decisive impact and significance in the swing between exclusion and inclusion.

The other four domains are political and civic participation, health and well-being, living environment, and crime and harm.

In the domain of culture, education, and skills, the researchers reference the work of the late twentieth-century French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002). Bourdieu introduced the concept of cultural capital, which has power because it is linked to the education system that reproduces the cultural dominance of those whose culture determines value. Thus, the dominant classes impose their interpretation of reality and of value on the underclass, and perpetuate their dominance, since the determinants of success and value are embedded in the cultural capital that they themselves were brought up in. This is most evident in South Africa, where culturally disadvantaged parents for whom English is not the first language give their all to send their kids to predominantly white English schools, where they have to leave their own sense of identity, language, and culture at the gate to assume the medium, idiom, and cultural psyche of their aspirant English environment. This Bourdieu refers to as cultural capital, and it is clearly an instrument of exclusion.

Bourdieu talks of four types of capital:<sup>10</sup>

- Economic capital – This is self-explanatory, as it refers to what is immediately convertible into money and can be institutionalised by way of property rights.
- Social capital – Networks of friends, extended family, and associates whose existence and connectedness creates opportunities for you. Bourdieu points out that this is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital.
- Symbolic capital – Recognition, honour, and prestige associated with certain values determined by the dominant group – the “good girl” message of affirmation that reinforces certain values. This goes for either recognition or misrecognition, the symbolism of approval or disapproval that Bourdieu refers to as a socially constituted cognitive capacity.
- Cultural capital – Here education figures heavily in Bourdieu’s theory.
- According to Bourdieu, cultural capital can exist in three forms:
- The institutionalised state, such as in educational qualifications and accreditations
- The objectified state, such as in the works of art, literature, equipment, and the instrumentation of the way things are done
- The embodied state is defined by tacit, unaccredited knowledge, things that people who are embedded in the culture would simply know and possess as idiomatic of life – tastes, smells, behaviours, and mannerisms, such as when we say a person is cultured or civilised, referring to their grasp of these embedded cultural values. When a person does not display this tacit “knowledge” of how things are done, we say the person is uncouth, uncultured. All these are the embodied aspects of cultural capital.

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<sup>10</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Forms of Capital*. 1986.

These fields of capital, as Bourdieu refers to them, become self-regenerating and reproduce their capacity for dominance. In his words:

In societies which have no “self-regulating market” ... no educational system, no juridical apparatus, and no State, relations of domination can be set up and maintained only at the cost of strategies which must be endlessly renewed, because the conditions required for a *mediated, lasting appropriation* of other agents’ [the people you seek to dominate]<sup>11</sup> labour, services, or homage have not been brought together. By contrast, domination no longer needs to be exerted in a direct, personal way when it is entailed in possession of the means (economic or cultural capital) of appropriating mechanisms of the field of production and the field of cultural production, which tend to assure their own reproduction by their very functioning, independently of any deliberate intervention by the agents.<sup>12</sup>

The colonial enterprise in South Africa came through the Cape, and as Bourdieu would say, in the absence of a “self-regulating market ... no educational system, no juridical apparatus, and no State, relations of domination can be set up and maintained only at the cost of strategies”, and these entailed war and brute force represented by Colonel John Graham’s “proper degree of terror” for the natives. The alternative was to subjugate the natives into the cash economy so that they could sell their labour to survive; they had to qualify for employment, education, and certification, and with it the culturing effect of “civilisation” and moral socialisation in religion.

But the successful introduction of formal administrative systems of magistrates, the Christian religion and education, and the cash economy that required the sale of labour by the conquered led only to another subjugation mechanism: the hut tax and the poll tax slowly created the successful effect of cultural and economic capital (see box).

### **The Fight against Colonialism and Imperialism in Africa (SA History)**

After 1900, Europe began to introduce changes to colonial rule in an effort to increase revenues from the colonies. These changes included taking land from the African people and giving it to the growing number of Europeans in the colonies. The other changes were the introduction of taxes, such as the hut tax and poll tax, which forced Africans to work for European settlers in order to afford to pay them: the new taxes had to be paid in cash and not in the form of cattle or crops, as had been the practice before. The exploitation of African labourers by European employers added to the growing resentment among the local people.

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11 Our insertion.

12 Pierre Bourdieu, “Structures, Habitus, Power: Basis for a Theory of Symbolic Power”. In: Nicholas B. Dirks et al, eds, *A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994, p. 178.



Thus Bourdieu throws light on the relationship between exclusion and the power of domination through these interrelated fields of capital:

- economic capital (the money and fixed assets)
- cultural capital institutionalised through education, embodied in norms and mores, and objectified in books and art works
- symbolic capital of recognitions, honours, and “approvables”
- social capital, such as family and “old boys” or “home boys” networks and connections

We as churches have made a very big contribution to the instrumentation of the regime of social exclusion that is South Africa’s heritage in today’s social reality. While on the surface our gospel message speaks of freedom and liberty, the social milieu of our existence and execution belies the true essence of the gospel. This is the case for the socially and economically excluded – by race, class, educational status, physical disabilities, and other prejudice-attracting life dispositions – and when one or

**Extract from an August 2011 presentation by the author to the SACC Consultation:**

Every year the Brazilian Church conducts a Lenten Solidarity Campaign over one pressing national matter. Nominations of issues are received from all over, to recommend the most pressing issue that the country should repent of and change from. In Brazil, when we visited to learn those many years ago, the issue at hand was that of abandoned children, *Menores Abandonados*. Their research showed that out of the then population of 150 million, there were 37 million children experiencing abandonment of one level or another. The corrective programmes dealt with this reality in every community and informed the role of the state and government institutions. The 2010 Campaign focused on people that are excluded from the economic benefits of the country, with the theme, “Economy and Life: You Can’t Serve Money and God”. Occasionally, the Brazilian Catholic Bishops draw in other Christian Churches, mostly through the National Council of Christian Churches of Brazil (CONIC). They did this also in 2010, with the theme of economic exclusion. The 2011 theme was “Life on the Planet: Creation Groans in the Pain of Childbirth”. In this Brazilian model, the various submissions or nominations are given for consideration to a panel, and a shortlist of top issues is presented to the Bishops’ Conference for a vote on the one to be attended; this decision is made some two years in advance. This allows for the role of the intellectuals and research institutions for earnest research on all aspects of that issue to be undertaken: statistics are gathered, impacts are investigated, and corrective proposals are prepared. During these two years all parishes are preparing themselves, looking at the same theme from their local perspective. Hymns are composed, prayers are written, and sermons are prepared. Then the year comes, and the 46 days of Lent are used on a concerted basis to throw everything at the theme: radio, TV, and all other possible media are brought to bear on the issue. Following Lent, the work continues, as the programmes that address the matter do not cease at Easter.

more of these occur in one person or group of persons, Johnny and his wretched descendants are forever trapped in a spiral of misery. This is the challenge of social exclusion!

It is in this regard that we have in the last year or so been working with leaders of South African churches to work towards an approach that identifies and acts each year on one major social ill over which society needs to repent and change direction to make an impact in the quality of life and create inclusivity. We use the Brazilian model (see box previous page) of See-Judge-Act, in what we call the Rolling Church Action for Social Transformation. This is part of the upcoming SACC Renewal Programme (South African Council of Churches), where the SACC will strengthen its role in nation-building to advocate for social justice, empower marginalised constituencies to participate in South Africa's development as a nation, and be a voice that confronts head-on any forms of exploitation, corruption, and socio-economic injustice with the full and inclusive participation of all, especially the marginalised, youth, and women.

Significantly, a more urgent AHA Movement of Christians is emerging, the Authentic Hopeful Action (AHA), to address the scale and depth of the problems associated with poverty, unemployment, and inequality in South Africa from a Christian perspective of contrition and the quest for an inclusive society, which can only be achieved through radical transformation of the relations of capital – social, economic, symbolic, and most certainly cultural, which helps to define the most marginalised of society.

In practical terms, it seems to me we have to do this with, and not on behalf of, the excluded. If the Church in our time stands up for the cause of social inclusion against social exclusion, maybe, just maybe, the Gospel of Jesus Christ might yet make coherent sense for our age. The time has come for the evangelical agenda to be a source of good news. For the Master said, "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly!" (John 10:10 NKJV).



# Inclusive Communities and Church Life – Theological Reflections

Wilfred A. Jebanesan

Theology in Asian cultures emerged from the fact that Christianity did not win large-scale acceptance in Asia.<sup>1</sup> Peiris argues that Christianity in Asia has created a “Christ-against-religions theology.”<sup>2</sup> He says that the theology brought from Western Christianity to Asia totally rejects Asian religiosity.<sup>3</sup> He claims that all the churches “must be given time to step into the baptismal waters of Asian religion and to pass through passion and death on the cross of Asian poverty.”<sup>4</sup>

This new concept leads theologians to another area of study: theologians should realise that the concept of theology basically originated in Western culture and was based on problems that churches in the West faced. For example, Western theologians emphasised theology and often talked about the secularisation of society and the decline of church membership. Moreover, they used the words “religion” and “theology” to describe Judeo-Christian religion and theology.<sup>5</sup> The Asian context is quite different, and all Christian actions are intimately interwoven and with those from people of other faiths. The Christian cannot filter, as it were, only what they may find good, ignore the rest, and collaborate indiscriminately. Neither can Christians refuse all local collaborations when the optimal conditions are not there or the people of other faiths do not fully agree with them.

Religious conversion has become the subject of passionate debate in contemporary Sri Lanka. When the anti-conversion bill was presented by MP Maheshwaran<sup>6</sup> to the Sri Lankan Parliament in 2004, Sri Lanka’s Supreme Court conveyed to the president and the Speaker of the House that the bill did not contravene the Sri Lankan constitution. The bill, entitled the *Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion*

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1 Aloysius Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Limited, 1988, p. 59.

2 Ibid. p. 60.

3 Ibid. p. 61.

4 Ibid. p. 63.

5 See Duncan Forrester, *Theology and Politics*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988, p. 38; Robin Gill, *The Social Context of Theology*. London: Mowbrays, 1975, p. 12.

6 Mr Maheshwaran, former Hindu Cultural Affairs Minister, visited Tamil Nadu, one of five states in India with anti-conversion laws. On his return to Sri Lanka, Maheshwaran made a public statement vowing to introduce a bill in Parliament in order to curb religious conversions. In subsequent months, Maheshwaran repeated his intentions to introduce the bill to Parliament. A draft bill closely modelled on the Tamil Nadu anti-conversion law has now been prepared; see also Don Asoka Wijewardena, “Anti-conversion Laws within 60 Days”. *Sunday Observer* at 3, 18 January 2004; <http://www.sundayobserver.lk/2004/01/18/new16.html>.

*Act*, was published in the gazette of 28 May 2004. According to one report, “the bill is likely to find an easy passage in Parliament, as the Supreme Court has given the green light”. The legislation,<sup>7</sup> which has the blessing of the government inspired by Buddhist-Sinhala fundamentalists<sup>8</sup> in Sri Lanka, has raised profound concerns, especially among Christians, a small minority of the population.

## Historical embedding

From the earliest encounters, missionary zeal characterised the way the European Christians approached Buddhist traditions. The Portuguese Catholics who conquered the island in 1505 were the first to put the typical Christian stance towards the traditions of the Indian subcontinent into practice. In the Portuguese view, the future of the indigenous traditions was clear: these had to be eradicated. The “idols” could not be tolerated, and neither could the heathen festivals. Measures had to be taken to spread the gospel and to promote the conversion of “the heathens” to Christianity. The Christian religion was something to be spread, if not peacefully, then through force. Apparently, there was something deeply wrong with the native traditions, and the only way to correct this wrong was to guide the natives into the Christian faith.

What exactly was wrong? To answer this question: in my country, a pious home would possess, alongside the Bible and prayer book or devotional text, the occasional book on the adventures of missionaries. These books told of those heroes and heroines of the faith who, in obedience to Christ’s great commission to make disciples of all people (Matt 28:19), had gone to distant and dangerous places with the message of salvation. A favourite volume of these adventurers’ stories was one called *Deeds of Courageousness of Godly Men*. In the days previous to the feminist movement, mission was still focused on “godly men”, although there were also good numbers of godly and courageous women at the frontiers of mission. The stories of David Livingston, adventuring in a trackless wilderness to oppose slave traders, made fascinating fare for faith and imagination. These adventures were made more graphic still by the drawings that illustrated the stories in *Deeds of Courageousness of Godly Men*. Missionaries were pictured being confronted by lions, or praying unaware of stealthy intruders with murderous intent. The life of a missionary seemed to be one adventure after the other, with little mention of dreary months of trekking, learning languages, or overcoming the ravages of disease. Missionaries always seemed to be delivered from direct divine intervention or, failing this, would die peacefully with

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7 The National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka (a branch of the World Evangelical Alliance) which represents Charismatic or Evangelical churches, issued a statement on 6 January 2004 condemning violence against Christians and alleged unethical conversions. The archbishop of the Catholic Church of Sri Lanka, Oswald Gomis, also issued a statement condemning alleged unethical conversions.

8 On 21 July 2004, Buddhist Jathika Hela Urumaya monks submitted a bill in Parliament seeking to outlaw religious conversions based on offers of cash or other incentives. Seventy per cent of Sri Lanka’s 19 million people are Buddhists, while about 7.5 per cent are Christians. Hindus make up about 15 per cent, and Muslims comprise 8 per cent.

blessings on their lips. The vigour of missionary outreach that promises salvation to those lost in pagan religions and tyrannical societies has continued among mainline Protestants, Anglicans, and Roman Catholics.

To the more zealous Christians, Sri Lanka literally appeared as a battleground of the clash between God's truth and Satan's fraud. William Harvard, a pioneer Methodist missionary to Sri Lanka, published *A Narrative of the Establishment and Progress of Mission to Ceylon and India* (London 1823). The title itself expressed his main idea: Harvard argued that people had the freedom to accept Christ. But carefully planned means of witness were to be utilised to make good on this offer of salvation, so that the message could be heard by those who were ignorant of it. The teaming of native languages, the translation of the Bible, the study of the cultural background of non-Christian peoples, and the teaching of natives to be pastors were the means by which Harvard and the missionaries conducted the conversion of non-Christian populations. This was not just the victory cry of an aggressive religion out to rule the world: "After all, the uncivilized state of the heathen, instead of affording an objection *against* preaching the gospel to them, ought to furnish an argument *for* it. Can we as men, or as Christians, hear that a great part of our fellow creatures, whose souls are as immortal as ours, and who are as capable as ourselves, of adorning the gospel, and contributing by their preaching, writings, or practices to the glory of our Redeemer's name, and the good of his church, are enveloped [sic] in ignorance and barbarism? Can we hear that they are without the gospel, without government, without laws, and without arts, and sciences; and not exert ourselves to introduce amongst them the sentiments of men, and of Christians?"<sup>9</sup> This background allows us to make sense of the claims of both Indian and European Christians that conversion is a right and a duty of the religious. They simply have to share the universal truth of Christ with the rest of humankind. They should at least attempt to convince the heathens that the latter's corrupt beliefs ought to be replaced with pure Christian doctrine.

## Doctrinal approaches

From the sixteenth to the twenty-first century, the Christians have viewed their encounter with the Buddhist/Hindu traditions as a battle between Christianity and idolatry. This theological framework attributes certain characteristic properties to religion: it is conceived as a struggle between the true and the false. The struggle has different aspects to it. First, it involves rivalry between religions with regard to the truth of doctrines. Insofar as different religions are either true or false, they revolve around a set of doctrines or beliefs. Therefore, the Christians oppose the Buddhist/Hindu traditions to the Christian religion in terms of the beliefs these "rival religions" proclaim. The main issue of religion is to make a choice between these different sets of beliefs: the message of the atoning death of Jesus Christ and the related precepts

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9 William Carey, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians, to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens*. Leicester 1792, p. 69-70, <http://www.wmcarey.edu/carey/enquiry/anenquiry.pdf>

on the one hand, or the errors of false religion on the other. Second, the competition between religions revolves around the gaining of converts. The true religion strives to save the souls of men and women, while false religion keeps them in the command of the devil. This can also be put in terms of their respective ends. The true religion is the only path to salvation. Hell is the fatal destination of all other religions. Third, the rivalry not only concerns the life to come, but is also expressed in the conduct of the followers of the different religions here on earth. As false religion, Buddhism and Hinduism embody immorality, and the true religion of Christianity exemplifies morality. Conversion, then, cannot be anything but a fundamental right, since it allows individuals to be guided from falsity to truth and from depravity to good.

Theology in the Asian context emerges from the idea that the relation of other religions to Christianity is not one of error to truth, darkness to light, or evil to goodness, but rather of potency to act, seeds to fruit: the type or symbol to the thing and reality itself. This does not mean losing Christian religious concepts and leveling down Christianity, but it means the seed must die; the symbol must give way to reality. Pieris says that for Asians, theology is praxis over theory, a radical involvement with the people.<sup>10</sup> In Asian thinking, theology with “words” has no meaning; in Asian religious experience, meaning is found in “silence”, in “wordlessness that gives every word its meaning”.<sup>11</sup>

## New reflections

What, then, is the locus of this praxis? Certainly not the Christian life lived within the Church in the presence of non-Christians; rather, it is the God experience of God’s own people living beyond the Church.<sup>12</sup> Theology from the Asian context emerges from a different perspective and angle. It produces new reflections on the traditional Christian theologies and at the same time initiates new praxis to work among religiosity in Asia. This is again an important factor for theology among the people of Asia and within Asia. A Christian theologian must be humble enough to renounce his or her alliance with power and be able to participate in the Asian poverty.<sup>13</sup> Only this can produce a proper reflection on Asian theology or, in other words, a theology from non-Christian experience. It is also crucial for a theologian to note that several Asian Christian thinkers recognise the validity of the religious experience of the convert in their pre-Christian life. They look upon commitment to Christ as an extension or enrichment of their earlier life and experiences or as a fulfilment of a longing for God that had already been there before they turned to Christ.

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10 Pieris, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 85.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 86.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 86.

# Inclusive Societies and Church Life

A Theological Contribution from a European Perspective

*Thomas Fender*

The UN *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* entered into force on 3 May 2008 and reminded the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) of one of its basic concerns. The self-conception of the EKD is as a community where different people are connected with each other equally. To avoid exclusion and to allow participation are paramount concerns of the EKD. Its department of diaconia took up the subject of inclusion and named it as the central topic of interest for the years 2013 and 2014, under the theme of “Living With Differences”. This gave rise to a process of discussion within the German Protestant Church.

## Theological foundation

Theologically, the meaning of the term “inclusion” can be justified in different ways. My first entry into this concept is the biblical view given in Genesis: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” (Gen 1:27 ESV). God creates a human being in his image, but in two different ways: woman and man, Eve and Adam. Both reports of creation tell us about it. In spite of their differences, men and women are both created in God’s image and are wanted by God in the way he created them. This means that from the very beginning in life, human beings meet in otherness. Human life is a life in difference.

The difference of the genders stands for many other human differences, and these change nothing of the person, because each person is still in the image of God. No matter whether woman or man, whether with black, yellow or white skin colour, whether ill or healthy, able or disabled, old or young, each person is an image of God. Every person is created completely in God’s image.

In the New Testament, Paul uses the picture of the body with its different parts to explain the meaning of congregation:

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptised into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many.... But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.”



On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable ... But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.  
(1 Cor 12:12–14, 18–22, 24–26 ESV).

For Paul, it matters that there are differences within the congregation, and he understands these as wealth. The spirit of Christ connects different people in their whole variability, be it in physical or social regard or with regard to their talents, to the congregation of Jesus Christ in which the members meet on equal footing. By this measure, church life is and has always been inclusive.

If we look at Jesus Christ, two things become clear. First, in him God takes part in this world:

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

(John 1:14 ESV).

God remains not for himself and somewhere outside, but proceeds in Jesus Christ on equal footing with human beings. In Jesus Christ, he shares human joys, worries, miseries, and fears.

Second, God allows human beings to have a part in the reconciliation in Jesus Christ:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

(John 3:16 ESV).

By Christ's suffering on the cross, God himself became a handicapped, a disabled person.

That is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

(2 Cor 5:19 ESV).

## Discussion

For our discussion, it is important that integration and inclusion are not conflated. Integration refers to an effort to cancel the effects of segregation and ensure that it does not recur. This is an important job, but by this, integration is only one preliminary stage of inclusion.

Inclusion is a social process aimed at creating an adequate living space for all people. In order to achieve this process, it is necessary to open up and to change what already exists. Inclusion involves approaching others. Borders must be lifted to allow participation in our society, to allow for equality of a variety of opportunities.

Relationships must be adapted to the needs of the people, not the other way round. The evolving needs, interests, and life circumstances of every person have to be respected and taken seriously if we are to recognise the strengths and abilities of individuals and to extend them. The basis for this is the equality of all people on the

basis of universal human rights. Otherness is normal: it is liberal and equal coexistence, not hierarchical order.

Furthermore, all this needs to be discussed in a broader view, because inclusion refers not only to persons with disabilities but to groups that extend far beyond them. In a country like Germany, we also have to reflect on the inclusion of migrants, delinquents, same-sex life partners, refugees, or Muslims as employees in the department of diaconia and the church. How about the inclusion of those living in old age or nursing homes? What about those joining services for child help and youth welfare? Inclusion is not only about the disabled; it refers to the coexistence and social involvement of all people.

The opposite of inclusion is exclusion, which happens anywhere people are excluded, for whatever reason, or face discrimination. Exclusion also occurs when society makes it difficult or even impossible to participate in the society itself, whether this is the whole of society or merely parts of it that exclude others.

Inclusion is not a special programme for a certain group of people, but a broad principle to inform social life. No one should be excluded. Returning to the subject of church and congregation, we need to get rid of the old pictures in our minds to be able to follow new paths. Every one of us has these old images in our minds, as the following short story may point out.

## Lunch with God

Once, there was a little boy who absolutely wanted to meet God. He was aware that it would be a long way to get to the place where God lived. So he took out a backpack, filled it with some cans of soda and several bars of chocolate, and set off. After a while, he came to a small park.

There he saw an old woman sitting on a bench and watching the pigeons pecking at the ground in front of her. The little boy sat down next to the woman and opened his backpack. He was searching for a soda when he saw the hungry eyes of the old woman. So he grabbed a chocolate bar and passed it to the woman.

She took the sweet gratefully and smiled at him – such a wonderful smile. Hoping to see her smile again, the little boy offered her a can of soda as well. She took it and smiled, beaming even more strongly than before. The little boy was happy.

The two of them spent the whole afternoon sitting on that bench in the park, eating chocolate bars and drinking sodas – but neither of them spoke a single word. When the sun went down, the boy felt tired and decided to go home. He took a few steps, then paused and turned around. He went back to the old woman and gave her a hug. She gave him her most beautiful smile.

When the boy returned home, his mother saw the joy on his face and asked what beautiful thing had happened to make him look so happy. And the little boy answered: “I had lunch with God – and she has a wonderful smile!” The old woman had gone home too, where her son was waiting for her. He asked her why she looked so happy. She answered: “I had lunch with God – and he is much younger than I thought.” [Author unknown]



# Inclusiveness through Inclusion in Young People's Everyday Lives – A Critical and Pragmatic View

*Hendrik Meisel*

## Introduction

The year 2008 marked a change in the work on inclusion in Germany and the world. The topic of inclusive life, in all its details, was at the top of the UN's agenda. The *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* played an advocacy role that put the topic of inclusion into the public eye for a long time. The range and possibilities of inclusion became the object of discussions in ordinary schools, as we will see later. For this conference, I will look at young people's everyday lives to see what status is actually given to inclusiveness.

## Person-related definition and reflections on language

For a multi-perspective view on inclusiveness, a person-related definition is in my eyes obsolete. Part of inclusion, and at the same time a precondition for it, is integration. Inclusion is emotional, psychosocial or sociological integration. But it is more than that, too, and forms a variety of different manifestations. In the practical lives and daily realities of young people, inclusiveness and inclusion primarily refer to persons with physical disabilities.

Inclusion for me, as a young person, implies the creation of a society in which no personal disabilities, problems, external appearances, mental or physical conditions, religions or origins play a role; the sole focus is on the individual human being. Often, the incomplete realisation of a society, and therefore societal exclusion, goes hand in hand with a lot of discrimination. This kind of discrimination is not only verbal, but also extends to situations in which people cannot be part of a meeting or visit a certain restaurant, because they have no chance to access the building. This is one kind of discrimination that could be overcome with the right ancillary equipment.

### *Language as part of discrimination*

When I first visited Bethel, the famous institution for diaconic work in Bielefeld in Westphalia, Germany, I realised how important language is in making a difference. A lot of people speak about "disabled persons", but to me the term "people with disabilities" is more suitable. Using this term puts the human individual at the centre of the sentence and makes this person the active subject: the person is recognised

before the disability. But why is this important for me? In youth peer groups, the term “disabled person” is often used as a term of reproach, sometimes in combination with the question “Are you disabled?”. Why do young people not reflect on what they are saying? A 19-year-old man told me after an inclusive vacation trip that he had never thought about inclusiveness before: “It was a different world, and I wasn’t part of it.” Before this trip, part of a programme for Protestant youth with inclusiveness as its theme, he had no chance to get in contact with others and abolish old prejudices. Not only did the experience change his view, but it partly changed his life. He is now a teacher at a school for children with special needs. But why should we in the church care about inclusiveness?

## Theological perspective on inclusion

If you consider inclusion in a theological way, you may first arrive at the care for people with illness, special needs, or a mental or physical disabilities, work that was already being done in the early church. In the early centuries, the function of the deacon (Greek: *διάκονος*), or the so-called widow (later deaconess) was to care for the elderly or nurse the sick. This service was done to help others. It was a duty and an honour, according to what Jesus said in Matthew 25:40: “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.” In Christian communities, the care for “brothers and sisters in Christ” was an important aspect of community life. This was an important development, because in the past, illness and disability had been linked to outcast status and rejection from society. The Christian community (Greek: *κοινωνία*) provided a social structure sufficient to live a life that was of course affected and influenced by the disability, but that contained the option to get help and stay in contact with others. This community acquired great value and importance.

## Inclusion – Its meaning for young people and myself

A lot of young people I stay in contact with decided to do voluntary service abroad after their graduation from school. Some of them have deliberately chosen an inclusive institution for this service, which has put the topic of inclusiveness at top of mind, as well as in the public discussion, which may be the largest we have ever had on the subject.

### *Inclusive education*

Is it a good idea to bring pupils with special needs into ordinary schools? A theoretical view that follows the standards and ideas of inclusive life would certainly say yes. Concerning the question of resources (financial or personnel), the situation looks a little bit different. Integrating people with special needs into a standardised environment is a problem, because the teachers at the schools are not educated and skilled in this special requirement. There are not enough experts at the schools to perform

the educational *and* the inclusive work. As Jan Fleischhauer, author at the German magazine *Der Spiegel*, pointed out in his online column: “All practical questions (“How is this supposed to work?”) were wiped away with appeals to conscience. This ignorance of the concrete also applies to the question of whether it benefits people with disabilities when they are put into a classroom where none of the teachers have learned how to handle their needs.”<sup>1</sup>

Different educational needs require more resources and, of course, popular acceptance. Parents of pupils are debating the educational value of including a child with disabilities or special needs in class. Pupils or students who are hearing impaired need assisted listening devices. Looking at the problem rationally, inclusion is only a question of having the right ancillary equipment, but for parents and sometimes students as well, it brings up a mix of fear, prejudices, and lack of knowledge. If inclusive education becomes a reality in the classroom, it will not take long for people to recognise that there is a special benefit in inclusiveness.

People with different backgrounds, talents, disabilities and possibilities create a new way of life and find a respectful way to learn together. The idea is not to impart a great deal more knowledge, but to open up the horizon of experience, creating and improving social skills. Jan Fleischhauer says, “You see, it’s not about imparting knowledge; it’s about the realisation of a utopia.”<sup>2</sup> I do not agree with him on this. There is an opportunity here to find a realistic way to bring inclusiveness to education, but it will involve a reform of the German educational system. It takes a lot of time, money, and human resources with a lot of talent to create this kind of education. These are the challenges we will confront in the years to follow.

### *Inclusion into everyday life*

The lift is not working, a box of medicine has no instructions in Braille, the bus has no more space for a wheelchair: these are all situations I was faced with in recent months. Does inclusion really end with a full bus at the bus stop? No, it does not! In all of these situations, there were people available to help and assist. The next lift in service was located after a few minutes, the right dosage of the pills was found, and five people got off the bus to give the woman in the wheelchair the chance to get her connecting train. Personal commitment in these situations is important. Inclusiveness and inclusive life starts with us, and that is important to learn and to realise.

### *Best practice – sail together*

In the summer of 1995, youth worker Dirk Loose took a trip to the Netherlands. Part of his job with the Protestant youth group in Dortmund was to bring about more inclusiveness among the Protestant youth in Dortmund. During that summer, he learned of a sailing ship built by people with disabilities that could carry four wheelchairs. In this moment, an idea was born. The following year, he went for an inclusive sailing trip with a great variety of people with and without disabilities and special needs. The sailing ship *Ludgardina* is specially constructed to give people with disabilities a chance to do most of the work on deck by themselves, such as

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1 Translation into English by the author.

2 Translation into English by the author.

hauling in the sails or working in the galley. The time on board was very special for all of the trip's participants. Youth leaders can take away a lot from this experience: they should think about organisation, support, and the care of all (!) participants, from physical access to rooms, areas, or even shops, to other special needs people may have.

There has been an important development in the Protestant youth group of Westphalia regarding the work on inclusiveness. The part of the financial funding that comes from the youth chamber of the Evangelical Church of Westphalia was increased this autumn, to be used for inclusive activities. Those who organise explicitly inclusive activities can get more money to support the higher cost of inclusive trips.

Returning to the *Ludgardina* and the inclusive sailing trip, an organisation to support "sailing together" was founded in 2001. People from different ages, backgrounds, and origins, with and without disabilities came together to start the group. An inclusive trip is a special experience. The advantage of a universally accessible ship is that accessible rooms and equipment are always available. It all starts with an inclusive experience, with a focus on a equality of rights and privileges. "We can find treasures in every single person", Dirk Loose says today of his work. We need to search for these treasures, so we can find a way to improve inclusiveness in our lives.

"God loves you all, inclusive!"

This is an idea for a movement that could be created by young people. The perspective taken on the issue of inclusion is important: Is it just something that you offer, to improve the life of anyone with a disability, or is it everything you do, in the knowledge that you are working together as a community to handle everyday situations by learning from each other? In the end, the pupils who share a classroom with a person with a disability learn more and improve their social skills. And those with a disability on an inclusive sailing trip are not only included, they are participants and partners in the group, in a community, at the same level as everyone else!

For me, in an inclusive community everyone contributes something to the success of community life, regardless of disability. Inclusion in everyday life situations means breaking down the barriers in our heads and thinking about our perception of "normal" life. We must be able to create spaces, places, and possibilities where people can meet without barriers or hindering circumstances. It is not only being a *διάκονος* for others, it is living in a *κοινωνία* together. Only by living inclusiveness in our communities are we able to learn and understand it. We need the experience of it, and I am sure we will see that variety and diversity is an enrichment and improvement to our communities, as well as society. In the economics known as diversity management, it is a betterment for us all. The development of the idea of mutual enrichment, increasing space, and improved opportunities for experiences and extracurricular learning will make us richer in experience and change our perspective. Because all in all: "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." And he loves them all, inclusive!

# Inclusiveness and Human Rights

A Framework Enabling Societies to Become Inclusive

*Theodor Rathgeber*

## Introduction

*A world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people.*

Universal Declaration on Human Rights (1948), Preambular Paragraph (PP) 2

*Whereas the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom...*

(PP) 5

The system of international human rights standards is an expression of an inclusive understanding of human life. As quoted, the United Nations *Universal Declaration on Human Rights* (UDHR) considers all four critical elements of a self-determined life, and urges States to guarantee free choice in the substance and procedure of fundamental life conditions. The background of turning this comprehensive approach into a genuine language in international law, as well as into political concepts at governance, will be the subject of this text, accompanied with some remarks on how far those legal instruments can be used by churches at different levels.

## Terminology

Starting from the still-ambitious aim of the UDHR, the term “inclusion” has been used for a long time in the social sciences and in international standard-setting institutions such as the UN that focus on social policy-making and governance. While at the international level there is no generally accepted definition of social inclusion, the basic meaning comprises critical aspects of life such as access to income generation and social services; the capacity to connect with family, friends, and community; and the freedom to pursue one’s own interests and define the meaning of “own”. Vice versa, social exclusion is the restriction of access to opportunities and



the limitation of the capabilities required to capitalise on these opportunities.<sup>1</sup> In terms of international human rights standards, social inclusion would therefore be transferred on the one hand into language such as the:

- Right to education [Art. 13 and 14]
  - Right to work and employment [Art. 6 and 7]
  - Right to social security, including social insurance [Art. 9]
  - Right to social services, public infrastructure, and facilities such as health, water, sanitation, housing, power supply, etc. in accordance with the potential standards of the country [Art. 11 and 12]
  - Right to cultural life and (recreational) activities [Art. 15]<sup>2</sup>
- Equity in the distribution of wealth and resources is another critical element of inclusive societies consequently requested by these rights.

The term and concept of social inclusion in terms of human rights has been further developed at various opportunities within the UN system:

- Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action, a key outcome of the 1995 UN World Summit for Social Development
- Millennium Declaration (2000)
- Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization at the International Labour Conference 2008 (97th session)
- Report of the UN Secretary-General on the Second UN Decade for the Eradication of Poverty in 2008<sup>3</sup>

UNESCO highlighted in 2012 the value of human rights in a socially inclusive society:

Inclusive society is defined as a society for all, in which every individual has an active role to play. Such a society is based on fundamental values of equity, equality, social justice, and human rights and freedoms, as well as on the principles of tolerance and embracing diversity.<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, in terms of policy-making and governance comprising the entire society, social inclusion – and meanwhile at discourse level simply “inclusion” – comprises aspects related to a number of freedoms to make one’s own voice heard, to actively participate in matters of society, and to enjoy access to public information, an independent judiciary, and a fair trial. Again, in terms of human rights, the State

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1 See *Creating an Inclusive Society: Practical Strategies to Promote Social Integration*. DESA 2009, p. 3ff.; accessible via <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/egms/docs/2009/Ghana/inclusive-society.pdf>.

2 See the wording in the relevant articles in the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights.

3 UN Document A/63/190, para. 7, 8. Obviously, there are a number of further studies by UN agencies dealing with the subject of inclusion, for instance, the joint World Health Organisation (WHO) and World Bank World Report on Disability (2011), accessible via [http://www.unicef.org/protection/World\\_report\\_on\\_disability\\_eng.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/protection/World_report_on_disability_eng.pdf).

4 Consultations of the Director-General with Member States on Social Inclusion, Social Transformations, Social Innovation, November 2012, accessible via [http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/BPI/EPA/images/media\\_services/Director-General/ConceptNoteSocialInclusionSocialTransformationsSocialInnovationEN.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/BPI/EPA/images/media_services/Director-General/ConceptNoteSocialInclusionSocialTransformationsSocialInnovationEN.pdf).

is to provide the conditions for all people to have the best opportunities to enjoy life, with no one left out. This is a general conclusion for different country situations, since the people from countries in the Global North, for instance, were and are also subject to profound social exclusion. Next to these criteria, special attention has been given to the issues of negative stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination, and racism as attitudes and behaviour capable of directly and fundamentally excluding people from any meaningful participation in society, including sports and cultural activities, or simply people being prevented from taking public transport because of presumed verbal abuse. Thus, respect for all human rights, freedoms, and the rule of law, both at national and international levels, are fundamental for the comprehensive implementation of inclusion.

## Self-determination of people by UN treaties

Currently, there are nine core standards providing legal protections and obligations for governments to fully establish the conditions for people to live self-determined lives, which includes an inclusive society. In addition, there are corresponding optional protocols and pertinent articles within the treaty that establish an individual complaint procedure and enable persons to claim their rights in case of presumed infringement, to be supervised by the relevant UN treaty body.<sup>5</sup> These core standards are (with status of ratification as of May 2015):

- ICERD / International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination ([adopted by the UN General Assembly in] 1965 / [in force since] 1969, [ratified by] 177 [UN Member States])
- ICCPR / International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966/1976, 168)
- ICESCR / International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966/1976, 164)
- CEDAW / International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979/1981, 189)
- CAT / International Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1984/1987, 158)
- CRC / International Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989/1990, 195)
- CMW / International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (1990/2003, 48)
- ICRPD / International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006/2008, 156)
- ICED / International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (2006/2010, 46)

The international human rights standards are not restricted to a certain understanding of development, societal environment, or process of civilisation. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to underline that the process of civilisation in the understanding of

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5 As long as the State Party has ratified the Optional Protocol and has not inserted reservation against the relevant article.

Norbert Elias<sup>6</sup> needs to be critically revised. The same would be true for the exclusive focus on “healing” in the Bible. This is to say that it is necessary to acknowledge and accept vulnerability (in previous language “deficit”) as an intrinsic part of being human. Second, the process of civilisation does not constitute a linear process and does not automatically generate a better outcome the next morning. Civilisation and inclusion is an evolving concept, and, thus, open to interventions, for better or for worse.

The evolution in thinking and acting in particular, by States and all sectors of society – thus governance – in terms of inclusion has been actually condensed in the UN *International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (ICRPD). Historically, persons with disabilities have been nearly invisible in society, although they were entitled to take advantage of all individual rights enshrined in the human rights standards. Nevertheless, persons with disabilities have been traditionally considered to be recipients of charity or objects of others’ decisions and not holders of rights. The Convention’s provisions say that protection is not only about providing disability-related services, but about changing attitudes and behaviours that have been leading to the stigmatisation and marginalisation of persons with disabilities.

Stephen Hawking, Frida Kahlo, Ludwig van Beethoven, and Vincent van Gogh are among the very few disabled persons in recent history who have been able to realise their talents and their own lives, even receiving accolades for their achievements, although not necessarily among the people of their time. Today, it is estimated that over 650 million people are disabled in one way or another. Eighty per cent live in developing countries. The great majority face discrimination and exclusion, and are far from being able to evolve their talents. Still, in many countries it is expected that the person with the disability adapt to the prevailing conditions. The Convention now reverses this view, requesting at least from governments that they generate accessible conditions for individuals to interact with an environment that historically has not accommodated those individuals’ differences and limits. There is no longer a focus on what is “wrong” with the person.

## The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in detail

### *Background*

A different understanding of disability in society was being promulgated as early as 1981, through the International Year of Disabled Persons and the World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons. That same year, the World Health Organisation (WHO) started developing a concept by which persons with disabilities would not be considered on the basis of their deficits, but their capabilities. The concept was concluded in 1999 in the manual *International Classification of*

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6 See Norbert Elias (1969): *Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation. Soziogenetische und psychogenetische Untersuchungen*. 2 volumes, Frankfurt/Main: suhrkamp, 2nd ed. For a philosophical critique of Elias see Hans Peter Duerr (1988-2002): *Der Mythos vom Zivilisationsprozeß*. Five volumes, Frankfurt/Main: suhrkamp.

*Impairments, Activities and Participation: A Manual of Dimensions and Functioning*.<sup>7</sup> In May 2001, the WHO addressed the right of self-determination for people with severe and multiple disabilities.<sup>8</sup> In June 2011, the organisation published its first *World Report on Disability*.<sup>9</sup> UNESCO adopted in 1994 the *Salamanca Declaration*,<sup>10</sup> stating that inclusion should be the primary objective of public education.

In 1993, the *United Nations General Assembly* (UNGA) adopted the *Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities*.<sup>11</sup> In 1991, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) developed its General Recommendation No. 18 on disabled women,<sup>12</sup> and in January 1995, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) adopted its General Comment No. 5 (1994) on persons with disabilities.<sup>13</sup> In addition, the reports of the UN Special Rapporteurs on Disability and of the former UN Sub-commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, as well as a series of resolutions by the former UN Commission on Human Rights in 1998, 2000, and 2002, paved the way for a human rights-centred approach.

Nowadays, it is just routine that the reference to “inclusion” forms a part of every UN document and audience related to pertinent issues: e.g., the report of the UN Secretary-General on a disability-inclusive development agenda towards 2015 and beyond (A/69/187); the drafting process for the World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (March 2015; Japan), with reference to adding disability inclusion into the *Post-2015 Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction*; the UN DESA-UNESCO Forum on Disability and Development, in its document *ICT and Disability: Pursuing Inclusive Development through Technology* within the framework of the International Conference on the Role of Information and Communication Technologies for Persons with Disabilities (November 2014, India).

### *The Convention*

The International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (ICRPD) was adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 2006 and has been in force since May 2008. The current stage of ratification is as follows (as of May 2015):

ICRPD	Signatories: 27	States parties: 156
Optional Protocol	Signatories: 30	Parties: 86

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7 Accessible via <http://www.sustainable-design.ie/arch/Beta2full.pdf>.

8 See WHO (2001): *International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health*. Geneva, accessible via [http://psychiatr.ru/download/1313?view=1&name=ICF\\_18.pdf](http://psychiatr.ru/download/1313?view=1&name=ICF_18.pdf).

9 See footnote 3.

10 Accessible via [http://www.unesco.org/education/pdf/SALAMA\\_E.PDF](http://www.unesco.org/education/pdf/SALAMA_E.PDF).

11 Accessible via <http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=26>.

12 See CEDAW *General Recommendations No. 16, 17, and 18*, adopted at the Tenth Session, 1991 (contained in Document A/46/38), 1991; accessible via <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CEDAW/Pages/Recommendations.aspx>.

13 See CESCR *General Comment No. 5: Persons with Disabilities*, Eleventh Session (1994), accessible via [http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/treatybodyexternal/TBSearch.aspx?Lang=en&TreatyID=9&DocTypeID=11](http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/TBSearch.aspx?Lang=en&TreatyID=9&DocTypeID=11).

The term “signatory” means that a government has expressed its political will to foster the convention, as well as its intention to become a party in the future.

The ICRPD tailors all existing human rights to the needs of people with disabilities, but it is the term and concept of inclusion that turns this convention into a landmark decision within the UN human rights system. Persons with disabilities now hold rights, including the right to self-determination and participation, and they are entitled to a comprehensive understanding of their protection against discrimination. The State, not the person, is requested to adapt itself to the needs of people with disabilities. The convention is accompanied by an optional protocol that provides a complaint procedure, similarly to other UN conventions on human rights. The monitoring Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) is able to undertake inquiries in States parties to the convention, if the CRPD receives reliable information indicating grave or systematic violations of the convention.

The ICRPD does not include a definition of disability or persons with disabilities in a strict sense, but rather provides some guidance on disability as a concept. The preamble as well as Article 1<sup>14</sup> endorse a social approach to disability and mention attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder disabled persons’ full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. The reference to the barriers that are external to the subject as constituting factors of disability represents an important step away from notions that equated disability to the existence of functional limitations.

Some definitions are given in Article 2 in relation to the purposes of the convention:

“Communication” includes languages, display of text, Braille, tactile communication, large print, accessible multimedia as well as written, audio, plain-language, human-reader and augmentative and alternative modes, means and formats of communication, including accessible information and communication technology;

“Language” includes spoken and signed languages and other forms of non-spoken languages;

“Discrimination on the basis of disability” means any distinction, exclusion or restriction on the basis of disability which has the purpose or effect of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal basis with others, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field. It includes all forms of discrimination, including denial of reasonable accommodation;

“Reasonable accommodation” means necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden,

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14 ICRPD, Article 1: “Purpose: The purpose of the present Convention is to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity.

Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.” accessible via <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CRPD/Pages/ConventionRightsPersonsWithDisabilities.aspx>.

where needed in a particular case, to ensure to persons with disabilities the enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms;

“Universal design” means the design of products, environments, programmes and services to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design. “Universal design” shall not exclude assistive devices for particular groups of persons with disabilities where this is needed.<sup>15</sup>

Article 3 of ICRPD identifies a set of basic principles and benchmarks which shall guide the interpretation and implementation of the convention, cutting across all issues. Overarching is the respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy, independence of persons, difference and acceptance of persons who deviate from mainstream standards, non-discrimination, full and effective participation, and full access to procedures which claim to protect rights holders and enable them to complain. The general principles of Article 3 are as follows:

The principles of the present Convention shall be:

- (a) Respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy including the freedom to make one’s own choices, and independence of persons;
- (b) Non-discrimination;
- (c) Full and effective participation and inclusion in society;
- (d) Respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity;
- (e) Equality of opportunity;
- (f) Accessibility;
- (g) Equality between men and women;
- (h) Respect for the evolving capacities of children with disabilities and respect for the right of children with disabilities to preserve their identities.<sup>16</sup>

Inclusion, in terms of the ICRPD, therefore, principally refers to a process towards self-determination and individual autonomy, while States parties are challenged to organise society in liberty.

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights provided further detail on the core principles in 2010:

“Inherent dignity” refers to the worth of every person. When the dignity of persons with disabilities is respected, their experiences and opinions are valued and are formed without fear of physical, psychological or emotional harm. “Individual autonomy” means to be in charge of one’s own life and to have the freedom to make one’s own choices. Respect for the individual autonomy of persons with disabilities means that persons with disabilities have, on an equal basis with others, reasonable life choices, are subject to minimum interference in their private life and can make their own decisions, with adequate support where required.

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15 See at <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CRPD/Pages/ConventionRightsPersonsWithDisabilities.aspx>.

16 Article 3 - General principles; accessible via <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CRPD/Pages/ConventionRightsPersonsWithDisabilities.aspx>.

The principle of “non-discrimination” means that all rights are guaranteed to everyone without distinction, exclusion or restriction based on disability or on race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, age, or any other status.

“Equality” means creating societal conditions that respect difference, address disadvantages and ensure that all women, men, girls and boys participate fully on equal terms. Equality is denied when a girl with a disability is taken out of school by her parents. Despite her good grades, her parents decide that it is useless to spend money on her education because of her disability. Achieving equality sometimes requires additional measures such as the provision of assistance to persons with psychosocial or intellectual disabilities in order to support them in making decisions and in exercising their legal capacity on an equal basis with others.

The concepts of “full and effective participation and inclusion and accessibility” mean that society, both in its public and in its private dimensions, is organized to enable all people to take part fully. Being fully included in society means that persons with disabilities are recognized and valued as equal participants. Their needs are understood as integral to the social and economic order and not identified as “special”.

“Respect for difference” involves accepting others in a context of mutual understanding. This incorporates the acceptance of disability as part of human diversity and humanity. Despite some visible or apparent differences, all people have the same rights and dignity.<sup>17</sup>

In order to implement the ICRPD, States parties to the convention are obliged according to Article 4 to – inter alia – ensure and promote the full realisation of all the human rights and fundamental freedoms for persons with disabilities, without discrimination; to take into account all policies and programmes; to ensure that public authorities and institutions act in conformity with the convention; to promote the availability and use of universally designed goods, services, equipment, facilities, new technologies, including information and communications technologies, mobility aids, devices and assistive technologies; to train professionals and staff working with persons with disabilities; to make resources available, including international cooperation; and to closely consult with and actively involve persons with disabilities, including children with disabilities, through their representative organisations.<sup>18</sup>

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17 Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (2010): Monitoring the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: Guidance for Human Rights Monitors. Professional training series No. 17. New York-Geneva.

18 ICRPD, Article 4:

“1. States Parties undertake to ensure and promote the full realization of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all persons with disabilities without discrimination of any kind on the basis of disability. To this end, States Parties undertake:

- (a) To adopt all appropriate legislative, administrative and other measures for the implementation of the rights recognized in the present Convention;
- (b) To take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to modify or abolish existing



## About implementation, in brief

### *UN Treaty Body*

Each of the aforementioned core human rights conventions includes a committee, the UN “Treaty Body”. These committees are composed of independent experts who monitor the implementation of the human rights convention or treaty. Each State party to a treaty has an obligation to take steps to ensure that everyone in the State can enjoy the rights set out in the treaty, and to report back to the corresponding treaty body on its progress. In addition to the reports from States parties, the treaty bodies receive information on human rights situations from other sources, such as *National Human Rights Institutions* (NHRIs), civil society organisations, United Nations entities, and academic institutions. Most committees allocate specific plenary time to hearing submissions from non-state stakeholders. In the light of the information available, the treaty body examines the report in the presence of a State’s

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laws, regulations, customs and practices that constitute discrimination against persons with disabilities;

(c) To take into account the protection and promotion of the human rights of persons with disabilities in all policies and programmes;

(d) To refrain from engaging in any act or practice that is inconsistent with the present Convention and to ensure that public authorities and institutions act in conformity with the present Convention;

(e) To take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination on the basis of disability by any person, organization or private enterprise;

(f) To undertake or promote research and development of universally designed goods, services, equipment and facilities, as defined in article 2 of the present Convention, which should require the minimum possible adaptation and the least cost to meet the specific needs of a person with disabilities, to promote their availability and use, and to promote universal design in the development of standards and guidelines;

(g) To undertake or promote research and development of, and to promote the availability and use of new technologies, including information and communications technologies, mobility aids, devices and assistive technologies, suitable for persons with disabilities, giving priority to technologies at an affordable cost;

(h) To provide accessible information to persons with disabilities about mobility aids, devices and assistive technologies, including new technologies, as well as other forms of assistance, support services and facilities;

(i) To promote the training of professionals and staff working with persons with disabilities in the rights recognized in this Convention so as to better provide the assistance and services guaranteed by those rights.

2. With regard to economic, social and cultural rights, each State Party undertakes to take measures to the maximum of its available resources and, where needed, within the framework of international cooperation, with a view to achieving progressively the full realization of these rights, without prejudice to those obligations contained in the present Convention that are immediately applicable according to international law.

3. In the development and implementation of legislation and policies to implement the present Convention, and in other decision-making processes concerning issues relating to persons with disabilities, States Parties shall closely consult with and actively involve persons with disabilities, including children with disabilities, through their representative organizations.<sup>7</sup>

Accessible via <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CRPD/Pages/ConventionRightsPersonsWithDisabilities.aspx>.



delegation. Based on this dialogue, the committee publishes its concerns and recommendations, referred to as “concluding observations”.

Under certain conditions, the Committees can also receive petitions and complaints from individuals. Any individual who claims that their rights under the treaty have been violated by a State party to that treaty may bring a communication before the relevant committee, provided that the state has recognised the competence of the committee to receive such complaints, and that domestic remedies have been exhausted. Six of the committees (CESCR, CAT, CEDAW, CRPD, CED, and CRC; see abbreviations page 61) are further entitled, under certain conditions, to self-initiate country inquiries if they receive reliable information containing well-founded indications of serious, grave, or systematic violations of the conventions by a State.

Finally, the Committees also publish their interpretation of the content of human rights provisions, known as “general comments” or “general recommendations” on thematic issues or methods of work. These comments are considered to be case law and are used as a general guide to the information the treaty body expects from the submitting state in relation to specific articles of the treaty.<sup>19</sup>

### *Special Rapporteurs*

The mandate holders of the special procedures – the institutional part of the UN Human Rights Council – are independent human rights experts with mandates to report on human rights situations and advise governments from a thematic or country-specific perspective. The special procedures experts cover all human rights. They undertake country visits and act on individual cases as well as concerns of a broader, structural nature, by sending communications to States and others in which they bring alleged violations or abuses to their attention. The mandate holders conduct thematic studies and convene expert consultations, contribute to the development of international human rights standards, engage in advocacy, raise public awareness, and provide advice for technical cooperation. The special procedures report annually to the Human Rights Council, and the majority also to the UN General Assembly. Their tasks are defined in the resolutions creating or extending their mandates. As of May 2015, there are 41 thematic and 14 country mandates.<sup>20</sup>

In relation to ICRPD, the most relevant mandate holders at the moment are:

- Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities (mandate since 2014, resolution A/HRC/RES/26/20);
- Special Rapporteur on the right to education (mandate since 1998, UNCHR resolution 1998/33);
- Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health (mandate since 2002, UNCHR resolution 2002/31)

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19 See further details in Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (2012): The United Nations Human Rights Treaty System: An Introduction to the core human rights treaties and the treaty bodies. Factsheet No. 30/Rev.1, Geneva, accessible via <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/FactSheet30Rev1.pdf>.

20 See further details at <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/SP/Pages/Welcomepage.aspx> and links to corresponding mandates.

The mandates on governance related to access to justice and a fair trial, freedom of expression, freedom of peaceful assembly, and freedom of association.

In the framework of the UN *Standard Rules for the Equalization of Opportunities of Persons with Disabilities* (1993), there is also a Special Rapporteur on Disability that reports annually to the Commission for Social Development. The reports present findings on the implementation of the *Standard Rules* and present recommendations for their further development.<sup>21</sup>

## Universal Periodic Review

The mechanisms of the Human Rights Council include the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), a state-driven mechanism aimed at improving the human rights situation on the ground. Each Member State of the United Nations is to declare what actions the state has taken to fulfil its human rights obligations. The UPR began in 2008, with each of the current 193 UN Member States periodically reporting on its human rights situation to a working group of the HRC and undergoing scrutiny carried out predominantly by peers. No other mechanism of this kind currently exists to survey governments and their international human rights obligations. By October 2011, the human rights records of all 193 UN Member States had been reviewed. Nearly 100 per cent of the countries have participated in this programme. Interesting for our context is that non-state stakeholders can submit information to the review process to be added to the report from “other stakeholders” to be considered during the review. The information provided can be referred to by any of the States taking part in the interactive discussion during the review at the working group. Non-state actors, i.e., NGOs with consultative status to ECOSOC,<sup>22</sup> can attend the UPR Working Group sessions and can make oral and written statements at the regular sessions of the Human Rights Council when the outcome of the working group’s assessment on the state under review is considered.<sup>23</sup>

### *Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights*

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) is mandated to promote and protect the enjoyment and full realisation, by all people, of all rights established in the Charter of the United Nations and in international human rights laws and treaties. The thematic priorities are:

- Strengthening international human rights mechanisms
- Protecting witness and victims
- Enhancing equality
- Countering discrimination
- Combating impunity
- Strengthening accountability and the rule of law

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21 See details at <http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=183>.

22 UN Economic and Social Council.

23 See further details on the UPR at <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR/Pages/UPRMain.aspx>.

- Integrating human rights in development and in the economic sphere
- Serving as an early warning in situations of conflict, violence, and insecurity

The OHCHR is also engaged in dialogues with and is a purveyor of technical advice to governments, institutions concerned with the administration of justice, and law enforcement agencies. Non-state actors are invited and encouraged to provide local information to the OHCHR.<sup>24</sup>

## Conclusion

The term and concept of inclusion in a broader sense ultimately means to accept difference, dissent, and even aberration as an intrinsic part of life and an equivalent contribution to human society. Inclusion requires a fundamental shift in perceiving reality and thinking about alternatives. The UN human rights systems address the design of the entire society, starting with individual rights and rights holders.

To make this approach a reality, active engagement is required. Within the framework of the UN human rights regime, civil society (e.g., bar associations, student clubs, trade unions, university institutes, bloggers, religious groups, and charities working with historically under-represented groups), and especially human rights defenders are considered a cornerstone of the promotion, protection, and advancement of human rights. The treaty bodies, UNHRC, special procedures, and OHCHR closely cooperate with civil society, and for some of these instruments, civil society remains a strategic priority. Vice versa, these bodies are engaged to maintain civil society as a dynamic, diverse, and independent actor, able to operate freely, knowledgeably, and skilfully with regard to human rights. In recent years, special emphasis has been put on protecting and defending civil society space. The public space has been shrinking in a number of countries, and human rights defenders have even been physically attacked; these engaged people have been put at risk because of their work.

As became known to the participants at the conference in Stellenbosch, churches are fundamental for an inclusive society for a variety of reasons that begin with the Gospel. They are essential for the active participation of all, the prevention of racism, and the fostering of community engagement in order to provide equality of opportunity. This is the essence of the Christian teachings on social relationships.

While charity is needed and forms a historical pillar of Church commitment, the debate on inclusion has contributed to strengthening the focus on empowering people towards self-determination in disputes within the churches as well. Turning this into concrete practice will require additional efforts, among them the conference in Stellenbosch. Article 4 of the ICRPD on States' obligations contains some possible ideas: the focus should not be on compensating or replacing the States' obligations, but rather on promoting and encouraging self-organisation by local individuals and groups, based on a human rights approach. Ultimately, the people should be enabled to raise their voices and claim their rights on their own.

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<sup>24</sup> See further details at <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Pages/WelcomePage.aspx>.

Obviously, such a change in local mentalities and situations requires an additional effort in terms of proactive commitment. Churches are in a rather privileged position to create these kinds of optional, positive narratives of an inclusive society, and to enable each member of society in general and the Christian community in particular to share, understand, and contribute to such narratives.



# Regional Perspectives



# South African Context





# Exclusion and Inclusion in South Africa Today

*Paul Verryn*

## Introduction

Arguably one of the most critical themes that confronts us in the New Testament is the theme of inclusion. There is no doubt that the original Christian community could have been considered a small Jewish sect, and the considerable determination to justify expansion into the so-called Gentile world was a huge shift. This expansion implicated engagement with the Roman enemy and emphasised that including others was integral to Christ's ministry, whether these others were lepers or Samaritans or women or the blind or sinners, so this Christian community needed to understand belonging. This value still confronts the Church with a huge challenge, particularly in view of the fact that we have managed to sanctify division in our denominationalism.

## The South African context

Coming to the South African context, it is important to remember that some of the original apartheid thinking was germinated in faculties of theology before it expanded into all of its political sophistication. It can probably best be summarised historically as "if you're white, you're alright. If you're brown, stick around. If you're black – get back". It is also important to note that although many of the mainline churches passed all sorts of resolutions ranging from boycott to proclaiming apartheid a heresy, the practice of the churches showed a completely different struggle. It was very seldom brought up in the discourse that whites serving whites and blacks serving blacks lacked integrity in the light of this condemnation. It is true to say that part of the anxiety revolved around the fear of a colonial mindset being perpetuated in the black community by white missionaries, but it is difficult to understand why, in the light of the recognition that separateness is an abomination to God, we still see very few whites serving in black communities and very few blacks serving in white communities, and at times it seems as if the Church has managed apartheid far more efficiently than the politicians ever could have conceptualised.

Having said this, it is nothing short of a miracle that the carefully qualified transition that has taken place in South Africa happened in the way that it did. Considering the forces aligned against each other in the struggle, it is remarkable that there was not more bloodshed and that such a fundamental shift in mindset was achieved. With the legacy perpetuated over decades of the deprivation of human rights, par-

ticularly those of the leaders in the black community and their supporters, the determination to negotiate with the enemy was an almost incredible achievement. Obviously the divisions in our society may not of themselves imply deficit. In fact it may be argued that our divisions enable and anticipate the complexity of our society and that one of our greatest strengths is to be found in that diversity. However, when our differences become the initiators of prejudice, injustice, violence, humiliation, or abuse, the antennae of danger must be aroused.

## Consideration of various problem areas

### *Disability*

I must admit to being somewhat insecure about commenting in any in-depth way on the challenges faced by the disabled. It is, however, abundantly clear that the disabled are excluded by and large because of monolithic insensitivity to the discourse that confronts them. It is clear that often structural insensitivities expose inclusion to the more sophisticated stigmas relating to the other that perpetuate rejection. Our society seems to have developed a mindset of having dealt with the problem institutionally, albeit inadequately, and is therefore rather unwilling to engage with the issue further. In terms of our society's ability to engage psychological alienation, more profound disaffection is evident. For instance, antisocial behaviour is simply rejected, and society as a whole has considerable distance to travel in gaining insight and appropriateness in this regard. Disability resulting from the historical traumatization of the nation has been left unattended. It is important to be aware of the fact that very little systemic intervention is in place for people who have been traumatised through violence, abuse, or torture. It must be noted that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission provided a limited intervention, but in some instances simply afforded credibility to psychological disability. Little has been done to rehabilitate fairly large numbers of people who suffer from flashbacks, depression, suicidal ideation, or dysfunctional relationships – all relating to previous traumatic experience.

### *HIV and Aids*

In this area, we are struggling with some degree of cognitive dissonance. HIV is an integral part of South African life, and it is true to say that prejudice against anyone who is living with the syndrome is preposterous. Healthcare in this regard has improved considerably, particularly in the Zuma era. However, some provinces, like the Free State and the Eastern Cape, often report shortages in medication and inadequate crisis intervention. But our dissonance exists in our inability to confront pragmatically the phenomenon relating to sexual activity in society. It is difficult to determine whether our inability stems from social prudishness and an unwillingness to speak about sexual matters, our struggle with the realities of our gender prejudices, or our hypocritical religious baggage preventing truth in this regard. We are probably dealing with elements of each of these in our vulnerability. For instance, in some churches, young people who become pregnant out of wedlock will “self-discipline” themselves and are expected to refrain from participating in holy

rites, even though they were never given responsible education concerning sex and relationships, nor was there a willingness to listen to the other side before making punitive judgments. It seems as if our twenty-first century liberation is still confined in by Victorian hypocrisy.

### *Xenophobia and ethnicity*

During the transition period in South Africa (1990–1994), intense violence threatened the stability of the nation. This violence presented itself with different faces. Party political strife challenged the stability of the transition, and in some regions ethnicity seemed to be a flashpoint of conflict. Some of the dissonance went back centuries, and it seemed as if space was created for it in the context of enormous socio-political change. The hostel peace initiative engendered some remarkable negotiations and forged stability in what could have erupted into full-scale ethnic war. However, unfortunately some of the systems that sparked that dissent are still in place. For instance, in the North West Province in the migrant mining community, tensions are still present. Migrant workers are sometimes rejected in the medical clinics, which cannot cope with the enormous workload. Recently, in a municipal operation to capacitate sewage, it was specifically the homes of migrant workers which were excluded from the plans. Local leadership is loath to project any message to migrant workers that would indicate that their permanent residence in the area is welcome. There is a deep value for the local tribal communities to insist that the mining enterprises in the area are a temporary intrusion into normalcy and that when the rush settles, workers from other parts of South Africa and other areas of the region will go back to where they belong. This affects the erection of permanent housing and investment in proper education facilities for the children, and leads to huge underinvestment in health facilities.

The distance between the rejection of migrant workers and the violence meted out against foreign nationals is negligible. In fact, it seems as if they are the same strings on an instrument. What has been particularly disgraceful in the South African context has been the apparent projection that we have a progressive, open, accepting, welcoming nation. The violence meted out against foreign nationals has been unprecedented, appalling, and reminiscent of a despicable history. Obviously, from an ostensibly public political platform no justification could be given for this outrageous behaviour. However, the Department of Home Affairs in particular has made it very difficult for vulnerable threatened foreigners to find sanctuary within our borders. Allegations of corruption at Refugee Reception Centres (RROs) have not been investigated with integrity. Access to efficient services for legitimacy is complicated, and the instruction from the Supreme Court to reopen the RROs has simply been ignored. The way in which officials treat foreign nationals, from street to office, has been reminiscent of the Pass Laws of apartheid South Africa.

The unfortunate criminalisation of all foreign nationals has facilitated suspicion and prejudice in the country. We have behaved despicably, especially in view of the fact that many people seeking asylum in this country have been seriously violated and abused, and have come to us from places of deep vulnerability. The statement that “95% of those claiming asylum in SA are not genuine asylum seekers but rather

looking for work or business opportunities”, made in the ANC *Peace and Stability* document, gives an indication of how such appalling behaviour is justified. When one considers that 85 per cent of this nation regard themselves as religious, and a very substantial percentage of that number regard themselves as Christian, it is incomprehensible to imagine how we reconcile ourselves with the words “I was a stranger...”.

Furthermore, what makes our behaviour even more reprehensible is the fact that our visitors carry the potential to mediate our historical skills deficit and to enable us to achieve places of hope for the African continent. At some level, our response to foreign nationals has not been unlike the stupidity of apartheid, which was a decision to lock up 80 per cent of the nation’s potential.

### *Poverty*

On many occasions I have referred to particular contexts because there have been manifestations of xenophobia. It may seem strange, but often it seems as if xenophobia is a symptom of a far more profound dysfunction in society. One of the most profound threats to the stability of the future of this nation is to be found in the disparity of the haves and have-nots. In fact, the allegation has been made that a very clever political ploy was used in the transition period in South Africa to create a black elite and middle class that would prevent this nation from having to confront one of the most profound injustices of humanity. In fact, the allegation that the transition betrayed the essence of the humanity of this nation in a far more profound way carries credence.

Unfortunately, the religious community as a whole has been co-opted into this paradigm. Generally, the Church has remained thunderously silent in the face of the gigantic discrimination in wage differentials. Religious bodies by and large have adapted to the status quo with regard to housing, job creation, poor standards of education, and vulnerable health services. Our desperate need to sustain our religious dignity has vetoed our ability to engage the poorest of the poor with integrity. In fact, the Church reflects the injustice in the nation perfectly and has great difficulty in accessing the reality of the economically marginalised. To a large degree, our messages are completely irrelevant to the dispossessed.

Few institutions could be better placed than the Church in terms of mobilising a different mindset and being able to legitimately confront injustice if it so chooses. It is true to say that the language of violent revolution is becoming more and more acceptable, and this norm threatens fundamentally any achievement that might have been sustained in becoming a new South Africa.

### Conclusion

Ultimately, the challenge is relevant. One of the drastically different approaches given as a possibility to the followers of Christ was that somehow their faith made sense to fishermen, to the rejected, to the violated, to the dispossessed. Christ quite ingeniously avoided too much structure and confronted the storm with honesty and outrage. A new Kairos looms.

# “God is crying”: Towards More Inclusive Communities

*Nadine Bowers du Toit*

## Introduction

The rainbow nation heralded by Archbishop Desmond Tutu in the heady days of early democracy has not (YET – as an eschatological aside!) been realised. In fact, the archbishop recently commented at a re-enactment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) faith community hearings that he felt God was crying over the injustices that still remain here and in the world at large. South Africa (SA) remains a divided community on many levels: socially, racially, and socio-economically. This division by its very nature implies that some are included and others excluded from the mainstream of society. Or differently put, some are to be found at the centres of power, while others languish at the peripheries or margins – excluded from the very practices and discourses that most affect them. Exclusion or marginalisation is perhaps most closely related to the issue of power (and therefore powerlessness), which is most acutely felt by those in poverty. This is no more evident than in the growing restlessness displayed by increasing social delivery protests and industrial action, which may be traced back to a lack of social power.

Within the discourse on theology and development, the church's limited engagement with poverty in South Africa, restricted to notions of charity and/or pragmatic interaction with the state, has been critiqued by various scholars over the past ten years. This paper will briefly explore the context of exclusion within SA (the reality) followed by a brief analysis of these two approaches and an emerging approach (the challenge), followed by brief points for discussion (vision) as to the way forward.

## The reality: A context of exclusion, or an inclusive rainbow nation?

South Africa is still deeply scarred by its policies of exclusion as put in place by the apartheid state, and it is clear that despite the fall of the regime, poverty in SA is still largely a legacy of the structural inequalities of the past. Hein Marais, in his book *South Africa: Pushed to the Limit*, notes that:

During the “rainbow nation” interlude of the mid 1990s, the terms of belonging were undemanding and structured around the embracing principle of “live and let live”. In the abstract this seems appealing, but is unsatisfactory in a society with a history as brutalising as South Africa's, a history that in many ways still constitutes the present and decides the future.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Hein Marais, *South Africa: Pushed to the Limit*. Claremont: UCT Press, 2010, p. 6.

This raises pertinent questions with regards to the question: who is my neighbour? One's neighbour (the economic, social or racial "other") appears to be no closer than at the time of the fall of apartheid.

It is a well-publicised fact that SA has one of the highest inequality rates in the world, and despite the growth of a black middle class, poverty and inequality remain racially skewed.<sup>2</sup> Liebbrandt, Woolard, Finn, and Argent state that "in addition to high poverty levels, South Africa's inequality levels are among the highest in the world. Furthermore, levels of poverty and inequality continue to bear a persistent racial undertone."<sup>3</sup> Therefore, although this year we celebrate twenty years of a democratic South Africa, the educational, institutional, and systemic advantages given to white people during apartheid continue to ensure employment for the majority of this group, and therefore their escape from poverty. However, despite the fact that eighteen years of post-apartheid transition has not been sufficient time to see high aggregate inequality fall, intra-race inequality is also beginning to grow.<sup>4</sup>

There are certainly those who would wish to contest this and would argue that policies such as Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) have now resulted in a reverse trend, which impoverishes whites in order to enrich the black populace. This discourse of exclusion is on the rise within sectors of the white population, and has led to a rise in cultural/identity resistance within the public domain, as symbolised by acts such as the singing of the "old" national anthem by the popular Afrikaaner artist Steve Hofmeyer.

There remain not only race cleavages, but class cleavages. Roberts notes that although wage incomes have been growing across race groups, income inequality has risen, "with income increasingly concentrated in the richest income decile".<sup>5</sup> For this reason, some would argue that BEE has not been as broad as was hoped and has only served to further enrich those – such as the "tenderpreneurs" – who were already wealthy.

### *The rise of the black elite*

These class divisions and the poor's restlessness with their lot has led to an unprecedented number of service delivery protests and industrial actions. The tragedy of Marikana is one such example, while the near-monthly protests along the route I travel to work (and the deteriorating condition of the road due to this) are a constant reminder of inequities in our land. These cleavages are perpetuated by unequal power relations – and there is clearly a widespread growing dissatisfaction with the status quo.

The recent TRC faith community re-enactment revealed that many church denominations had begun to engage with the past, but were now realising that the

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2 Benjamin J. Roberts, "Your Place or Mine? Beliefs about Inequality and Redress Preferences in South Africa". Social Indicators Research 118 (2014), p. 1167–1190.

3 Murray Leibbrandt et al. "Trends in South African Income Distribution and Poverty since the Fall of Apartheid"; OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers, No. 101, OECD Publishing, 2010, p. 9, OECD.doi:10.1787/5kmm50t7p1ms-en

4 Ibid., 21.

5 Citation of Leibbrandt et al. (2010, 2011) in Roberts "Your Place", p. 1167.

reconciliatory approach that Roberts identifies as “live and let live” or, perhaps more aptly put, “forgive and forget”, has not really engaged the deep social and economic injustices left by apartheid.

## The challenge: Loving my neighbour

The manner in which many churches have responded to loving their neighbour, has not really engaged these deep social and economic injustices. Part of the reason, I propose, is because perhaps many of us have forgotten that poverty is a justice issue. While during the apartheid era, church leaders such as Allan Boesak challenged congregations to work for justice and relieve poverty, our approaches (for the most part) have been “stuck” in two modes:

### *The charity or welfare approach*

This approach entails the provision of basic needs to relieve the plight of those affected by poverty, such as food (in the form of *kospakkies* and soup kitchens), clothing, and the support of welfare organisations such as old age homes and orphanages. These approaches were popularly identified by David Kortzen as “First Generation” strategies and in many churches are termed *kerklike armsorg*; they are often framed in the diaconic mode of “service” to the poor. Although these relief approaches are not wrong in and of themselves, they have been criticised by several SA scholars within the field of theology and development for often perpetuating dependency and the objectification of those on the receiving end of such charity.<sup>6</sup> When one considers the deep class and race cleavages in society, such acts of charity (should they fail to move beyond mere acts of charity) may only serve to perpetuate the divides between neighbours if there is no consciousness of the dangers of this approach. Not only does it hold the danger of perpetuating the divide between the haves and the have-nots, but it may also seek to perpetuate the divide between the powerful and the powerless. I have previously noted in a chapter entitled “Theology and the Social Welfare of the Church” that a theological understanding of “love of neighbour” was identified as a strong motivator in the Paarl case study for congregations to engage with poverty. Nevertheless, when there is a weak rather than a strong understanding of the concept, “it loses its potency and may simply imply charity or philanthropy of a kind that may create dependence”.<sup>7</sup>

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6 See Ignatius Swart, “Transforming Social Welfare? The Religious Discourse on Social Development in Post-apartheid South Africa,” in Ignatius Swart et al. (eds.), *Welfare, Religion and Gender in Post-apartheid South Africa: Constructing a South-North Dialogue*. Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2012; Karel T. August, *Equipping the Saints: God’s Measure for Development*. Bellville: Printman, 2010; and Nadine F. Bowers Du Toit, “Theology and the Social Welfare Practice of the Church – Exploring the Relationship in the Paarl Context”. In: Ignatius Swart et al., eds, *Welfare, Religion and Gender in Post-apartheid South Africa: Constructing a South-North Dialogue*. Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2012.

7 Bowers Du Toit, “Theology”, p. 264.



### *The “pragmatic” approach*

This approach, labelled as such by Swart, is the attempt by church bodies and denominations (as represented by EFSA [Ecumenical Foundation of Southern Africa] and NSRAD [National Religious Association for Social Development]) in a post-apartheid SA to engage with the state. This approach has argued for a strong religion-state partnership based largely on arguments such as the churches’ grassroots reach, moral basis, financial contributions to those in need, and voluntary capacity (often couched in the catch-all term “social capital”). These are indeed strong pragmatic reasons for a government to engage with a civil society role player such as the Church. It may even be termed an approach which wants to encourage the state to see its “neighbour” as the Church, and vice versa! Swart<sup>8</sup> nevertheless argues that this church-state partnership should not be presented as a “magic bullet” to end poverty and inequality. He notes that when social partnership becomes an end in itself, [it] may rule out and even be hostile to the possibility of conflictual dialogue about issues of power, inequality and access to resources, which are experienced by people on the ground as well as the real issues that are at stake.<sup>9</sup>

This approach was largely proposed during the first decade and a half of democracy, but now requires further scrutiny at a time when the government appears to be failing to act with regards to corruption even within its own ranks. The damning report by the Public Protector that the president had misused public funds in order to upgrade his rural homestead and the recent discarding of her report by a commission of inquiry led by the African National Congress (ANC) are one example of this. How close is too close a partnership with a neighbour that despite some gains (such as in its implementation of social grants etc.) is failing in many respects? To push the metaphor further, while we are scripturally implored to respect this neighbour, are we not also scripturally implored to challenge this neighbour out of love for the many others suffering as a result of the injustices in the neighbourhood?

### *Missional theology?*

There is, I believe, a third approach emerging within many churches (both mainline and evangelical) towards the appropriation of missional theology. This is most evident in movements such as Fresh Expressions (for example in the Anglican church) as well as the Partnership for Missional Churches (within the DRC family [Democratic Republic of the Congo]), but is also popular amongst some of the macro independent evangelical congregations. Van Der Watt (2010: 172) notes that within the DRC family,

The Missional Partnership ... focuses mainly (although not exclusively) on local congregations, on transforming their identity, on being missional within the local context and not so much on missionary or diaconal programs and actions. The missional movement ventured to find answers for a new generation in a post-modern, secularised society – thus the connection to the emerging church movement in Northern America.<sup>10</sup>

8 Swart, “Transforming”, p. 73.

9 Ibid., p. 77.

10 G. Van Der Watt, “Recent Developments and Challenges in Understanding the Dutch

Although he distinguishes between this approach and the other (namely The Ministry for Service and Witness) within this tradition, which is “clearly focused on a broader field – on denominational work (institutional) as well as the calling of congregations, on partnerships with other churches, on the church’s public witness, on projects and programmes, on evangelisation and diaconal service – in the local environment, but also further afield”, he appears concerned that the missional approach as it is currently appropriated may be too narrow.<sup>11</sup> Although many of his concerns have largely to do with its ecclesiology, I do worry (and perhaps this is related to its ecclesiology in some ways) that white DRC congregations who are not situated in economic places of discomfort (which is further complicated by apartheid town planning) and who identify with the politics of identity resistance may only see themselves as being sent to their own. This is a possible reality in light of new “race politics” or the renewed assertion of the white Afrikaner as the new oppressed group. This is of course not true for all white congregations; however, there is a deep temptation within this approach to identify one’s neighbour through the lenses of the deep divisions within our society. In this scenario, one’s neighbour literally is just that, and not the “other” that Jesus was so pertinently challenging us about.

## The vision: Radicalising the love of neighbour

My underlying critique of these three approaches against the background of our contextual challenges is simply that however positive they are in certain respects, they fail to address the very divides within our society that perpetuate poverty and inequality. I would like to propose three manners in which we as the Church need to move in becoming more inclusive communities:

### *We need to re-envision our theological motivation for development*

I would argue that what partly gave rise to the first two approaches in particular is a theology that is not radical enough for the challenges we face. Any theology that wishes to address issues of poverty and inequality must address power discourses, as well as radicalise an understanding of who our neighbour is. As I have stated in another article:

In a South African context the “other” may be identified in terms of race, socio-economic status or both. The Apartheid system generated fear of the other, leading to regarding the other as either lesser or greater in value than its own group. Love of neighbour in this context means finding and reconciling with the poor neighbour ... it requires being with the poor in their context, not merely being for the poor. It requires stepping across boundaries of class and/or race. Love of neighbour, therefore, calls for more than charity.

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Reformed Family of Churches’ Missional Identity and Calling”. *NGTT* 51 (3 & 4), 2010, p. 164–174; p. 172.

<sup>11</sup> Van Der Watt, “Recent”, p. 173.

In many ways our society is still called to engage power. Perhaps not in the exact same key as liberationist discourses did during the Apartheid era, but it is clearly not enough, for example to talk of love of neighbour or power in a weak sense. As the Kairos Document enjoined us, the oppressor must be called to repentance. In today's context, those of us as Christians who have relative wealth must perhaps also be called to repentance in our maintenance of the status quo:

At present they have false hopes. They hope to maintain the status quo and their special privileges with perhaps some adjustments and they fear any real alternative. But there is much more than that to hope for and nothing to fear.

Can the Christian message of hope not help them in this matter?<sup>12</sup>

South Africa is currently in a situation of "not yet"; how could theologians such as Russel Botman encourage us to put hope into action in this context? We will need to revisit stronger theological concepts in our own context that speak to these challenges.

### *We need to revisit our understanding of the churches' position with regards to the state*

The kind of pragmatic approach previously identified and undertaken in the interests of partnering with the state, however well-meaning, has not borne much fruit. Furthermore, within growing critique of the government, the church may have to reconsider whether it may need to take a more radical stance with regards to state engagement. The National Development Plan is clearly calling for engaged citizenship, but the rules of engagement may need to shift towards a more critical engagement with the state in order to push a more radical social justice agenda. As David Bosch once stated, we should "adopt a positive, but sober attitude towards the civil realm".<sup>13</sup> I have heard growing calls (most recently at the TRC re-enactment) for a resurrection of the South African Council of Churches of old in order to re-engage the state as a "power" bloc; however, I am not fully convinced that the resurrection of a body without widespread support (i.e., amongst the Evangelical and Pentecostal groups who form the majority of Christians in the country) will be representative.

### *We need to re-engage with justice issues at a community level through mobilisation*

This point relates to both the first and second points. With regards to the first point, we will need to do deeper theological reflection so that it can give rise to hopeful action. We cannot, and should not, merely be led by pragmatism. I recently witnessed a group of young Christian grassroots community workers who were engaging in advocacy work, but were surprised and encouraged by the resources offered to them in scripture! With regard to the second point, we will need to do two things. First, we will need to engage and mobilise the youth to address issues of social justice in their own communities. The 2012 SA Reconciliation Barometer noted that there is a spirit of optimism and co-operation amongst youth: they are civically minded, demonstrate growing approval for racial integration, and are more likely to build stronger

12 The Kairos Document, 1986.

13 David Bosch, *Transforming Mission*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1993, p. 95.

relationships across race and class divides. Secondly, we will need as a church to address issues of restitution, reconciliation, and neighbourliness starting with our own backyards. One thing that the TRC enactment brought to light was that we have not taken these issues seriously enough. There are, however, signs of hope (AHA movement, work done by the Restitution Foundation, etc.). Thirdly we will need to equip clergy and laity with the tools to move beyond the charity approach.

Many of the issues I have mentioned are far from new. They are some of the very issues that were grappled with by the church in the 1970s and 80s. The call to radicalise neighbourliness in order to produce a more inclusive society, remains a hard one. Yet we cannot and must not grow weary of doing good as we remember the power of the resurrection, that our Hope is grounded in more than our own efforts.



# Inclusiveness of Marginalised People

The New World Foundation and its Community Development and Training Centre

*Marius Bluemel*

The New World Foundation (NWF) was founded in 1980 in the Cape Flats township of Lavender Hill. At this time, the apartheid system caused hopelessness, injustice, and war. NWF was thus established with the vision of “building a new world of hope, justice and peace”. The organisation was founded in affiliation with the United Reformed Church and weathered the storms of intense political instability during the 1980s. NWF started with a crèche for 27 children and a soup kitchen in the Vrygrond informal settlement. During this time, it opposed apartheid and fought for the political and human rights of the people in Lavender Hill and surrounding communities that were marginalised and excluded because of the apartheid law. Even though the political situation has changed dramatically in South Africa since the first democratic elections in 1994, NWF is still fighting the oppression and exclusion of poor and marginalised people.

NWF operates from its own community centre covering an area comprising the communities of Lavender Hill, St Montague Village, Hillview, Seawinds, Vrygrond/Capricorn (formal settlements) and Cuba Heights, Military Heights, Village Heights and Overcome Heights (informal settlements) in the so-called Cape Flats, near Cape Town.



*New World Foundation Community Development and Training Centre in Lavender Hill*

Lavender Hill and its surrounding communities were created by the apartheid regime to pursue the objectives of the *Group Areas Act* (1950) to separate people according to their races. “Coloured people” were evicted from areas such as District Six and Wynberg, which were then declared “whites only”. The segregation created isolated “coloured” and “black” communities without access to basic services. Twenty years into democracy, it remains a challenge for the local governments to overcome these structures.

Lavender Hill’s housing was constructed between 1972 and 1974. The standard of the flats and houses was and remains very poor and has deteriorated over time because of a lack of maintenance and because people are not allowed to own their properties. The space of the two- or three-room flats was not sufficient for the families, which resulted in overcrowding. Today, inhabitants live in crowded flats, in the back gardens of flats, or in shacks in informal settlements. These have developed over the past years at the boundaries of Lavender Hill as a result of the apartheid legislation, as well as the migration from rural areas within South Africa and from central, eastern, and southern Africa. For example, it is estimated that approximately five million Zimbabweans have immigrated to South Africa. The informal settlements, which emerged and grew over the past 20 years on the edges of townships like Lavender Hill, were a particularly frequent destination for people from different nationalities (amongst others Zimbabwe, Malawi, Congo, Rwanda, Somalia) to settle. Currently, approximately 100,000 people live in Lavender Hill and the surrounding communities. As a result of the historical legacies of apartheid, the communities are highly dysfunctional and entrenched in poverty. The socio-economic problems are huge and multiple.

### *Poverty/unemployment*

Lavender Hill and its surroundings are defined by the government as low-income areas (the average household consists of five people with an income less than R [South African Rand] 3,000). Data on the households is collected by the government every five years during the national census. The national unemployment rate is at 26 per cent according to government statistics, but in areas like Lavender Hill, unemployment is common in each and every family. Data collected by NWF from clients on an annual basis indicates unemployment of approximately 80 per cent. The majority of the clients and programme participants declare that they are living from social support grants provided by the government (e.g., child support grants of R 315 per child per month).

### *Low educational level*

Many of the inhabitants of Lavender Hill did not complete school and drop out of school even before finishing primary school (grade 1–7; high school is grade 8–12). The school dropout rate is approximately 50 per cent. The low educational level results in very limited chances on the job market and for tertiary education (colleges, universities, etc.) Most of the people try to survive as day labourers doing casual jobs.

### *Poor housing and living conditions and poor health and health care facilities*

The blocks of flats and single houses erected by the apartheid government are deteriorating from a lack of maintenance. The housing structures are owned by the city of Cape Town, and the inhabitants pay a monthly rent, but little is done to upgrade the housing and develop the infrastructure. The health care facilities are very basic, and the prevalence of HIV/Aids is at 10–15 per cent, according to the TB/HIV Association that cooperates with NWF in these areas. Tuberculosis is prevalent as well.

### *High level of crime and violence*

There is a high level of substance abuse (alcohol and drugs) in the communities. Almost every family is affected by this siege. There is a high level of crime (opportunistic crime) in order to generate some income to survive, but also to pay for drugs and alcohol. Domestic violence/family violence is rife, and gang violence (the gangs are controlling the drug trade) is a part of life in Lavender Hill. Young girls and women are victims of rape and gender-based violence (GBV).

Faced with these multi-layered problems and challenges, the government struggles to implement effective service delivery (housing, schooling, public library, infrastructure etc.) and especially adequate policing in order to curb the crime, violence, and gang violence to create a more inclusive metropolitan area in Cape Town.

## New World Foundation holistic approach to address violence and trauma

The majority of children, youth, families, and community members in these areas are trapped in hopelessness because they have been marginalised and excluded. This manifests in low self-esteem and high levels of apathy. These characteristics are strong evidence of trauma and a deeply entrenched “woundedness” in the communities.

With experience of over 30 years, NWF has developed an approach (see overview at the bottom of the text) to address the multilayered problems and challenges of the people and to facilitate change in the communities. NWF work is divided into three main objectives (work focus areas), namely:

1. Safe Learning Spaces and Social Cohesion
2. Conflict Resolution and Mediation
3. Education for work

At the centre of the work is the concept of “broad life education”, i.e., life skills training with a strong focus on self-development and a positive self-concept/high self-esteem. NWF is convinced that the dignity of the people can only be restored – and the violence and dysfunction in families and communities overcome – if a positive self-concept is developed and space for healing is created to cope with the experienced trauma and *woundedness*. This broad life education and life skills training is an integral part of all the programmes and interventions NWF is offering on its own, in cooperation with partner organisations, and in partnership with the members of the communities (see overview).



NWF's approach has been proven successful for many people and families, who have reported that the programmes and services of NWF have changed their lives and created space for healing and hope for the future. Such programmes, interventions and services are particularly vital to address trauma and woundedness at the individual, group, and community levels. They include:

- *Advice office*: individuals, couples, and families receive advice and mediation services from a social worker. NWF assists 150 clients per month.
- *Counselling services*: community members are trained as lay counsellors and offer this service to approximately 50 people.
- *Support groups*: NWF is running three different support groups with a total of 90 members. These address chronic illness, the elderly, and LGBTI individuals.
- *Life skills training*: the training is particularly emphasised in the youth development programmes.
- *Aftercare programmes* reach out to 120 youth.
- *Youth leadership programmes* reach out to 100 youth.
- *Recreational programmes* reach out to 100 youth.
- *Cooperation with community structures* such as the street and court committees: the street and court committees consist of a total of 85 members. Their support team is reaching out to 300 to 400 community members per month. In cooperation with NWF, the committee is organising conflict-resolution workshops, lobbying campaigns at local government level, etc.

This integrated approach, which offers various programmes and interventions to members of the communities – including the Educare Centre for 160 children, programmes for parents, training programmes, and an Information Centre to assist community members (400 people per annum) with job and study applications and opportunities – creates a solid foundation to build an inclusive community. Other realities of everyday life and its corresponding concerns that NWF addresses are related to:

- minorities, for instance people who are HIV-positive, the LGBTI community, people with disabilities, and foreigners (immigrants from various African countries) who fear discrimination
- violence towards children and women (GBV)

The NWF human-rights-based approach ensures that everyone, including minorities, is welcome to utilise the services, participate in programmes, and address the problems in the community and society they are facing. The diversity of different people with different backgrounds and life stories helps to reduce prejudice and discrimination.

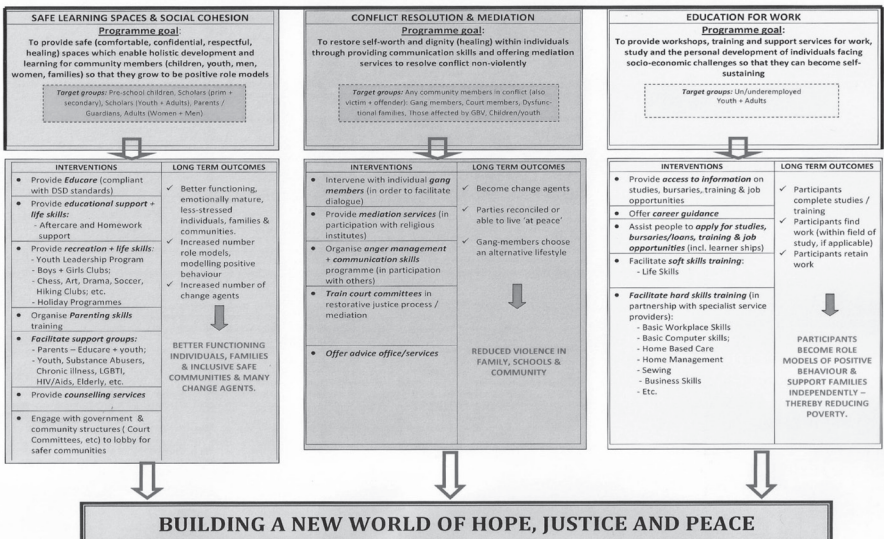
NWF is seen by many as a safe place where everybody is welcomed and assisted. NWF is described as a “little oasis” or even a “safe haven”. With its outreach programmes and interventions, NWF reaches between 8,000 and 10,000 people per annum.

The challenges that must still be overcome – for inhabitants of communities like Lavender Hill and its surroundings, as well as for NWF – are (a) the structural disintegration as a result of apartheid and (b) the stigmatisation of fellow citizens that makes people of Lavender Hill into second- or third-class citizens, labelled as gangsters, drug addicts, etc.

The apartheid regime created communities like Lavender Hill far out of town, with hardly any appropriate infrastructure and access to public services. To this day, the government has no plans to better integrate the communities into the metropolitan area of Cape Town or to upgrade the housing, schools, etc., even though “building inclusive communities and towns” is part of government policy.

The challenge is to cooperate with the local, provincial, and national governments in order to achieve substantial improvements in the living conditions of the people of Lavender Hill and its surroundings. South Africa currently has the highest rates of social and economic inequality worldwide. There is still a long way to go, and more equal, inclusive communities in South Africa to build. Institutions like NWF and the churches have an important role to play in this process.

### OVERVIEW OF NWF’S WORK FOCUS, ORGANISED IN 3 GOALS





# African Context



# How does the Church React towards Customs and Violence against Women, Especially towards Widows?

*Esther Ngalle Mbonjo*

In humanity, special attention has always been given to women because they are the carriers and givers of life. They are worthy of this attention because as soon as a baby is born, they are the ones taking care of him/her until a certain age. Women therefore represent the foundation of life on the one hand and the foundation of the family on the other hand.

Violence against women: an evocative title for all acts of physical, moral, linguistic, traditional, social and professional aggressions directed against women because of their sex and likely causing them harm. The upsurge of violence against women has led the church to be interested in this form of so-called discrimination against humans of the “lower sex”. Thus, in 1993 the United Nations (UN) adopted a statement to abolish violence against women. In Article 4, this text provides in substance that “States parties should condemn violence against women and should not invoke any custom, tradition, or religious consideration to avoid their obligations with respect to its elimination”.<sup>1</sup> In the same framework, the UN declared an International Widows Day on 23 June 2010, to end all negative practices associated with widowhood.

The church that protects the widow and the orphan reacts to these customs and the violence against widows. The church struggles against cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment, including widowhood rites. In Cameroon, after the death of the husband or wife, widowhood occurs and the surviving spouse must generally provide evidence of innocence. The Republic of Cameroon is a country of the central African subregion, located at the bottom of the Gulf of Guinea. Cameroon shares common borders with Nigeria in the west; Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, and Congo in the south; the Central African Republic in the east; and Chad in the north. It has two official languages, French and English. Cameroon is an ethnic, linguistic, and socio-cultural mosaic of approximately 250 ethnic groups with an equal number of languages.

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<sup>1</sup> Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, UN document A/RES/48/104, adopted by the UN General-Assembly.

## Overview of the current practice of widowhood rites in some regions of Cameroon

### *West region*

The practice of widowhood in this region is built on evidence of innocence that the widow is responsible for bringing forward. This is why widowhood is also compulsory if the deceased died of an accident, or an illness. The family of in-laws designates the person responsible for submitting the spouse to the rite. The widow is subjected to many constraints and privations that sometimes affect her dignity; and, we have to notice, all this takes place in her husband's compound.

The ritual starts with a session of shaving. The sister-in-law responsible for performing the ritual has to shave all the hair from the widow's intimate parts. She then must cover the widow with powder, generally ashes, before installing her on banana leaves near the fire in her kitchen. She eats on a traditional plate, and only dry food. She is not allowed to speak to anyone, so she is completely cut of society and the outside world, with her only external communication occurring through the mediation of the person who is leading the ritual. At the same time, she is not entitled to any toilet, even for the most natural needs. She must obtain permission before leaving her banana leaves, considered her bed sheet. Otherwise the procedure and all the sacrifices made will be cancelled and restarted afresh.

In the case of polygamy, it is the first wife who will give other women the right to stand by rising first. In many families, the widow has the obligation to wash her husband's corpse before burial. She must hold his head at the moment his corpse will be put in the coffin. At the same time, the property of the family during this period might be placed under seal, and can be even sold if the husband's brothers are greedy.

At the end of the widowhood period, the person submitting the widow to the rite must lead her to the edge of a river often used for the same causes; the aim here is to wash the widow after a second waxing session in order to remove the burden of widowhood. After that, the widow is subjected to a new way of learning. For this, she must take part in popular festivities, such as visiting the scene of a funeral celebration, accompanied by her relatives. She must do all this in order to get rid of her widowhood. Her reconciliation also comes from her presence in the village market, where she must make purchases, to fill her "bag of widowhood". This bag must be given to the authority who initiated the rite. The widow will quite often wear mourning garb (sometimes blue or black, or recently white) till the funeral of her late husband has been organised.

### *Centre region*

Among the rites celebrated in the Centre region of Cameroon, the rite of widowhood has an important place. This is a funeral rite of purification to which the surviving spouse is submitted when the other spouse has died; it is one of the last few African rites to have survived the European influence. Widowhood is considered a set of ceremonies whose "raison d'être" is to negotiate the separation of death with those who are still alive. Indeed, the aim of widowhood or *Akus* is on the one hand to ensure that the soul of the deceased should rest in peace, and on the other hand

to keep the other spouse sheltered from reprisals if the deceased spouse and the wife did not separate on good terms. Widowhood is also an expression of the pain felt by the family of the deceased, which is why the wife is quickly suspected of her husband's death. To recap, in the Centre region of Cameroon, the widowhood rite has three goals: the first is to disconnect the widow from her former situation, the second is to mark her passage through marginal situations, and the third is to change her previous status.

The rites are run by the sisters of the late husband. As soon as the partner dies, there is an earthquake in the life of the other partner. While the men are lying on old jute bags, the widow is obliged to leave her bedroom and to come and stay in the funeral home. She must lie on the ground, which is watered from time to time. She is forbidden to change her mud-stained clothes or take a bath. She must take off her shoes and refrain from eating or going out without the permission of her sisters-in-law who perform these rites. She must not speak or stare at the entourage. She should sleep lying next to the corpse of her husband.

### *Littoral (coastal) region*

In the Littoral region, the major concern for widows is based on the financial pressures imposed on them by their deceased husband's family. The day of his burial, the widow has to prepare a hearty meal for her sisters-in-law and offer them money, which could be valued in the hundreds of millions of CFA francs. It is only after doing all this that the widow can be washed and dressed in the widowhood garment. In addition, if the widow expresses the desire not to wear this garment any more, the same rite begins. A new meal and money are requested, but this time for the brothers-in-law and the uncles. Many of these widows are poor, old, and sometimes sick. The church is interested in this problem and can become a model by focusing on the education of Christians.

## Educational plan

It is clear that the persistence of widowhood practices results from a lack of awareness of the real situation those women are facing and the lack of education on women's rights and human rights in general. Because of secular conditioning mechanisms, the global order that includes widowhood obeys conscious or unconscious codes that no longer allow questioning and prevents any revolt against custom and its dehumanising practices. Widowhood and characteristic violence are part of the reality that we are living without asking questions. "This is our tradition. We make do with it", we often hear.

It is therefore necessary to create awareness of the problems within the different segments of the society through an educational process, structured around:

- Mobilisation of forces of the society through outreach campaigns that open people's eyes and ears to the concrete problems of widowhood today
- Exchange, sharing, and reflection with the protagonists and victims of demeaning and dehumanising widowhood practices in order to build a network capable



of challenging power, and generating resistance and revolt in order to change the prevailing social practices

- Dialogue with the authorities that are in the society, traditional leaders, religious leaders, civic and political leaders, and other forces whose social power can contribute to transforming people's mindsets
- Awareness-building through proximity talks and sessions to increase knowledge of human rights and women's rights in particular, as well as alternative means of income generation
- Campaigns in schools, high schools, and colleges, where young people can become aware of the problems and practice rebuilding women's dignity and human rights
- Investment in media (newspaper, radio and television) and in public debates on widowhood rites

All of these actions will help to create a new social consciousness that incorporates the need to embody the rights of women in the mentality, institutions, and dreams of the people.

## Codify rites of widowhood

### *Customary law*

The oral tradition of African tradition has been forged by the effect of time and perpetuates the perversions observed in the practice of widowhood out of a lack of tolerance. It is therefore urgent to rebuild widowhood rites and get these down in writing in the different cultures. In this regard, the involvement of traditional leaders will be necessary.

### *Positive law*

All kinds of atrocities are committed against the widow out of "custom". A number of acts violate human rights as protected by national and international laws. "No one shall be subjected to torture; or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment" says Article 5 of Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). This is why, in addition to the written and traditional codification, it is necessary to use positive law to harmonise widowhood practices.

### *Support for victims*

Women's associations, including the Cameroonian Association of Women Jurists (CAFÉJ) organise educational talks in church parishes in order to raise awareness of how customs and traditions have evolved and to increase respect for human rights. The Evangelical Church of Cameroon (Eglise Evangélique du Cameroun; EEC) has helped to supervise the framework for Christian widowhood, including the Department of Christian Women of the EEC.

## Testimonies

### *Wife of a pastor*

After the death of a pastor of the EEC, the traditional widowhood rites were not carried out as usual; instead, the church organised mourning visits until the burial. The pastors organised a church service in order to raise some money to financially help the widow. After the funeral, the pastors present laid hands on the widow, and many prayers were said for her. It was forbidden for the woman to wear the traditional cloth required in widowhood.

### *Mother of a pastor of the EEC*

The mother of a pastor of the EEC lost her husband in a village of our country. Pastors prayed and laid hands on the widow; there were no traditional rituals on the occasion of mourning. Here also, the pastors organised a church service in order to raise some money to assist the widow.

### *Former national president of the Department of the Union of Christian Women of the EEC*

This eminent lady of the EEC lost her husband; traditional widowhood rites were not performed. The pastors present gave thanks to the Lord, asking him to protect the widow through prayers and laying on of hands. She did not wear the traditional cloth required in widowhood.

### *A member of the EEC*

Pastors laid hands on the widow, and many prayers were said for her. She did not wear the traditional cloth required in widowhood.

## Conclusion

The Evangelical Church of Cameroon is aware of the situation of violence against widows. It has begun to create traditions of Christian widowhood and is in the process of formalising the practice. During the last general assembly of my church, a commission was created to study how the church can formalise its position against this practice that violates human rights.



# Inclusiveness in a Context where Women and Children are Affected by Extreme Forms of Violence

*Marina Mutetho Kasongo*

## Introduction

In line with the main theme of this conference, the concern here is to see how the Church can become an inclusive community for the people who have been victims of rape resulting from wars and for the children who have been exposed to violence from the war in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Is it possible to have a community that is really inclusive in the face of discrimination and violence? Is it possible to include victims of rape in the Church to help restore their dignity? I will use the CBCA (Communauté Baptiste au Centre de l'Afrique) case study of women survivors of rape and child victims of violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo to illustrate how the Church can be inclusive.

Let us first note that the CBCA is a Baptist church in Central Africa. Its head office is located in the eastern part of the DR Congo, where most of its activities are implemented, particularly in the North Kivu and South Kivu provinces, in the Oriental province (Bunia and Kisangani), and in the Kindu province. When talking about the CBCA case study, I will focus on its work in the eastern provinces, where the wars persisted and which were the provinces most affected by the wars in the DRC.

## What is an inclusive community?

In this particular paper, let us note that an inclusive community would be a community that accepts, welcomes, and includes everyone without discrimination, in order to give hope and joy that can restore human dignity. An inclusive community would work towards healing those who have been traumatised, following Jesus' model of restoring human dignity to people who have been shamefully wounded by violence. It is a church which would serve as a home where everyone finds a place to be and can get comfort to recover their humanity.

## Cases of women and children survivors of sexual violence

### *Women victims of war*

As is well known, the DRC, particularly the eastern part of Congo, has been a battleground for many armed troops for about two decades. Massive population

displacements took place, and the remaining population faced loss of human lives, other atrocities such as sexual violence, rape by combatants, women and girls placed into sexual slavery by armed troops, children misused in armed troops, poverty, etc.

Among the victims of these wars, women and children have suffered the most. For instance, in October 2004 the human rights group Amnesty International reported about 40,000 cases of rape over the previous six years, the majority occurring in South Kivu.<sup>1</sup> A 2011 human rights report reported that 1,000 women were being raped every day. In 2013, during the first semester of the war by the armed Group M23 in the North Kivu Province, it was reported that more than 3,000 women had been raped.<sup>2</sup> The point is that rape is usually rampant during armed conflicts. It has been generally reported that rape was used so extensively as a tool by warriors involved in the country's recent conflicts that the DR Congo, and the eastern province of the country in particular, has been described as the "rape capital of the world".<sup>3</sup> Official UN figures give further evidence of the growing threat that women and girls face. They show that recorded cases of sexual violence in North Kivu rose from 4,689 cases in 2011 to 7,075 in 2012, with many more cases going unreported.<sup>4</sup> UNHCR protection monitoring teams have registered 705 cases of sexual violence in the region since January 2014, including 619 cases of rape.<sup>5</sup> While some of the figures might have been inflated and others minimised, depending on the reporter, they definitively indicate that women and girls have been victims of systematic rape during wars. The many women being treated in the most specialised health centres and hospitals, such as the Heal Africa hospital in Goma (North Kivu province) and the Panzi hospital in Bukavu (South Kivu province), show that evidence. According to the Health Africa Report, in 2013, raped women were treated for fistula linked to rape.

### *Consequences of rape for female victims*

Female victims of rape face physical and psychological effects. Some of them have been severely injured, others became pregnant. They are traumatised, ashamed, and stressed. In addition, victims of rape may face discrimination and rejection by their family and husband. They are sometimes blamed for what happened to them and are often stigmatised by their community. As most displaced people are destitute, having lost all their property through looting and displacement and been deprived of their production resources, the excluded and rejected female victims of rape are strongly affected by poverty. They have no other means of survival, making them doubly dehumanised. In addition, some other female victims of rape have contract-

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1 Wikipedia, "Sexual Violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo", see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sexual\\_violence\\_in\\_the\\_Democratic\\_Republic\\_of\\_the\\_Congo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sexual_violence_in_the_Democratic_Republic_of_the_Congo)

2 <http://radiokapi.net/actualite/2013/12/17/nord-kivu-plus-de-3-000-cas-de-viols-enregistres-au-1er-semester-2013/> December 17, 2013 by Admin in News, Video; Tags: congo, DR Congo, Francais, Nord Kivu.

3 Wikipedia, *ibid.*

4 Sexual Violence on the Rise in DRC's North Kivu, 30 July 2013, see <http://www.unhcr.org/51f79a649.htm>

5 *Ibid.*

ed sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/Aids. The estimation is that 30 per cent of female victims of rape in North Kivu have been infected with HIV.<sup>6</sup>

In most of the cases, female victims of rape do not have the means to access justice, even if the perpetrator is identified. This increases their hopelessness and adds to their loss of dignity. In the midst of this total destruction, there is a need for an inclusive Church. Is the Church ready to restore dignity to these victims of rape?.

### *Cases of children excluded because of war*

Women have not been the only victims of violence. Children have also suffered from the wars in the eastern part of the DR Congo. Girls have been victims of rape and have been kidnapped and kept as sexual slaves by armed troops. For instance, out of the 705 cases of survivors of sexual violence recorded in the beginning of the year 2012, 288 were minors. It is always difficult for girls who become pregnant or bear children out of rape to be accepted with their child by their family, since families have been reluctant to accept children fathered by the enemy. This rejection and stigmatisation has increased the number of returning girls who contemplate abortion or suicide. Some end up by wondering where God was when all this happened to them. They feel excluded from the community. It is in the midst of these problems that the Church needs to be inclusive.

According to documentation, boys as well as girls were captured to join and serve armed troops. Humanitarian organisations and UN agencies worked to protect children by pulling them out of military service, but despite the efforts to bring them back home, some of them have had difficulties reintegrating into society and their respective families. Others have been rejected by their families and are treated as criminals for having participated in the bloodshed by the armed troops. Others are accused of witchcraft and abandoned on the streets, leaving them at risk of being exposed to all types of violence: beatings, robbery, banditry, arrest, etc. They are discriminated against and considered a danger to the community. Children in this situation have the same need to be treated as human beings to live in dignity. This again is an indication of the need for an inclusive community, which could welcome and accept them and restore their dignity.

## The CBCA approach of using inclusiveness to meet the challenge of women and children victims of sexual violence

As a church in mission, the CBCA has paid attention to these two particular categories in its mission work. Its effort is to help women and girls who have been victims of rape to recover their humanity and dignity: psychologically, spiritually, physically, and socially. Following Jesus' model of restoring human dignity, the CBCA worked to be an inclusive community by welcoming them for trauma healing, physical re-

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6 Sexual Warfare in the Democratic Republic of Congo, 2009; see <http://www.smh.com.au/interactive/2009/congo/index.html>

covery, and social integration through two specific projects: one for women survivors of sexual violence, and another for child survivors.

Using an approach of holistic inclusiveness towards the female victims of sexual violence, the CBCA first identified the victims who had been physically injured and facilitated their access to health care facilities for health treatment. These women and children have also received psychological treatment for trauma from an assistant psychologist trained by the CBCA. In this specific area, 2,882 woman victims and 398 children were assisted in 2013. Out of the 398 raped children, 81 were given bursaries for school fees, and 93 returned children learned income generating skills and received start-up kits for income-generating activities.

On a social level, the CBCA plays a mediator role to reconcile husbands with their wives as well as families with rejected women or children. Some women have been reconciled with their husband as result of these activities, and children have been reunited with their families. In general, however, the challenge remains, since the community might continue to discriminate against these victims. There is still the need to sensitise the community about the all-inclusive love of Christ. To address the issue of poverty and guarantee the survival of these rejected and abandoned women and children, the CBCA has trained them in self-reliance and income-generating activities and skills, and has given them grants of a start-up capital as well as start-up kits.

Between 2007 and 2014, 1,174 women were given grants for small business, and more than 50 children recovered from armed troops received training and start-up kits. Some received a grant for small-scale business like selling prepaid mobile phone cards (Airtel, Vodacom). Some of the beneficiaries are now established and can reorganise their lives and continue to support their children.<sup>7</sup> With these activities, the CBCA is working as an inclusive church by helping the victims to recover their human dignity.

Concerning access to justice for female victims, the CBCA provided legal support to the victims whose perpetrators were known to the judiciary. More than 20 female victims of rape have received legal assistance. This assistance has included listening to the victims, preparing their case analysis, providing legal advice, and opening a legal case against the perpetrators. As a result, four cases were sent to the prosecutor, and the perpetrators are in prison awaiting sentencing.<sup>8</sup> Clinics welcoming the victims provided ten places where they could be listened to in confidence. This is another way of inclusiveness supported by the CBCA to ensure justice for the victims.<sup>9</sup>

In order to bring survivors hope and rebuild their self-confidence, the CBCA organised seminars in Goma on 14-15 August 2013 where 45 female victims of rape were taught how to fully live their lives and go beyond what had happened to them. They also learned how to avoid being the victim of rape, and what to do in order to avoid transmission of sexual diseases in case of rape. Through role play and dramatic simulations, with twelve young boys and girls, the participants learned a therapy for internal injuries resulting from the rape experience.

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7 CBCA, Sexual Violence Project Report, 30 December 2013.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

## Biblical paradigm of inclusiveness

The Master of inclusiveness, Jesus sent the Church to continue with his mission of inclusion. The story of the bleeding woman who was healed by Jesus and whose life was restored to normal (Luke 13:10–17), is an indication of Jesus' work of inclusiveness, which the church in the Eastern Congo should follow in healing the female and child victims of war. As Jesus expanded his love to the despised people like the Samaritan woman (John 4:9) and the tax collector treated as a sinner, Zacchaeus (Luke 19:2–10), the inclusive love of the Church should help the excluded and the rejected to overcome the shame they have undergone from rape. In addition, as Jesus attended the excluded people such as the ten lepers (Luke 17:11–19), and brought them back to the community having healed them from their leprosy, the women and children victims of wars would feel accepted by Jesus if they were welcomed by the Church without discrimination. The children, who participated in bloodshed within armed troops, would experience the forgiveness of God if the church were inclusive and enabled them to cast out the guilt and the fear of having participated in killings, and to feel fully part of the community. Inclusion will allow them to recover their human dignity.

In sum, let us conclude this subject by saying that inclusiveness is the mission that Jesus entrusted to his Church for the restoration of human dignity. Giving hope to the hopeless, welcoming the marginalised ones, healing the inner and external wounds of people, seeking justice for the voiceless, and respecting the rights of those whose rights are being violated is the sign of a church's inclusiveness that transfers Jesus' love to humanity. An inclusive Church serves as a "light to the world" for the restoration of human dignity.





# Inclusive Communities in the Church

Premise, Reasoning, Profile, Realities and Challenges

*Paul Hatani Kisting*

Churches and societies should be continually encouraged to be more just, responsive, and inclusive in their quest for transformation into sanctuaries of love, justice, and peace. The heartbeat driving the agenda of inclusive communities in the context of the Church, in the midst of human fragmentation, isolation, rejection, neglect and abandonment, should rest upon cherishing the inherent human instinct to belong; to feel accepted, loved, and appreciated.

Mother Teresa once said (paraphrased): The worst thing that can happen to a human person is to be rejected and feel rejected.

Throughout his firebrand teachings and actions in the three years of his divine ministry, Jesus demonstrated immense and authentic attachment to the element of inclusivity for which he was often denigrated, vilified, rejected, and refused. Yet he was also adored, followed, appreciated and graced by those that experienced the yoke of exclusivity, slavery, oppression, suffering, and humiliation.

Martin Luther once said after delivering a Sunday sermon on Matthew 25: 31-46 (paraphrased): "I was in prison ... I was naked ... let us now go out and practice what we preached." They then went out, with him included, and visited the sick, the poor, and the destitute. They washed them, fed them, and cared for them.

After St Augustine and a student had visited congregants for the whole day, greeting, touching, listening, counselling, praying, chatting, and interacting with them, the student asked him when he would start to preach as he had promised. Said Augustine: "What we did is also preaching."

## Premise

The constitution of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia, hereafter referred to as ELCRN, echoes the basis upon which the church relates to

the concept of “inclusive communities” throughout its mission. Furthermore, the church regards the New and Old Testaments (scriptures) as the only norm and guide for faith, doctrine, and human existence. The Church Constitution: The diaconal ministry of the Church (Article 3):

The ELCRN Constitution: The Diaconal Ministry of the Church (Article 3):

3.1 The practice of *service to the people of God in all aspects of life is inseparable* from the office of preaching, teaching, and to live the Gospel and the administration of the Holy Sacraments;

3.2 In view of the specific care for the elderly, the sick, orphans, widows and widowers, the prisoners, people with disabilities as well as every aspect of a person’s needs in its totality, *the Church shall be engaged in diaconal ministry*;

3.3 The Church regards it as imperative that children, the youth, women, men and parishes and institutions *be engaged in such diaconal ministries*.

## Institutional structure – Driving forces towards community inclusion

The institutional structuring of the ELCRN through its parishes, circuits, institutions, and charitable organisations, provides a strategic yet encouraging platform and a safe environment to advocate for inclusive communities. These institutions can provide focused and consistent interventions, projects or programmes (on all institutional levels) that continuously seek to minimise human suffering, promote and restore human dignity, health and wellness, and care for the destitute, the marginalised, and excluded and disadvantaged communities.

## Accountability – Measuring action towards community inclusion

A strong sense of accountability through stringent policy directives (internal and external) and organisational management structures needs to inform secured community inclusions in all spheres of the human dimension to the best and optimal benefit of the flock. As God commanded Peter (and therefore the Church): “*Take care of My sheep*” (John 21: 16–17). The Church, as the body of Christ, should be viewed as an interdependent community where everyone belongs and everyone serves, everyone is in need and everyone is needed (1 Cor 12) (1 Cor 12:22).

## Partnering in favour of community inclusion

The church, as an integral part of the state, cannot operate in isolation and expect to solace the burden of constituent factors that is counterproductive to inclusive community considerations. That would be a futile exercise. Partnerships should be geared towards avoiding the duplication and/or overlapping of interventions; in the interest of the voiceless, the fearful and the scared should be approached, across all spectra (internal, external, national, regional, international, global). Partnerships

encourage structured cooperation, coordination, and networking across the board; they set the scene for resource mobilisation in terms of financial, technical, human, and other kinds of support that favours inclusivity.

Through its existence for the past twelve years, ELCAP has built up a solid partnership base at external, national, and international levels in terms of government, civil society, development partners, and donors. Although the importance of each partnership can never be underestimated, the partnership and connection with the core local communities (parish communities) is of high importance. Partnerships may come and go, but the community always remains.

The following highly reliable, committed and therefore earnestly regarded donor partners and development associates represent the *major resource base* of ELCAP Programmes aimed at community inclusiveness:

- Bread for the World (BfdW);
- Lifeline Childline Namibia (LLCLN);
- United Evangelical Mission (UEM);
- Church and Business against HIV and Aids (CHABAHIVA);
- Lutheran Communion in Southern Africa (LUCSA).

The vitality of stakeholder partnering on the local and national fronts – government ministries and services, civic organisations, non-governmental counterparts, ELCRN-based and community-based organisations, traditional leaders – demonstrably broadens and expands the safety nets and service delivery options in favour of community inclusion. It is an undisputed truth that such stakeholder partnerships provide an extension of service and embody reliable referral points.

## A bold step closer to a focused inclusive community (ELCAP)

Although responses aimed at including all communities within the context of church diaconal ministry may take different forms, directed to different audiences and addressing different needs at either individual or collective church institutional levels (which is encouraged to continue), the ELCRN has opted to centralise an effective and focused community inclusion response through ELCAP.

### *ELCAP core responses in the fight against HIV and Aids and other social disparities*

The following programmes are in operation at ELCAP:

- *Home-Based care* services;
- HIV and Aids *voluntary counseling and testing* services, coupled with other integrated programmes, e.g., male circumcision counselling, tests for diabetes, cholesterol, and pregnancy at both its standing sites (Rehoboth and Mariental) and mobile sites where outreach programmes are scheduled.
- A dedicated *Health and Wellness Workplace Programme*, coordinated by a programme officer (coordinator), is responsible for 60 per cent of the HIV and Aids programming within the institution. It provides health- and wellness-related

services in seven of the Tourism Sector (*Gondwana Collections*) camps and lodges, and is about to expand its services to the mining sector. These services are tailored for employees (workers) and employers.

- The *Gender-Based Violence Project* aimed at cementing a protracted understanding of gender concepts within the parish communities to reduce GBV incidence and prevalence.
- After-School Project (*Infohut*) that supervises after school programmes for children targeted at previously disadvantaged pupils, to advance scholastic performance under the trained supervision of retired teacher.
- Resource mobilisation in support of other social programmes of the church institutions.

## Realities and challenges of community inclusion

In realising the diaconal meaning of missionary work, the church deals with hard-core realities and challenges that are inseparable from the historical and structural designs and scope of the societies it serves. The church should therefore always be mindful of such discourse.

*Marginalised and excluded groups include amongst others:*

- *People with disabilities* – rejected by their families because they are sometimes considered a curse, unable to access basic services including education, health, and sanitation, they are sometimes not even able to attend church services because our church buildings are not easily accessible to the disabled, have no translation for deaf Christians during services and other public events, and the list unfortunately goes on. Many people in our communities consider being disabled or differently abled as a punishment from God, and the church has failed to provide comforting and explanatory preaching that these persons also represent the image of God.
- *Ethnic minorities and indigenous people* – treated as second-class citizens and as if they are less human, although in most cases they are the first inhabitants of those countries and territories.
- *Farm and domestic workers* – working under extremely harsh, slavery-type conditions without protection.
- *Refugees and citizens* – displaced by internal and regional conflicts, they have left their homes and livelihoods because of conflicts or wars in which they had very little say or involvement.
- *People with different sexual orientations* – condemned even by their own families and churches.

## Considerations

### *The rich-poor gap*

The huge gap between the haves and the have-nots is an element that tends to escalate and cannot be downplayed. Since it exerts its fair share of reversed effects on efforts aimed at equitable treatment and opportunities for all, this economic inequality qualifies for placement in the supreme ranks of factors directly suppressing healthy community inclusion. In the context of the church, it may often mean that members/persons and the church community experience discomfort, among other things, and would prefer to refrain from taking part in programmes, opportunities, and activities meant for all (inclusivity).

### *Inclusivity in practice – Voice of the Church*

The Desk for Social Development is lobbying for a basic income grant of 100 Namibian Dollars to all Namibians (age 0–59 years) to improve the livelihood of the target audience. This initiative aims to minimise the gap between the rich and the poor, giving bargaining power, worth, and dignity to the economically disadvantaged.

### *The “isms”*

*Regionalism, tribalism, individualism and self-centrism:* people base their association and interest in activities on territorial, ethnic, and individual considerations. When these “isms” occur, they dismantle the theory of community inclusion that should promote communion, coherence, pulling together, coexistence, and mutual love as the body of Christ.

### *An enabling environment*

The creation or development and the maintenance of an encouraging environment (safe, trusted, reliable, comfortable) should always be a top priority on the agenda: an environment that from the outset imparts a “you are very welcome here” flavour.

### *Leadership*

Community inclusion requires strong, competent and dedicated leadership that demonstrates genuine passion for individual human beings and the adversities in the broader environment (family, society, culture, traditions, governance structures) of these individuals.

### *Resources*

Since community inclusion by its nature requires resource capacity (financial, infrastructural, human, physical, etc.) the correct, competent, efficient, and effective management, sustainability and maintenance thereof should not be underestimated.

## Conclusion

The Church (the body of Christ) is a sacred sustainable social substance, with its

foundations firmly rooted in the abundance of God's grace, his will, his mercy, and his guidance. It embodies the central structure and nucleus of societal existence and is therefore strategically positioned in any given society to drive the community inclusion agenda. The Church commands integrity, authority, trust, and reliability, and it is on that premise, without compromising its dignity, that the Church must strive unblemished, serving the interest of human dignity.

# Inclusiveness in a Context of Children in Difficult Circumstances

*Adventina Kyamanywa*

## Introduction

Involvement in social services has been one of the cornerstones of the ELCT/NWD (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania North Western Diocese) since its inception 104 years ago. Such ministries have always aimed to contribute to human development, attending to various peoples' needs. The diocese is actively involved in educational and medical work, diaconic programmes such as the Tumaini Children's Centre, HUYAWA (Huduma ya Watoto-Service for Children), Igabiro-Home for People with Physical Challenges, Ntoma Orphanage, and Mugeza School for the Deaf. Diaconia is ingrained in the congregations' ministries, whereby sick people and the elderly are visited by both laypeople and clergy. The diocese is also involved in civic empowerment and in addressing environmental issues. What the diocese does for the ministry is attend to people's spiritual, mental, and physical needs.

The gospel of life is clearly seen from the beginning and throughout Jesus' ministry, as summed up in the teaching he gave at Nazareth (Luke 4:16–19). He came to set prisoners free, to give sight to the blind, and to heal all our diseases. It is this ministry of liberation that the ELCT/NWD continues to implement as a community of faith. To be a Christian is to share in the mission of Jesus, and that means bringing good news, especially to those in need.

## Biblical basis for helping people in need

In Luke 10:25–37, Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan to answer a question from a teacher of Jewish Law, who asks, "Who is my neighbour?" At the end of the story, Jesus shows that the Samaritan behaved like a neighbour to the man attacked by robbers. Our faith in God is expressed in love towards others, in response to God's love. From the First Commandment flow all the others. Jesus gave us a new commandment: to love one another (John 13:34–35).

Throughout both the Old and New Testament, God several times emphasises the need to care for vulnerable people grieved by the death of their loved ones. Very often widows and orphans are singled out for special care (Deuteronomy 14:29, 24:19; Isaiah 1:17; James 1:27). The book of James is one of the most powerful biblical expressions of the importance of support for the weak and vulnerable as part of Christian discipleship. James underlines the indisputable obligation to give support and protection to all who are in need.



## Vulnerable children in the region and the response of the Church

In Kagera Region, the area in which North Western Diocese operates, there has been a big increase in the number of orphans and vulnerable children, which is a major challenge for the church and society. It needs to be noted that the first cases of HIV/Aids were diagnosed in Kagera. The scars and wounds of the disease are quite visible. Some of the orphans and vulnerable children are children living and working on the streets.

Children who are living and working on the streets are confronted with emotional, physical, psychological, social, and spiritual challenges. They lack access to food, shelter, education, health care, and proper upbringing and guidance. They are also victims of high levels of violence and exploitation. They are unfortunately homeless, and culturally as well as socially rootless.

Child labour is a fact of daily life in Tanzania, as it is in many other poor societies today, especially in Africa and Asia. Children work for long hours at a very young age. In some cases, they are used as breadwinners for their divorced or widowed mothers. Some are completely alone and must take care of themselves. There are large numbers of child-headed families. The drafting of children into the commercial sex trade is a growing phenomenon in both big and small towns and cities.

In our society there is also the problem of child marriage. As it stands, some of the families in our society still consider girls the source of family income. Young girls are forced to be married because parents expect a bride price or dowry. Some young women do get married off without their consent and without any choice in their husband. There are serious downsides to this. Child marriages are a major life restriction and have a serious impact on health and parenting when children are married at such a tender age. It also cuts off educational opportunities, especially for girls.

Child trafficking is another issue of great concern. In Muleba District, for instance, there is a network of child traffickers supported by a prominent business-woman. We have had cases of children disappearing from homes, including school-children, who are lured away and promised a large amount of money if they go to work for some company. A son of one of the church workers told a nasty story of his life in Dar es Salaam, where he stayed for three months. His parents and relatives were subjected to an unbearable and prolonged period of loss and grief. When the boy returned, he told horrible stories of all kinds of exploitation, including sexual and cheap labour. He ended up not being paid all of the money he had been promised, and above all, he was psychologically, emotionally, and physically exhausted and severely affected. His decision to return and what he experienced was a similar scenario to the Prodigal Son. The only difference is that the decision to leave home was imposed on him. The District Child Protection Team of Muleba District, comprised of several child rights activists, has brought the existence of a child trafficking network in the area to the attention of law enforcement bodies.

## The Church's commitment

The ELCT/NWD is ardently working to address the problem of children working and living on the street by understanding the root causes of the problem. Findings from a recent study indicate family conflicts, parental neglect, poverty, abuse, lack of access to education, social marginalisation, and isolation. Some of the children have been kicked out of their homes, while others decided on their own to migrate to urban areas, hoping to find work in the formal sectors. Children orphaned by HIV/Aids are vulnerable, and at times are rejected by relatives.

Through the Tumaini Children's Centre, the church has strived to rehabilitate and reintegrate street and working children since 2003, and to date we have helped over 900 children to return to their homes and communities. The project started on a small scale and has now grown to a large project reaching over 100 children per year. The project has four components:

- outreach work targeting children and youth in Bukoba
- rehabilitation work at the Transition Centre
- reunification and follow-up
- community-based prevention work

Through the Human Rights Desk and HUYAWA, the ELCT/NWD educates people through seminars on human rights as well as children's rights. The church through these programmes defends the rights of children – rights to education, to play, and inherit, especially when the properties of orphans are confiscated by greedy family members. Furthermore, the diocese, through these programmes, has formed children's clubs in some parishes in which children are taught about their rights and responsibilities.

The ELCT/NWD is involved in child evangelism, conducting seminars that empower teachers with new skills in order to teach children in Sunday schools, provide Christian education in primary schools, and help children in clubs. The Students and Youth Unit of the diocese does a lot to address issues related to children's rights. Children who join the clubs have a good opportunity to learn and share together about their experiences of faith. They also sing and pray together.

## Challenges

While the church is engaging in helping vulnerable children, certain challenges have been addressed.

- Sometimes there is competition instead of cooperation, where different groups or institutions appear to be involved in the same task in the same area.
- Poverty seems to be the main source of problems facing vulnerable children. For instance, some children are engaging themselves in certain dangerous work or other hazardous activities because of poverty. Other children drop out of school as a result of poverty.
- Significant awareness-raising on human rights and gender equality has been done, but the problem of gender inequality still exists. In some areas, girls are

doing more domestic work than boys, and boys get more education. Domestic violence perpetrated against women is another big challenge.

## Conclusion and recommendations

Despite the work done by ELCT/NWD in Kagera Region to assist children in difficult circumstances, there is much more to do to help vulnerable children. Cooperation is needed between churches and other institutions (government and non-governmental organisations) that can participate in the task of reaching out to vulnerable children. Even the different groups and organisations that are already involved in such work need to cooperate together. They can share their experiences and the challenges they encounter.

For the church to be inclusive, there is a need to address gender roles and the relations in families that contribute to the vulnerability of children. Bearing in mind the biblical imperative to help the oppressed and those in need, churches should make vulnerable children a priority in their programmes (Jeremiah 22:3; see also Psalm 82:3). Caring for vulnerable children must emerge as an integral part of the core activity of churches.

Church leaders need to encourage their members to regard caring for orphans and vulnerable children as defending the quality of their discipleship.



*ELCT/NWD is ardently working to address the problem of children working and living on the street*

# Asian Context



# Inclusiveness in a Context of Urbanisation

Addressing Needs of Migrant Workers in the Hong Kong Situation

*Wai Cheong Milton Chang*

## Introduction

Before we discuss the issue of including migrant workers in an urban area, we have to spend a few words describing the situation in Hong Kong. Hong Kong is a cosmopolitan city with a population of over 7 million people, with 93.6 per cent ethnic Chinese and 6.4 per cent from other groups. However, the land mass is just 1,104 km<sup>2</sup> (426 sq. mi), making it one of the most densely populated areas in the world. Because Hong Kong was returned to mainland China after 1997, Hong Kong is no longer a colony of the British government but a special administrative region under the rule of the People's Republic of China. For the seventeen years since, the Chinese government has allowed 150 people a day to immigrate to Hong Kong. In addition, since Hong Kong is an international financial centre, many people from Africa and Southeast Asia would like to migrate to Hong Kong to earn their living. This influx of people into Hong Kong is a challenge and creates many social problems.

## Social problems in Hong Kong

One of the major problems Hong Kong is facing is the scarcity of land. Because of the limited development in diversifying multi-industries, the major industries in Hong Kong are the commercial industries, especially the development of the property industry. These industries comprise the major sector of GDP (gross domestic product) in Hong Kong. Perhaps many of you have heard that Hong Kong is just a very small place with a large population. Scarcity of usable land in Hong Kong has led to a high rent index and high property prices. These also create a serious problem: the disparity between the rich and the poor. Hong Kong's Gini coefficient<sup>1</sup> has risen from 0.518 in 1996 to 0.537 in recent years. In the past, Hong Kong has been first in the world. Many domestic families have to spend 40–50 per cent of their monthly income renting a flat or repaying mortgage. This directly affects the living standard of many people.

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<sup>1</sup> Measures income inequality on a scale of 0 to 1, where 0 is equivalent to perfect equality and 1 is equivalent to full inequality.

Many households have to live in small flats of around 40 m<sup>2</sup> with four to five persons living in one flat. This means that many households are what we call nuclear families, with just the parents and one to two children. The grandparents often have to move away to live in another area. To earn a living in Hong Kong, many mothers have to go to work to earn a living for their households, and many working mothers also need to employ domestic workers from countries in Southeast Asia such as Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. The working mothers have to earn a high enough salary to cover the wages of the domestic helpers and their rent or mortgage.

The absence of parents at home leads to several social problems: a communication and generation gap between parents and children, child abuse, and great pressure on students to strive for academic achievements, as well as extramarital sex, divorce (which also leads to the problems of single-parent families), and broken homes.

## Inclusion of migrant workers' needs

Because Hong Kong is a metro city where many foreigners would like to earn their living, the numbers of legal and illegal immigrants are high every year. Just as we have mentioned, many families in Hong Kong cannot afford to have a spacious living area and have to live by themselves as nuclear families, with the grandparents living somewhere else, the mother working outside the home, and domestic helpers employed to take care of the children and the elderly at home. According to the statistics of the Hong Kong government, there were around 320,000 domestic helpers employed in 2013, among them 46 per cent from Indonesia and 51 per cent from the Philippines, with others from Thailand, Sri Lanka or countries in Southeast Asia. The domestic helpers have to stay at the homes with the employers, taking care of the people, cooking meals, and doing household chores. They do not have standard working hours and are responsible for following their employers' instructions when doing housework. The standard remuneration of a domestic helper is around 500 US\$ per month, and the employer has to provide the helper with food and a place to sleep. Since nearly all the domestic helpers come from Southeast Asia and have different cultures, they have to fit themselves into the Chinese culture of Hong Kong and the various lifestyles of different families. Some experience culture shock in this new environment.

We receive reports from time to time of domestic helpers being abused by their employers. Some are said to have been beaten and tortured by their employers, and some do not have holidays or enough food. Their salaries may be deducted unreasonably because of minor mistakes or a failure to meet their employers' expectations. In a few cases, there have been reports of domestic helpers being sexually harassed by male employers and even raped by them. There was a well-known case in 2013 of an Indonesian domestic helper called Eriwana, who was badly tortured by her employer in Hong Kong. Her employer slapped her, beat her with a stick, and used boiling water to harm her, and she also did not allow Eriwana to go out, so that the

torture would not be discovered by other people. When Eriwana became too weak to do any more household chores, she was sent back to Indonesia, and the case was discovered by another Indonesian domestic helper before Eriwana got on the plane.

Moreover, when domestic helpers want to complain about ill treatment by their employers, some are advised by their agencies to forgo the complaints because helpers can end up with bad references from their employers, making it difficult for them to find new jobs. The problem has become worse because domestic helpers actually must spend up to 2,800 US\$ to apply for a job through the agencies. If they lose the jobs and have to go back to their own countries, they may have to spend much more money for another application. Furthermore, it can be quite difficult for financial reasons for the domestic helpers to bring their cases to court, or they may have a hard time providing sufficient proof of abuse. This is why some domestic helpers choose to tolerate torture on the job.

## Support

There are NGOs such as Christian Action who offer assistance to domestic workers. They help them by giving legal advice and may provide temporary accommodation when helpers are fired by their employers.

Since the UEM has member churches in Indonesia, and some of the domestic workers in Hong Kong are from Indonesia and are also members from those churches, the UEM has launched a joint programme with the Chinese Rhenish Church Hong Kong to serve the domestic helpers from Indonesia. Indonesian churches will send a minister/pastor on contract basis to come to Hong Kong and serve in the Indonesian domestic workers community. This pastor will visit them and provide counselling services to them. We also have a centre for this joint project at the Mission Department Office, where we have some interesting classes and small groups for them during their holidays, such as computer classes, language classes, cooking skills, guitar, etc. The Indonesian domestic workers can find leisure, equip themselves, and make friends by joining the centre's activities. We will also have Bible study groups and outreach programmes for those who have not yet found Jesus Christ.

In addition, we have shared the information on these programmes with members of the Chinese congregations, asking them to introduce their domestic helpers to the service provided and to foster mutual understanding between the employers and the domestic helpers.

When we have difficult cases or are asked for help by the domestic helpers, we also co-operate with other NGOs, Indonesian-speaking churches in Hong Kong, and even the Indonesian consulate. Carnivals promoting the rights of the domestic helpers have also been organised to let the helpers know more about the resources they can seek out for help when they need it.





# Models of Inclusiveness in the Indonesian Church Context

*Jan S. Aritonang*

## Preliminary remarks

Of the approximately 252 million people of Indonesia, there are around ten per cent Christians, with Catholics comprising around three per cent ( $\pm$  7.5 million) and non-Catholics approximately seven per cent ( $\pm$  17.5 million). The non-Catholic Christians are divided into around 400 church organisations (twelve of them are members of the UEM, with around six million members).<sup>1</sup> The majority of the population are Muslim: according to official statistics, about 85 per cent. This fact challenges the Christians and the churches to develop an inclusive, even pluralistic attitude and point of view.

Not all churches would like to develop such an attitude. Some Conservative-Evangelical and Pentecostal-Charismatic churches still regard the non-Christians as a target of evangelisation (read: Christianisation) and view interfaith dialogue as contrary to the great commandment of Christ in Matthew 29:19–20. This frequently brings difficulties and tensions among the nations, and even among the Christians themselves.

Of course, inclusiveness not only applies to interfaith relationships and living together, but also to many people who are facing various social, economic, and political problems, such as those who are affected by land-grabbing, environmental destruction, and exploitation due to deforestation. The LGBTIQ community<sup>2</sup> also needs attention, support, and inclusiveness from the churches, but this issue is not elaborated further in this paper. This paper focuses on some understanding, statements, experiences, struggles and actions taken by several churches in Indonesia concerning social, economic, and political problems, and interfaith cooperation on this matter.

## Exemplary cases

### *Land-grabbing*

Indonesia is a huge country of over 17,000 islands. In the past, most of the land was owned by the people according to their customary law. But beginning with Western

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1 The relatively complete description of the churches in Indonesia from the sixteenth century until 2005 can be read in Jan S. Aritonang and Karel Steenbrink (eds.), *A History of Christianity in Indonesia*. Leiden: Brill, 2008; available through the Internet.

2 In the last decade there has been increasing attention and support from several Christian communities and churches in Indonesia, including Jakarta Theological Seminary, for issues affecting the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersexual and queer (LGBTIQ) community.

colonialism, land in many parts of the country has been claimed by the government as state-owned. Millions of hectares – especially forests – have been given over to private timber, mining, and plantation companies. No wonder there are conflicts in a lot of places. The people – many of them Christians – claim that they have inherited the land from their ancestors, while the government refers to certain law and the companies claim that they have already paid the government for this land. Through the Internet, we can get access to some legal cases and conflicts on this subject.

### *Environmental destruction*

As an equatorial country, Indonesia is blessed with a lot of other natural resources besides its huge forests. On the one hand, this brings a large amount of revenue to the country and government. On the other hand, it also brings temptations of greed and destruction. Much of the many environmental destruction in this country has been effected by companies extracting natural resources like oil, coal, gas, gold, nickel, and others. One of the actual examples is a flood of mud that has lasted over seven years in East Java, which emerged through the exploration of natural gas by a company called Lapindo (owned by the leader of a big political party). Thousands of houses, buildings, and roads, along with thousands of hectares of wet rice and other plantations have been covered by the mud, and the exploring company tried to avoid compensating the people for these losses.

### *Exploitation due to deforestation*

The environmental destruction as described above has a very strong connection with the exploitation of the forest. Millions of hectares of former forests are gradually becoming deserts, for example in Kalimantan (Borneo) and Sumatra. Some parts of the destroyed forest have been converted to plantations (especially palm oil). This just accelerates the process of barren soil. The programme of reforestation or replanting is not as fast as the deforestation. Much of the land has lost its fertility. The whole population is threatened by losing the lungs of the earth to breathe. Just during the months from August to October 2014, a number of territories in Indonesia were covered by smoke that brought serious disturbance to air traffic and people's health; these territories included Central and South Kalimantan, Riau, Jambi, and South Sumatra.

## Churches' standpoints and actions

For quite a long time, many churches in Indonesia did not consider these problems theirs. They still emphasise spiritual and heavenly salvation. But gradually, especially since the 1970s, more and more churches see those problems as part of their missionary and diaconal calling. This increase in attention is influenced among other things by the growing attention shown by ecumenical bodies like the WCC, UEM, and Communion of Churches of Indonesia (CCI). These churches and ecumenical bodies cannot work by themselves alone. In Indonesia, they build relationships and network with non-governmental organisations, including those established by

people of other faiths, especially moderate Muslim groups (like Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah). As with the HKBP, some examples, including from the CCI (PGI), may illustrate the scope of actions and networking.<sup>3</sup> The HKBP Confession of 1996 states, among other things:<sup>4</sup>

We emphasise that in Indonesia, as a plural society, we need to keep our faith alive and to take responsibility to serve the poor, the needy, the sick, strangers, uncivilised, uneducated, and the victims of unjust judgement.

God created human beings, and he sets the world where they live and work (Gen 2:5–15). All things belong to him. He grants life for all his creation.... God gives authority to human beings to care for the world with responsibility.... We confess that human beings are responsible for respecting and caring for all God's creation so that they can work, stay healthy, and prosper (Ps 8:4–10).

We oppose destructive activities such as burning down forests and cutting down trees (Deut 20:19–20). We oppose any activities that pollute the water and air, such as industrial waste dumping that contaminates drinking water and fresh air.

The preamble of the church order of HKBP from 2002 states, in part:<sup>5</sup>

As a church commissioned to the world, the HKBP has to work proactively, critically, and realistically to face the heavy challenges caused by the changes of the twenty-first century. Connecting to this, our church needs a new church order initiated with vision, mission, and steadfast principles, as follows:

*Vision:*

The HKBP will evolve to become an inclusive, dialogical, and open church, as well as one capable and powerful enough to develop a qualified life in the love of the Lord Jesus Christ, together with all people in the global society, especially the Christian society, for the glory of the Almighty God the Father.

*Mission:*

The HKBP attempts to enhance the quality of the whole society, especially the members of the HKBP, through qualified church ministry so that people can carry out the commission of Jesus Christ in their personal and family lives as well as the communal life of the whole human society at the local, national, regional, and global level, to face the challenges of the twenty-first century.

*Principles:*

To implement the above-mentioned vision and mission, the HKBP holds steadfastly to the following principles:

- To serve, not to be served (Mark 10:45)

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3 Huria Kristen Batak Protestan (Batak Christian Protestant Church). HKBP and GKPI (Gereja Kristen Protestan Indonesia; Christian-Protestant Church of Indonesia), as well as other ten church organisations are member of UEM and members of CCI (PGI).

4 Panindangion Haporsean – Pengakuan Iman – The Confession of Faith [of] HKBP (Pearaja-Tarutung: Kantor Pusat HKBP, 2000), p. 132f.

5 Aturan dohot Paraturan HKBP 2002. Pearaja-Tarutung: Kantor Pusat HKBP, 2002, p. 3 (Batak) and 95 (Indonesian). English translation by the author.

- To become salt and light of the world (Matt 5:13-16)
- To upright justice, peace and integrity of creation (Mark 16:15; Luke 4:18-19).

In 1989, the HKBP composed an outline of ministry activities and programmes, and in the following years, e.g., in 2012, the church also set a five-year strategic plan for 2012 to 2016 as part of its *Fifty-Year and Ministry Development Plan* for 2012 to 2061.<sup>6</sup> In the five-year strategic plan, the HKBP reformulated its vision and mission:

*Vision:*

To be a blessing, the salt of the earth and the light of the world for the glory of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

*Mission (one of the four points):*

To recover the dignity of the little and marginalised people through education, health, and economic empowerment of the society, as well as to develop inter-church cooperation and interfaith dialogue.

In the elaboration of this vision and mission, there are a number of things that show HKBP's concern on socio-economic and interfaith matters. However, several HKBP pastors complained that these documents were never evaluated to see how far HKBP had already fulfilled the task and manifested its vision and mission.

Among the many cases the HKBP has faced and handled is the case of Inti In-dorayon Utama (IIU) being converted into Toba Pulp Lestari (TPL). This is a timber and pulp company that was given a concession by the government to take trees from land inherited by the people. In the 1990s, the HKBP – together with other churches and some NGOs<sup>7</sup> – strived to advocate for the people. A number of its pastors were even imprisoned. The retired ephorus of the HKBP, Rev. Dr Jubil Raplan Hutauruk, also led the HKBP and some other churches during his term (1998–2004) to protest the action of the company and government, and brought the case to court.<sup>8</sup>

Another example is the GKPI.<sup>9</sup> The GKPI is a relatively young church, but since the 1980s it has taken the issues of environmental destruction as well as interfaith cooperation into account. In its 1993 document *Understanding of Faith*,<sup>10</sup> it states:

All creation is placed by God in harmony that sustains and enlivens in accordance with his grace and the providence of his creation. God gives a special mandate to human beings to participate in the conservation and exploitation of creation.

6 [Konsep] Rencana Strategis HKBP Tahun 2012-2016. Pearaja-Tarutung: Kantor Pusat HKBP, 2012. English translation by the author.

7 Such as KSPPM (Kelompok Studi Pengembangan Prakarsa Masyarakat; Study Group on the Development Societal Initiative).

8 But then Eliakim Sitorus, one of the activists of KSPPM (in his text message of 5 October 2014 to JSA), complained that in recent years, the churches (incl. HKBP) had been rather feverish to run advocacy programmes for victims of the development in Indonesia, and that the churches were not functioning as leaders to direct change and innovate in life; the theological standpoints of the churches is not clear.

9 Gereja Kristen Protestan Indonesia (Christian-Protestant Church of Indonesia).

10 Pokok-pokok Pemahaman Iman GKPI (Understanding of Faith of GKPI). P. Siantar: Kolportase Pusat GKPI, 1993; English translation by the author.

Based on this understanding, the GKPI states and teaches that all believers must rely on the power of God in conserving all of his creation:

Human beings must be responsible in caring for and exploring the sustainability of the universe created by God. Destruction of God's creation, of nature and the environment, is basically an opposition to God, who has already created all things and who will always keep care of them in love and faithfulness.

Diaconal tasks are done [by the GKPI] as a reflection of Christ's ministry.... The church lives in and from the compassion of Christ; therefore, the church has to serve [through ministry] as a response and expression of thankfulness to the Lord's service. Through humanitarian ministry, the church implements Christ's love to human beings. Humanitarian ministry consists of aiding those in need who have been struck by disaster, ... as well as community development in order to overcome poverty and all of its causes.

On the propagation of the Gospel or evangelisation, the GKPI's general policy document for 2010 to 2015 states:<sup>11</sup>

The propagation of the Gospel is carried out with respect for people of other faiths and in a spirit of harmony, mainly harmony among the people of different faiths. Therefore, the goal of the propagation of the Gospel is not Christianisation, but the proclamation of the Good News, news of salvation and new life in the Lord Jesus Christ. In line with the theme of this period, "The Lord is good to all" (Psalm 145:9<sup>a</sup>), interfaith dialogue should be attempted at various levels.

Concerning diaconia, the *Understanding of Faith* document for 1993 states that diaconia is twofold, comprised of charity and transformation, which is motivated by the spirit of renewal and transformation of the life of the society.

Based on these documents, all levels of the GKPI – from local congregations up to the synod – composed certain programmes and took action related to the conservation and caretaking of creation, as well as cooperation with the people of other faiths, either alone or together with other churches.<sup>12</sup> One of the forums where some churches, especially in North Sumatra, meet and work together is the KSPPM.<sup>13</sup> This NGO is very active in advocacy to motivate and empower the people to maintain their land and fight against land-grabbing, as well as the destruction of the environment by timber (including pulp) companies that in many cases are backed by government officials.

One of the most recent cases dealt with is that of Pandumaan-Sipitu Huta village, West Humbang district, North Sumatra. The people in this village are generally members of HKBP and GKPI. They owned their inherited land and cultivated

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11 Since 1993, the GKPI has composed a general policy document that contains a five-year plan and policy and is revised in every Periodic General Synod (every five years).

12 The more detailed GKPI programme and its actions in diakonia and interfaith cooperation during its 50 years of existence can be found in Jan S. Aritonang, Yubileum 50 Tahun GKPI. P. Siantar: Kolportase GKPI, 2014.

13 See footnote 7.

plants, including the frankincense (benzoin, *haminjon*) tree. The government, i.e., the ministry of forestry, in conspiracy with a pulp company, took the land and the plants, excluding the frankincense tree. But the frankincense tree cannot produce the incense if the surrounding trees are taken out, which causes the people to lose their income. The people blocked the area, and together with the churches, they brought this case to court. Before the case was opened, many people were arrested and imprisoned on accusations of violent resistance to the government programme. The case is still pending.

## Council of the Communion of Churches in Indonesia<sup>14</sup>

Since its seventh general assembly in 1971, the CCI – influenced by the WCC general conference in Uppsala 1968 – has paid more and more attention to the church's responsibility to protect life and all of creation, holding a series of conferences of church, society and theological consultation. It has also considered the issues of the integrity of creation and having inclusive-dialogical relations with people of other faiths, following some examples from the formula of the last conference and consultation. The Conference on Church and Society 2008 stated<sup>15</sup>:

The main causes of the destruction of the environment are the exploitation of natural resources for the sake of national income without consideration for the sustaining power of the environment; deforestation in favour of plantations dependent on inorganic fertilisers and other poisonous materials like pesticides, insecticides, and herbicides; the weakness of law enforcement and government oversight, which is not optimal for the enterprise of processing and managing the natural resources; and the low level of education and knowledge in the society.

The churches in Indonesia, as the unseparated part of the nation, also have a moral responsibility to sustain nature and the environment. As already stated in the document "Main Common Task and Calling of 2004–2009", the churches are called to proclaim the Gospel to all creatures, which means that God gives a mandate to the church to cultivate and care for all creation... Given the importance of extracting benefit from natural resources for the welfare of humanity, the effort to sustain nature and take care of the environment becomes a must for the sake of life in peace and welfare and the sustainable integrity of creation. We therefore make the following recommendations:

*To the government:*

(i) Put a moratorium on forest cutting for commercial purposes, and concentrate on intensive and extensive rehabilitation and reforestation for the next five to ten years and beyond.

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14 All members of the UEM in Indonesia (12 church organisations) are also member of the CCI (DGI/PGI).

15 Jan S. Aritonang et al. (eds.), *Tuhan Itu Baik kepada Semua Orang – Hasil Konferensi Gereja dan Masyarakat VIII PGI, Cipayung – Bogor 17-21 November 2008* (Jakarta: PGI, 2009), p. 233ff.; English translation by the author.

(ii) Control the efforts of law enforcement without exception and implement the laws and other regulations dealing with pollution and destruction of the environment.

*To the churches:*

(i) Build networking to cooperate on taking care of and developing the natural resources and environment.

(ii) Be wise and careful about financial aid for political purposes, especially in partnership with the government.

(iii) Educate members to conserve natural resources and participate in the effort of sustaining the environment.

Concerning religious pluralism, the Conference included the following:

Pluralism is a way for religions to return to their basic calling: striving for peace and welfare (shalom) from God alone, so that this earth becomes “oikos”, the place of coexistence.... The church understands pluralism as a grace and opportunity to build cooperation for mutual goodness and fraternity while respecting uniqueness.

*Suggestion and recommendations:*

*To the government:* Assure freedom of religion and faith; take action towards the groups or parties that are using violence in differences of opinion and convictions; maintain Pancasila [the five-pillar foundation of the state] that assures pluralism and national unity.

*To the church:* Build an inclusive-pluralist theology that is open and considers religious pluralism as the context of doing theology; build an intensive relationship within and across faiths for the benefit of the nation and to solve the problems of humanity; advocate for the victims (churches as well as the other faiths) affected by injustice and violence on behalf of religion.

Referring to this conference of 2008, and decided at its general assembly in 2009, the CCI has stated:<sup>16</sup>:

*The ways of proclaiming the Gospel:*

Indonesian society in which the Gospel is proclaimed is a pluralistic society from ethnic, religion, race and inter-group aspects. Proclaiming the Gospel in such a society should consider this plurality, so that the Good News to be proclaimed does not change to become bad news for the hearers. In such a pluralistic society, a church presence [praesentia] that is sensitive to the surrounding world, proactive in taking initiative to solve common problems, and shows solidarity with the destiny of the people is the essentially the proclamation of the Gospel.

*Pluralism:*

Plurality in Indonesia is part of the foundation of this country. As a plural-

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16 Dokumen Keesaan Gereja Persekutuan Gereja-gereja di Indonesia (DKG-PGI) 2009-2014 [The Main Common Calling Task of 2009-2014]. Jakarta: PGI, 2010, p. 70ff.; English translation by the author.



istic society, we are also aware of the potential trouble within. That is why Pancasila is not merely a *modus vivendi* [way of living together], but also a “home together” that makes possible the status of this state and the manifest of this nation as a Big Family of Indonesia. The motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* [Unity in Diversity] manifests the spirit of unity in diversity.

*Diaconia:*

The church’s calling to collaborate and serve can be seen from several aspects that are mutually strengthening and enriching:

- (i) the responsibility to manage, care for, and sustain God’s creation;
- (ii) the responsibility to strive for a society based on justice and welfare for all people, without ethnic, racial, religious or cultural discrimination, as the manifestation of God’s love for the world.

*Social-economic order:*

The churches promote the application of a pro-people paradigm, as encouraged in the document “AGAPE” (Alternative Globalization Addressing People on Earth), a system that is oriented to God, humanity, and the universe, where the dominant ethos is not merely profit-seeking, but love. Here economic development prioritises justice, peace and mutual joy, from all to all.

The CCI’s theological consultation of 2011 had as its theme “Initiating Ways towards Peace, Justice, and Integrity of Creation, in its Concluding Documents, Striving to Manifest Truth and Justice”. In this consultation, the churches in Indonesia invited the whole nation to redeclare the importance of living together in a pluralistic society, for the sake of a future full of peace, according to the aspiration of the nation. The declaration was a reconfirmation of human dignity:<sup>17</sup>

- The Christians in Indonesia are faced with a reality of reduced human dignity and of human rights violations in all aspects of life. We witness and experience various acts of violence such as the exploitation of women and the neglect of children and the elderly. Young people’s aspirations are being ignored, people are refusing to live among those who are different from them [by religion, ethnicity, ideology, sexual orientation, etc.], people’s rights and customs are being trampled, and the destruction of environment is threatening people’s lives. This situation has been triggered by greed, the spirit of this era. It stimulates a tendency among human beings to think only of themselves and frequently leads to the neglect of one’s fellows in creation.
- In this reality, we confess that the Christians, as part of the Indonesian nation, frequently fail to proclaim the Gospel of peace and justice, and even frequently become actors in the process of reducing human dignity.
- The Christians in Indonesia are called to dare to cry out with a critical prophetic voice in the midst of this reality that reduces human dignity, without losing their readiness to engage in processes of transformation and self-correction in

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17 In Jan S. Aritonang et al. (eds), *Berteologi dalam Konteks – Meretas Jalan Menuju Perdamaian, Keadilan, dan Keutuhan Ciptaan*. Konsultasi Teologi Nasional PGI, 31 October–4 November 2011. Jakarta: PGI, Persetia and GKI, 2012, p. xviff.

the understanding and praxis of life that is contrary to the values of the Gospel at the heart of this life. The Christians in Indonesia need to affirm that they side with those whose dignity has been reduced. This can be done without violence, through dialogue with various groups in the society.

CCI officials try to implement these statements and declarations in their daily activities, while they are occupied with handling various issues and cases concerning the environment as well as interfaith cooperation (and conflict). The government is one of their most important dialogue partners among the many social and religious organisations as well as many other institutions, including private companies dealing with natural resources and environmental issues. The CCI represents around 15 million Christians in Indonesia.

## Closing remarks

The churches and Christians in Indonesia, as represented by those examples mentioned above, are trying to develop their inclusiveness and to show their concern and attention to the people facing various social, economic, and political problems. But we have to be honest and confess that there are a lot of fields of ministry that are not yet seriously or properly touched upon and elaborated by the churches in Indonesia. There are still many problems that distract and hinder them from maximising the fulfilment of their calling, including the following factors:

- Some members of the churches, including significant donors to the churches, are also involved in land-grabbing, environmental destruction, and exploitation due to deforestation.
- A lot of church members work in companies involved in such destruction.
- Churches have received financial support from these companies.
- Christians and churches in many cases cannot speak with one voice and viewpoint.

These problems and realities, I am quite sure, are not only happening in Indonesia, but also in many other countries and parts of the world. We must continue our efforts to carry out our responsibility and engage in self-criticism and introspection.

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# Inclusiveness in a Context of Poverty and Human Rights Violations against Indigenous Peoples and the Marginalised

*Edna J. Orteza*

Just a few weeks ago, I accompanied my husband to the office of the Claims Board to file a petition for recognition and reparation of human rights violations committed during the Marcos regime. He had been taken without a warrant of arrest, tortured, put in solitary confinement, and detained for almost a year. He was the first pastor to be arrested under martial law. After him, so many other pastors, bishops, church workers and lay leaders were harassed, arrested, tortured, detained against their will, disappeared, and killed. Today, 40 years later, human rights violations in various forms are still being committed. It does not matter who the president is; martial law or not, human rights violations in many and various forms continue to escalate.

## The UCCP

My church is known to be under the watchful eyes of the Philippine military, but as violations continue, it remains all the more consistently firm in its defence and promotion of justice, peace, and human rights. The United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) came into being at a time of great uncertainty. The Philippines was just then starting to rebuild from the ravages of the Second World War. The 1947 amendments to the 1935 Philippine constitution gave parity rights to the United States of America in the exploitation of the country's natural resources. Then-president Manuel Roxas pledged loyalty and allegiance to the US. This charted the policy of succeeding presidents vis-à-vis the US.

The UCCP was formed in 1948, with the coming together of the United Evangelical Church in the Philippines (Presbyterian, United Brethren, Congregational) and the Evangelical Church in the Philippines (Church of Christ-Disciples, Philippine Methodist Church). They signed a declaration of union, and it was a sign of hope. The formation of the UCCP served as a model for the kind of unity that is possible for Christian churches that were divided by confessions, politics, and praxis.

Hence, by its very nature, the UCCP is at once evangelical, reformed, ecumenical, and prophetic. As its faith confession, it continues to broaden its efforts to deal with the roots of injustice and the absence of peace, and it is strengthened by a sense of spirituality that is renewed by its consistent immersion with the people. Simultaneous to its

historical institutional development, the UCCP has maintained a commitment to and participation in the ongoing transformation of church and society, identifying with the historical projects of the poor, oppressed, and marginalised. Inevitably, people's movements have been integrated into its expressions of church, mission, and ecumenism.

## The context of mission

### *Poverty*

In the Philippines, 80 per cent of the country's resources are shared by only 20 per cent of the population and conversely, 20 per cent are shared by the 80 per cent majority. According to a recent survey:

- Six out of ten Filipinos cannot buy enough food, have trouble sending their children to school, and do not have access to safe drinking water, electricity, or sanitary systems. The increasing privatisation of health institutions is narrowing people's access to health services. Millions of the country's poorest and most vulnerable have no social insurance or safety nets.
- 11.9 million are unemployed and 549,000 farmers, fisherfolk and workers have lost their jobs.
- The minimum wage in Metro Manila is Php [Philippine Peso] 456 (roughly 10 US\$), far below the poverty line of Php 1,034 (23 \$) for an average family of six persons.
- Workers continue to experience severe labour repression, with 392 trade-union-related human rights violations and corresponding 30,578 victims in three years (Center for Trade Union and Human Rights). There is an increasing contractualisation of labour, which hinders the right to form unions.
- At least 300,000 hectares of agricultural land in Mindanao are in the hands of multinational companies, creating billions of dollars in profit to the detriment of thousands of farmers and indigenous communities.
- The rural poor suffer backward agricultural systems and feudal relationships, with 52 per cent of all farms remaining under tenancy, lease, and other forms of tenurial arrangement. The majority of farmers still rely on hand tools, ploughs and carabaos (water buffalos), with insufficient irrigation.
- Children (14.4 million) and women (12.8 million) make up the largest percentage of the poor population among underprivileged sectors. An estimated 5.5 million children aged 0–14 years have been left behind by their OFW (Overseas Filipino Workers) parents. Some 2.4 million children aged 5–17 are in the workforce, either to augment family income or fending for themselves. There are 2.2 million children living on the streets (IBON, Facts and Figures).

### *Environmental disasters*

Because of its location in the tropics, the Philippines is vulnerable to environmental disasters. An average of 20 typhoons hit the Philippines every year. One recent disaster, the worst in decades, is Typhoon Haiyan, which had an unprecedented death toll and destroyed properties, infrastructure, and the livelihood of whole communities.

There are complex human factors at play. The Philippines is the twelfth most populous country in the world, with an unbridled population growth that is expected to exceed 100 million by the end of the year 2014. In the highly congested urban centres, there is air and water pollution, and solid waste management and sanitation are grossly inadequate. Outside the cities, despite laws requiring trees to be replanted, forests are being cleared, damaging watersheds and silting farmland and estuaries. Coral reefs are being destroyed by dynamite blasting. Mangroves are being converted to prawn ponds. Mining companies are eroding mountains, encroaching on ancestral lands, disrupting people's way of life, and brutalising the cultures of indigenous peoples.

While the nation grapples with relief, rehabilitation, and reconstruction efforts, the people continue to reel from the effects of backwardness and underdevelopment. Human rights violations aggravate the death and destruction brought about by environmental disasters.

### *Mining and indigenous peoples*

The Philippines has deposits of gold, silver, copper, nickel, cobalt, iron, chromite, platinum, lead, zinc, mercury, manganese, asbestos, lode, arite, bentonite, felspar, diatomite, gypsum, perlite, silica, talc, and clay of various kinds. The Cordillera region is rich in mineral reserves and is home to the three longest-operating mining giants in the country. Today, one-third of the Cordillera's land area of more than 1.8 million hectares is covered by mining operations, mining permits, and applications. While the gross production value in mining was Php 146.4 billion (3.38 billion US\$) in 2012, taxes, fees, and royalties from the industry were only Php 12.12 million (282,212 US\$)<sup>1</sup>. According to NCSB figures, 22.6 per cent of families in the region remain poor. There are twelve mining companies operating in typhoon-devastated areas in North-west Mindanao. Exploration permits were given to nine mining companies, covering 42,000 hectares in Bukidnon alone. According to BALS Mindanao, there are also 51 other companies that have applied for exploration permits in the area.

On 5 March 2012, Jimmy Liguyon, Barangay Captain of Barangay Dao, San Fernando, Bukidnon, was shot dead inside his home. He was 37 years old. He was from the Lumad-Matigsalog tribe and was married with five children. Liguyon was the chairperson of the local church council of the UCCP: he was murdered because he did not sign the permit for a mining corporation to operate in the tribe's ancestral land in Bukidnon.

It is common knowledge that Liguyon was murdered by Alde Salusad, a member of a paramilitary group. Since his murder, more than a hundred members of his family and relatives have fled their homes following threats from Alde Salusad. They set up camp in front of the Malaybalay Provincial Capitol and urged the arrest of Salusad. The governor has ordered his arrest, but the police have not yet executed the warrant. Salusad has been seen moving around the area and remains free at the time of this writing.

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1 Source: bulatlat.com.

The *Philippine Mining Act* of 1995, which provides for the full-scale liberalisation of the mining industry, has led to the destruction of natural resources. It has displaced people's livelihoods, mostly those of indigenous communities, and threatens the basis of their lives, as well as their lives themselves. The government, however, continues to encourage new mining investments and has failed to address the killing of environmental advocates. Many of these advocates belong to indigenous communities trying to protect their ancestral lands from the encroachment of big business and mining corporations.

### *Human rights violations*

The human rights alliance Karapatan has documented 705 civilians who have been victims of extrajudicial killings since Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo came to power in 2001. Church people have not been spared from various forms of human rights violations. Just to name a few:

1. *Rey Corpin*, 13-year-old UCCP member who was killed along with eight peasants (Kananga 9 massacre) on 16 April 2003 in Kananga, Leyte. He was found dead with his head shattered and his body bearing brutal signs of torture.
2. *Isaias Mañano*, member of the UCCP-Christian Youth Fellowship (CYF) and the Anakpawis party-list chapter in Mindoro, was killed on 28 April 2004 in Calapan City, Oriental Mindoro.
3. *Joel Baclao*, UCCP member and coordinator of Andurog Mayon, the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP) relief and rehabilitation work for victims of the Mayon Volcano eruption, member of the Promotion of Church People's Response (PCPR) National Council in Bicol, was killed on 10 November 2004.
4. *Vicente Olea*, 71-year-old UCCP member in San Vicente, Palawan, was killed on 23 November 2004.
5. *Juancho Sanchez*, member of UCCP-CYF Tarlac, was massacred along with seven workers and supporters of the Hacienda Luisita strike on 16 November 2004. Juancho Sanchez, the son of the pastor in the UCCP church in Hacienda Luisita, was killed as he was giving water to church members in the picket lines.
6. *Abe Sungit*, leader of the indigenous peoples in Palawan, member of the UCCP Indigenous Peoples' Programme, Karapatan-Palawan and Pagsambatan, was killed on 5 February 2005.
7. *Alfredo Davis*, member of UCCP in Mahaplag, Leyte, was killed on 5 April 2005.
8. *Alden Ambida*, a UCCP leader and coordinator of Bayan Muna-Eastern Visayas was ambushed and wounded on 9 April 2005.
9. *Rev. Edison Lapuz*, UCCP conference minister, member of the PCPR, Karapatan and Bayan Muna, was killed on 12 May 2005.
10. *Rev. Raul Domingo*, UCCP pastor, member of Kapatirang Simbahan para sa Bayan (Kasimbayan), and Secretary-General of Karapatan in Palawan, was shot and seriously wounded on 20 August 2005, ultimately dying in hospital on 4 September 2005.
11. *Junico Jacosalem*, UCCP member and Bayan Muna municipal coordinator in Aluran, Misamis Occidental, was killed execution-style on 6 December 2005.
12. *Nestor Arinque*, former local church council chair of the UCCP in Mabini, Bo-

- hol and chair of the Hugpong sa Mag-uuma sa Mabini (HUMABI), was shot to death by three unidentified motorcycle-riding men on 7 March 2006.
13. *Rev. Nehemias Tinambacan* of Calaran, Misamis Occidental, was shot to death by four armed men riding motorcycles on 9 May 2006 while travelling to Oroquieta City. Tinambacan's wife, Marilou, was also injured in the attack. She survived by hiding inside their van and pretending to be dead.
  14. *Andy Pawican*, another UCCP pastor in Central Luzon, was murdered in Pantabangan Nueva Ecija on 21 May 2006.
  15. *Noel "Noli" Capulong* was gunned down by two unidentified men on a motorcycle on 27 May 2006 on his way home. Noel, a former staffer in the NCCP and also an active member of the UCCP, was active in the BAYAN MUNA Environmental Action Movement.
  16. Two other UCCP members, *Ruel Marcila* and *Rodel Paltig*, were abducted and tortured but eventually released.

The violation of civil and political rights continues under the Aquino government, as the following data from Karapatan shows.

*Violations of civil and political rights under the Aquino government (July 2010 to June 2014)*

<b>Violation</b>	<b>Number of victims</b>
Extrajudicial killing	204
Enforced disappearance	21
Torture	99
Rape	3
Frustrated extrajudicial killing	207
Illegal arrest without detention	272
Illegal arrest and detention	664
Illegal search and seizure	270
Physical assault and injury	395
Demolition	17,145
Violation of domicile	504
Destruction of property	12,694
Divestment of property	355
Forced evacuation	39,800
Threat/harassment/intimidation	65,712
Indiscriminate firing	9,932
Forced/fake surrender	57
Forced labour/involuntary servitude	172
Use of civilians in police and/or military operations as guides and/or shield	549
Use of schools, medical, religious and other public places for military purpose	141,490
Restriction or violent dispersal of mass actions, public assemblies and gatherings	9,929



## *Victims of extrajudicial killing and enforced disappearance under the Aquino government by sector (July 2010 to June 2014)*

<b>Sector</b>	<b>Extrajudicial killing</b>	<b>Enforced disappearance</b>
Church	3	0
Entrepreneur	5	0
Environmentalist	6	0
Fisherfolk	5	0
Government employee	3	0
Indigenous peoples	49	1
Media	3	0
Minor	18	0
Peasant	117	14
Teacher	1	0
Urban poor	13	1
Human rights worker	2	0
Worker	8	2
Youth/student	7	1
Moro	5	1
Transport	6	0

## The dynamics of exclusion

### *The Aquino government: Exclusionary growth and elite governance*

In spite of claims of democratic space and good governance, the Aquino government has proven itself to be much like the previous administrations. Major issues have emerged that dissolve the illusion that profound social, economic, or political change is happening in the Philippines: mounting joblessness, growing poverty, rising prices, continuing patronage and pork barrel politics, bureaucrat capitalism, foreign policy defined by US interests, and intensified human rights violations. The country's pro-market economic policies are failing to deliver development, there are scant political reforms, patronage is being defended, foreign policy is becoming more neocolonial, and human rights continue to be violated.

All these happen amid steadily increasing profit for big corporations and the accumulation of wealth by the country's richest families.

### *Corruption in government*

In a country where 80 per cent of the people are poor and the minimum wage does not even reach the poverty line, where the people pay 32 per cent income tax and 12 per cent sales tax, and where corruption in government is rampant, the Pork Barrel scandal ignited a wave of seething public anger that led to massive anti-corruption protests.

Pork barrel is a pejorative term for Priority Development Assistance Funds (PDAF), a discretionary annual lump sum of 4.5 million US\$ and 1.6 million US\$ provided to each of the country's 24 Senators and 289 Congressmen, respectively, to pay for local infrastructure and development works. However, as it turned out, much of the funds were simply being stashed away through fake NGOs facilitated by Janet

Napoles. What enraged the public were the details of Napoles' alleged dealings with top government officials, in which 60 per cent of the pork-barrel funds reportedly went to legislators, and 30 per cent to Napoles. Investigation attempts are currently focusing on a paper trail via illicit bank accounts, but the likelihood of numerous cash transactions could make gathering primary evidence extremely problematic. As a legacy of Ferdinand Marcos, the practice has remained untouched and has become a source of massive corruption. President Aquino himself has an annual discretionary fund, which last year was at least 7.2 billion US\$ (Social Watch). Corruption in government is perpetrated by political dynasties. The political arena is mainly planned and operated by political families and alliances rather than by political parties.

### *US economic policy and military presence*

Poverty, inequality and poor standards of living are the direct results of neoliberal policies that give priority to foreign and corporate profits over the welfare of the majority. The operation of US and other foreign companies demonstrates how and why the economy remains backward and underdeveloped. Their role in export-oriented, import-dependent assembly of low value-added manufacturing and in the exploration, development and utilisation of strategic natural resources remains significant.

The Philippines is the most strategic country in Southeast Asia, militarily. Thus, it is one of the largest recipients of US aid in Southeast Asia – at 1.5 billion US\$ just over the last decade from 2005–2014, of which 521 million US\$ is military and security aid. Aid flows have been increasing since the US declared the Philippines a front-line state in its self-declared “war on terrorism” in 2001 and a Major Non-NATO Ally in 2003.<sup>2</sup>

The *Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement* (EDCA) between the US and the Philippines, signed on 28 April 2014, seeks to bolster the US-Philippines security relationship by allowing the United States to station troops and operations on Philippine territory. This means an even greater US military presence in the Philippines. There is an increase in the number of US military personnel in the Philippines, deployment and positioning of war materials, equipment and supplies, building of infrastructures, and the use of domestic military installations. The agreement is in line with the military aspect of the region's growing strategic economic and geopolitical significance. The Philippine government has already started playing a role in US maneuvering to contain China, and justified the pact as bolstering its defense against the territorial threat of China in disputed areas of the South China Sea/West Philippine Sea.

### *Paramilitary groups*

*Executive Order No. 546* allows the military to create paramilitary groups as part of its counterinsurgency programme. According to Kalipunan ng mga Katutubong Mamamayan ng Pilipinas (KAMP), there are at least 14 paramilitary groups, backed by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), that sow terror in indigenous peoples' communities in the Cordillera region. KAMP has documented 50 indigenous peoples killed as a result of the arming of indigenous peoples into paramilitary groups. Troops from the 2nd Scout Ranger Battalion, 36th IB PA and the 3rd Special Forces Battalion under the 401st Brigade of the Philippine Army have been launching military opera-

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2 Source: bulatlat.com.

tions in Agusan del Sur and Surigao del Norte (Karapatan). Henry Alameda, a Manobo tribal leader, was shot and killed by three men armed with M-14 and M-16 rifles, suspected to be military agents, in Surigao del Sur on 24 October 2014. (Pinoy Weekly).

### *A culture of impunity*

The weak protection of human rights in the Philippines is reflected in the unprecedented killings of justice advocates, with little accountability after the fact. The Philippine government has failed to end impunity in extrajudicial killings, torture, and enforced disappearances.<sup>3</sup> The extrajudicial killings and other human rights violations continue under the counterinsurgency programme Oplan Bayanihan.

### *ASEAN 2015*

A critical concern is ASEAN 2015. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was established in Bangkok in 1967, as a political security pact in the aftermath of the Vietnam War. It started with five countries and now has ten. The ASEAN facilitates cooperation between countries. ASEAN must integrate and unify if it is to bolster its bargaining power as a sustainable resource base, efficient production hub, and globally competitive community relative to its vigorous continental rivals in other regions around the world. To do this, the ASEAN Economic Community must be established by the year 2015. This is expected to enhance regional security, develop a single market, and heighten regional competitiveness. The market will be characterised by the free flow of capital, goods, services, investments, and skilled labour. ASEAN 2015, when implemented, will only push peoples and communities into further exclusion. The Philippines is already gearing up for this.

## On being an inclusive community of faith

The beliefs, values, and principles of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines are entrenched in the UCCP Constitution and Bylaws and embodied in its Statement of Faith:

We believe

God is at work,

to make each person a new being in Christ,

and the whole world,

God's Kingdom – in which love, justice, and peace prevail.

The Kingdom of God is present

where faith in Jesus Christ is shared,

where healing is given to the sick,

where food is given to the hungry,

where light is given to the blind, and

where liberty is given to the captive and oppressed.

The implementation of programmes and ministries are guided by certain principles – unity, clarity, coherence, intentionality, and inclusiveness, which require the

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3 Source: Human Rights Watch.

widest and broadest participation by the constituency as well as the communities where they are located. This is further articulated in the programmatic goals: enriching the life and work of communities where local churches are located, and deepening the impact of the UCCP's collective response to societal issues and concerns.

UCCP programmes and ministries include, among others:

#### *Community Ministries*

The UCCP has more than 300 pilot communities focusing on issues surrounding poverty and economic justice, rural and agricultural development, ecological justice, and environmental sustainability.

#### *Disaster Response and Management*

We need to bring our social practice to the ethical values of love, justice, and care for the earth. The magnitude of the damage humans have inflicted on the environment has profound implications for the life, work, and witness of the church. Mainly owing to the experiences in our relief work, efforts are now geared not only in providing relief assistance but to support initiatives towards rehabilitation.

#### *Justice, Peace and Human Rights*

The JPHR programme aims to help deepen the biblical-theological understanding of persons as created in the image of God and of Jesus' promise of abundant life for all, thereby developing a commitment to the promotion of justice, human rights, and human dignity. This involves empowering our local churches to do prophetic witness by engaging in advocacy work on human rights issues and concerns. Initiatives in this area include:

- a. Fact-finding missions
- b. Video documentation
- c. Prayer rallies and vigils
- d. Public protests and mass actions
- e. Pastoral letters and public statements
- f. Legal suit against President Gloria-Macapagal Arroyo
- g. Networking and alliances
- h. International advocacy

#### *Legal suit*

The UCCP, through the General Secretary Bishop Reuel Norman Marigza, filed a legal suit with the Quezon City Regional Trial Court against former President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo for human rights violations during her term.

During the Arroyo administration, the military implemented a counter-insurgency campaign known as Oplan Bantay Laya, which sought to identify organisations that were critical of the government's policies. The UCCP had been tagged by the military as a front for the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP). It was during the implementation of said campaign that many UCCP church members became victims of extrajudicial killings allegedly committed by the military.

## *Networking and advocacy*

The UCCP engages in various forms of protest against human rights violations – be they economic, social, cultural or political.

## A culture of inclusiveness

The UCCP theme for the 2014–2018 quadrennium is “Spirituality for these Critical Times”, with sub-themes that focus on “Spirituality for a New Humanity”, “Spirituality for a New Creation”, and “Spirituality for Mission”. I mention this because I think this is what we all strive for – a new humanity and a new creation that shall be the core, the very nature of a new spirituality for mission. This, in essence, may be spirituality for inclusiveness.

The UCCP, in its prophetic witness, has taken the less-trodden path. Notwithstanding the cost of denouncing evils in society, it continues to give witness to redemptive love. Some insights we can learn towards a culture of inclusiveness:

1. rootedness in the faith, profound understanding of the imperatives of the gospel today
2. articulate the vision, clarify what constitutes the mission (Statement of Faith)
3. contextualise beliefs, values, and principles, live out the faith (Immersion)
4. commit to stand alongside the poor, the marginalised, the excluded
5. incorporate in the structure (Constitution and Bylaws, policies and guidelines)
6. integrate in programmes and ministries
7. establish linkages, networks and alliances for common pursuits
8. expand advocacy to regional and international levels
9. issue pastoral letters and public statements
10. strive to develop a culture of inclusiveness.

Further readings via the websites of

- Balsa Mindanao
- Bulatlat.com
- Center for Trade Union and Human Rights
- Human Rights Watch, World Report 2014
- IBON Facts and Figures
- Karapatan
- Leonor Briones, Social Watch Philippines
- News Info/Philippine Daily Inquirer
- Pinoy Weekly
- UCCP: A Continuing Journey
- UCCP Quadrennial Thrusts 2014-2018
- UCCP GA 2014 Report
- UCCP Statement of Faith
- Bulatlat Photos
- UCCP Photos
- Web Photos

# Inclusiveness in the Context of Ethnic and Religious Discrimination in Post-war Sri Lanka

*Wilfred A. Jebanesan*

The people in Sri Lanka have expressed their dismay and alarm over the apparent surge in religious intolerance and communal discord that has infiltrated the post-war Sri Lankan society. The issue of ethnic and religious intolerance has emerged from nowhere. The present official scenario is to convince the Sinhala Buddhist masses that they have a threat and enemy: the Muslims and Christians. The explosion of anti-Muslim and anti-Christian elements, virtually out of the blue, and the government's tolerance of the Bodu Bala Sena (BBS)<sup>1</sup> becomes perfectly understandable in this context. Every other problem and concern, from economic hardships to the crime wave, is pushed out of sight. To the extent these other issues are acknowledged at all, it is as by-products of the main "minority religious problem".

## Causes of the conflict

The current explanations suggest that the cause for the conflict is not located in the issue of religion and conversion itself, but in the nationalistic agenda of the politically motivated Buddhist community. Some say that high Buddhist priests fear they will lose their grip on Sri Lankan society if more and more members are converted away from Buddhism.<sup>2</sup> Others suggest that the attack on Christian conversion is merely a convenient pretext for Sinhala nationalism. These explanations are not supported by an analysis of the debate on conversion. They seem to consider the viewpoints in this debate as side issues in the struggle between the aggressive Buddhist movement on the one hand and the religious minorities on the other. At the very least, a genuine explanation of the clash over conversion in contemporary Sri Lanka should give us insight into the viewpoints of the different political parties. It should tell us why so many Sri Lankans have invested so much time, energy, and emotion into discussing this particular issue.

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1 The BBS was founded by monks Kirama Wimalajothi and Galagoda Aththe Gnanasaara after they broke away from Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU), claiming it was not militant enough in protecting Buddhism; see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bodu\\_Bala\\_Sena](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bodu_Bala_Sena) (last accessed 22 October 2014).

2 See Keerthisiri Fernando, "Minority Christian Identity in the Context of Majority Buddhist Identity in Sri Lanka". Current Dialogue, WCC, December 2011, at <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/what-we-do/current-dialogue-magazine/dialogue-51>.

When the anti-conversion bill was presented in 2004, Sri Lanka's Supreme Court stated that the bill did not contravene the Sri Lankan constitution.<sup>3</sup> The proposed anti-conversion legislation that alarms religious minorities, particularly Christians, generally states that there will be a penalty of five years' imprisonment and a fine of R[upee]s 150,000 if convicted (approx. €1,000). The penalty is seven years and a fine not exceeding Rs 500,000 if a minor, woman, or person referred to in the schedule group was converted. In brief, any attempt to "persuade or influence a person to adopt another religion" would become a criminal offense, and anyone convicted of offering "moral support [or] material assistance" leading to conversion<sup>4</sup> could be imprisoned for up to seven years.<sup>5</sup>

The debates of the last few years have been variations on the same theme. On the one hand, there are Christians and secularists who insist that conversion is a fundamental right, part of the universal freedom of conscience: "The right of conversion and the right not to be forced to convert or reconvert belong to the internal dimension of a person's religious or belief-related conviction, which is unconditionally protected under international human rights law."<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, we have Buddhists who say that conversion is an act of violence, which violates religious traditions and disrupts families, communities, and society in general.<sup>7</sup> Whereas it is obvious to one party that belonging to a religion implies the need and the right to convert others to that religion, the other party shows nothing but incomprehension towards this professed link between religion and conversion.

From the sixteenth to the twenty-first century, Christians have often viewed their encounters with other religious traditions as a battle between Christianity and idolatry. This theological framework attributes certain characteristic properties to religion. It is conceived of as a struggle between the true and the false. Christians oppose other religious traditions in terms of the beliefs these "rival religions" proclaim. The main issue of religion is to make a choice between these different sets of beliefs: the message of the atoning death of Jesus Christ and the related precepts on the one hand, or the errors of false religion on the other. Furthermore, the competition between religions revolves around the gaining of converts. The true religion strives to save the souls of men and women, while false religion keeps them in the command

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3 For details see "Inclusive Communities and Church Life" in this reader, by the same author.

4 *The Gazette of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka*, Part I: Section (I)—General Government Notifications, Ministry of Buddha Sasana. No. 1322/4-2004, January 5, 2004 at §2. ("No person shall proselytize or attempt to proselytize any other person nor shall any person aid or abet such proselytizing."); 8(a)(1); 8(a)(2).

5 *Ibid.* at 5(1). Furthermore, "[e]very director, office bearer, shareholder, member, or employee" of an organisation found guilty of an offence would be subject to the same punishment. *Ibid.* at 5(5)(a)(b).

6 From a press release by the OHCHR: "NEW YORK (25 October 2012) – The United Nations Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Heiner Bielefeldt, today urged States to consistently respect, protect and promote the human right to freedom of religion or belief in the area of conversion"; <http://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=12699&LangID=E>.

7 See "Manipulative Christian Conversions in Sri Lanka" by Senaka Weeraratna; <http://www.globalpolitician.com/default.asp?27554-christianity-buddhism-sri-lanka>.

of the devil. This can also be put in terms of their respective ends. The true religion is the only path to salvation. Hell is the fatal destination of all other religions. Conversion, then, cannot but be a fundamental right, since it allows individuals to be guided from falsity to truth.

## Inclusiveness in the post-war situation

Inclusiveness in the Sri Lankan context needs to involve people who are indifferent, living in isolation, labouring under misperceptions, false impressions and negative feelings towards other religious groups, have suspicions and mistrust, have never gathered for a common purpose or an event, have had no contacts outside of their villages, or who have had little opportunity for communication across ethnic, religious, and geographical boundaries. This is a difficult path to tread. However, I believe moving forward is possible when people of different ethnic and religious groups come together regularly and share their experiences and issues of common interest. When people became aware of the issues and the causes of conflict, and recognise the importance of working together, misconceptions and negative effects will be replaced and provide space for interactions.

“Promoting Dialogue, Reconciliation and Co-existence amongst Local Communities and Religious Groups” is a programme initiated by the Peace and Justice Desk of the Methodist Church Sri Lanka. I would like to share some thoughts from the outcome of this programme. Working together for a cause, e.g., building a house for a poor family or engaging in cultural exchanges, cooking, and discussion of values has brought about more understanding between the groups by creating an experience and acceptance of diversity. Undertaking common activities proved to participants that they too can contribute to the development of their village. Some of the initiatives also show that young people are becoming aware of the needs and helplessness of others; their experiences from such activities have made them realise that as a youth group they can use their energy positively for interreligious interaction on behalf of their people.

The church has been actively engaged in several discussions with both religious leaders and civil society leaders. Such meetings have not only nurtured healthy relationships, but also have enabled the church to explain the objective of the programme, as well as to understand the different viewpoints and concerns of leaders and their suggestions to address and find remedial solutions to issues that prevent coexistence and peace among local communities. The religious and civil society leaders have acknowledged and appreciated the initiative of the church and have assured us of their collaboration. Monthly discussions have been conducted with representatives from religious and civil societies, as well as with youth leaders. This forum has enhanced the integration and coherence of socio-economic and peace-building activities at the village level and has protected space for dialogue. Matters related to religious activities, cultural affairs, common village-level needs, priorities, challenges, and responsive actions have been discussed.

The church's efforts have provided the necessary facilities, space, and environment for children/students to continue their education in schools and have further



enhanced the secure peaceful surroundings available to them in which to live and grow up in freedom. Children are potentially among the most powerful of peace-builders, and adults support them in their efforts. Children more often than adults display the willingness to forgive and forget, to promote friendship and affection, and can see others as equals without a sense of superiority or difference. This means that children contribute in a meaningful way to developing and sustaining peace. The activities of children have nurtured good qualities as well as enabled positive personal development. The church has also given children space to have greater voices in their own development, as well as in the development of their own communities. Their participation has impacted their parents and local communities as well.

Generally, reconciliation among the ethnic groups is taking place at the village level, even in the absence of specific government policies or interventions. This is based on people's yearning for reviving pre-war relationships, mostly based on joint community interventions. These interventions have brought ethnic and neighbouring communities together on a much higher plane than the mere exchange of labour as in pre-war days, since now their connections are based on mutual understanding and respect for one another. The programme activities have provided these people with appropriate opportunities to get to know one another for promoting and building peace and practicing peaceful coexistence.

The programme interventions were in line with the "Milestones" programme, and competitively followed the process indicators:

- Leaders of different religions increasingly interact, jointly initiate and engage in common initiatives.
- Interfaith group members regularly participate in meetings/events and willingly contribute towards community interests.
- People interact and comfortably relate with neighbouring communities, take part in common events, exchange freely without fear or restrictions.
- Issues that disturb communities are openly discussed, solutions are unanimously agreed upon and actions are executed.
- Diversity represented in such events (diversity in terms of locality, gender, religion, ethnicity, age) should be a proper reflection of the composition of the community.

The programme has successfully brought about several constructive changes among the key actors of change at the outcome level. Thus, the church can confidently state that the key actors are able to respect other religions and their practices, value the cultures of the different ethnic groups and faiths, understand truth, reconcile, and engage in activities that address ethnic divides, develop common identity, and promote unity and harmonious relationships. The key actors remain examples to others in accepting members of other communities as they engage in healthy discussions, establish truth, accept responsibilities, forget bitterness, work with commitment, and promote interethnic cohesion as well as coexistence.

Since this is a continuous process of change, it has not yet reached its fullest impact, but it has seen considerable and significant changes in line with the objectives of the programme. The key actors of change need to be further empowered and supported, and the available local structures have to be strengthened. Although the

programme has not necessarily addressed each of the root causes or the dynamics of the conflict, it has created spaces for interaction and improved communication, and has given the programme target group a better understanding of the situation. In addition, the programme has strongly motivated people and built their confidence. The interfaith initiatives have given a platform where all religious leaders can assemble, agree on matters, unite, and then advocate at different levels with the purpose of promoting harmony. It can therefore be concluded that this programme has been efficient in its contribution to community peace and unity in the respective programme locations.

The church firmly believes that the initiation of key activities, supported by the acknowledgement and participation of key actors, will pave the way towards long-term changes and thereby will ensure that the objectives are reached. I see this programme as a change initiative. The church maintains transparency and in all circumstances has clearly explained the purpose of the programme, which is neither governed nor subjected to any hidden agendas. Having observed the positive changes, the church will emphasise the need for a continuation of such programmes by other religious and secular groups, mainly with the purpose of strengthening the local structures to ensure sustainability. This programme has reduced tensions among the communities through dialogue and interaction. The participating communities were able to realise that they were being provoked by a third party to fight with each other. This common initiative as implemented has given the opportunity for people to rebuild their broken relationships. Some of the villagers who never walked across to the other houses before because of the tensions are currently visiting one another's houses and villages. This friendship and trust has been built through common initiatives with majority participation from all the villages. Many incidents which earlier might have provoked dispute among the ethnic groups have been handled peacefully and solved with the assistance of the religious leaders.



# European Context



# Inclusiveness for People Living with Disabilities

The Response from the von Bodelschwingh Foundation Bethel

*Regine Buschmann*

Let me start with some facts and figures about the von Bodelschwingh Foundation Bethel (vBS Bethel). The vBS Bethel is one of the biggest Protestant Church social welfare institutions in the world. The approximately 17,000 staff members care for about 150,000 clients annually. The annual budget turnover reached € 1 billion in the year 2013. The major focus areas of work in Bethel are: people with epilepsy and mental disabilities, homeless people, young people with behavioural problems, elderly people with and without disabilities, hospitals with special emphasis on psychiatry, schools and professional training centres, and work and professional rehabilitation.

The foundation, begun in 1867, has since then grown to a large institution with reach all over northern Germany. With more than 250 locations today, the vBS Bethel offers its services in seven federal states of Germany. It includes four village-like locations, two of them in and near the city of Bielefeld in North Rhine-Westphalia, one in Freistatt in Lower Saxony, and one in Lobetal in Brandenburg, very close to the German capital of Berlin.

From the very beginning of Bethel, the institution implemented an early concept of inclusion. Friedrich v. Bodelschwingh, one of the institution's first leaders and a gifted visionary, developed a concept for people with and without disabilities to live together in one neighbourhood. His vision was to see the "Bethel colony" as a "fresh, healthy, Christian community in which everyone has the great joy not only to be cared for but to care; not only to be served, but to serve others according to his or her own abilities and to contribute to the development of the community."

This guiding principle already shows one of the major aspects of inclusion, which is community or fellowship. In Bodelschwingh's times, of course, this meant a community outside the ordinary society and neighbourhoods. It was a community in an institutional setting, where people with different kinds of disabilities were brought together in nursing homes and hospitals. Nowadays, the concept of inclusion is included in Bethel's mission statement, in the phrase "realising community". The statement mentions the social dimension of inclusion ("the natural coexistence of all people...in society. We regard diversity as enrichment. We strive for all citizens to live together with same rights, chances and duties.").

## The concept of inclusion and the role of the vBS Bethel

Johannes Rau, former president of the Federal Republic of Germany, talked about the “natural coexistence of people with more or less disability” when visiting Bethel in 2004. This was at a time when the UN convention on disability had not yet been ratified, and politics did not yet talk about inclusion as a concept for society. Johannes Rau was of the opinion that almost all people suffer from the one or another disability; it is just that most of us do not recognise ourselves as being disabled.

Ten years later, in February 2014, when the then-German president Joachim Gauck visited Bethel, he said: “I do hope that in the end, when the concept of inclusion is finally implemented, the living situation for people with disabilities will not be worse than it is now.” In German society, there is not yet much awareness of living in inclusive communities with regard to people with severe, multiple, or mental disabilities. For more than 170 years, Germany’s disabled citizens were separated into institutions outside of “ordinary” communities. They were not visible as integral part of society. Even nowadays, the current political debate reduces inclusion almost exclusively to the area of schooling, where almost every family is directly or indirectly involved.

In order to include people with disabilities into ordinary neighbourhoods, long processes of information and convergence will be needed to let neighbours, landlords, employers, congregations, and schools become co-designers of inclusion in society. The German society needs to recognise not only blind people or people who use wheelchairs as worthy of inclusion into society, but also people with mental disorders, epilepsy, or multiple physical and mental disabilities. The role of Bethel here is to be a negotiator and discussion partner in public and in politics.

As one of the world’s largest Christian social welfare organisations, we are obliged to play a leading role in the implementation of the rights of people with disabilities in our society. “Nothing about us without us” is one of these principles. We do not want to decide for our clients, but together with them. This is not always easy: there is a danger of implementing a concept of “inclusion lite” that would realise inclusion only for people with mild disabilities and keep severely handicapped clients institutionalised in residential nursing homes.

It is the responsibility of policy to provide sufficient financial means for the implementation of the principle of inclusion. But it is the social welfare institutions and enterprises like Bethel who develop the concepts and make them a reality for society. Inclusion is a programmatic, normative concept with a good portion of utopia. The first steps for its implementation were already taken about 20 years ago. In 2014, there were more disabled people living and being treated in their own apartments in ordinary neighbourhoods than in residential nursing homes. This was unthinkable 20 years ago.

The Bethel foundation has, in principle, five major tasks:

[2.1] We want to make our enterprise as inclusive as possible with respect to staff members with disabilities.

[2.2] We want to design our infrastructure as an extraordinary example of universal accessibility.

[2.3] Our services for people with disabilities shall be designed in order to prevent exclusion and support inclusion.

[2.4] We support the self-determination and participation of people with disabilities in our work and structures.

[2.5] We want to support and motivate civil society to strive for inclusion. We will support and council civil society in its efforts towards an inclusive society (e.g., appropriate treatment for disabled people in hospitals, fair opportunities for employment, inclusive schools that accept and support children with disabilities).<sup>1</sup>

## Pending steps in Bethel

In twelve major working areas and projects, the Bethel Board of Directors has decided how inclusion will be implemented in the vBS Bethel until the year 2017. Inclusion is:

- part of the strategic goals negotiated between the board of directors and the heads of departments and working areas of Bethel
- a topic in all professional committees (*Fachausschüsse*)
- the topic of a large 2015 conference for members of staff and clients from all parts of the Bethel enterprise
- the theme of a campaign to bring inclusion into the public discussion
- an instrument to support the self-determination and full participation of Bethel clients (“Nothing about us without us”)
- the theme of new projects and programs in Bethel (see 4.)
- checked and implemented in all processes and structures of Bethel
- implemented in the treatment for people with disabilities in our hospitals
- implemented in the sheltered workshops in Bethel
- implemented in the department for professional education and training
- a focus area in the home-based care for elderly people with disabilities
- a project for “inclusive living” for people with and without disabilities.<sup>2</sup>
- Many of these major working areas require government assistance and especially funding. Their full implementation may take much more time than indicated in this plan.

## Pilot projects in Bethel

Bethel started to reduce places in its institutions and was already including small residential nursing homes into ordinary neighbourhoods more than twenty years ago, working to reduce prejudice against people with disabilities in society. But the

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1 Taken from: Inclusion: A challenge for Bethel, Bethel Board of Directors, March 2014; translation by the author.

2 Taken from: Inclusion – Plans and Projects 2014–2017, Bethel Board of Directors, March 2014; translation by the author.



institution also has many smaller and larger projects that encourage inclusion in different areas of daily life. I mention some of the projects in the following examples.

### *Bureau for simple language*

Life in Germany can be very difficult, especially for people with mental disabilities. Filling in an application for a mobile phone can be an insurmountable barrier because of the complexity of language used in these forms. This applies not only to customers with mental disabilities, but also to people with a migration background. The Bethel Bureau of Simple Language offers translation services for complicated texts on forms and applications. It is also available to check and correct newspaper articles, lectures and talks, etc. There are already some private companies as well as government offices that use this service. The professionals checking the texts are people with disabilities themselves. They know best what kind of translation is needed in order to make the forms easily understood.

### *PIKSL*

The PIKSL lab is located in Düsseldorf, the capital of North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW). Its office is located in an ordinary neighbourhood of shops: on one side of the building is a Turkish vegetable vendor, and on the other side there is a pharmacy. Many of the customers and staff members live in the neighbourhood. In 2012, the PIKSL lab was recognised by the NRW government for its aim of making modern information and communication technology available to people with mental retardation. The aim is to enable people with mental retardation to live as independently as possible and to participate in daily life as “normally” as possible as well. “The people with disabilities work on reducing technical complexity in the use of computers and the Internet themselves. They help to reduce the barriers for others. This is an extraordinary project”, said the NRW minister of science when handing over the award. Since then, PIKSL services have been requested by a number of companies and universities, and the lab has almost become self-sufficient in terms of its revenue.

### *Hotel Lindenhof*

The hotel Lindenhof is a special training hotel for young people with epilepsy and mild forms of mental retardation. The practical part of the training is intensified as compared to ordinary training in hotel management. The theoretical part is adjusted to the abilities of the trainees. The training takes place at the Lindenhof hotel in Bethel, on the premises of the Bethel village in Bielefeld. Since the demand for personnel in the hotel industries is very high (because of the undesirable working hours, etc.) the chances of obtaining formal employment on the labour market for these young hotel managers, waiters, and cooks are quite high. More than 80 per cent of the graduates find employment in hotels and restaurants.

### *“Inclusion is fun”*

“Inclusion live” was the idea behind the “summer circus” held at the Marten youth centre in the town of Dortmund (NRW). The festival was jointly organised by a

residential nursing home for people with disabilities and the nearby youth centre. Children, youth, and adults, with and without disabilities and from various cultural backgrounds, spent an afternoon participating in a variety of entertaining activities together. The first contacts between the youth centre and the residential nursing home for people with disabilities started with the city of Dortmund project “Diverse Dortmund – An Inclusive City for Children and Youth”. This music project for young people with and without disabilities opened the space to – inter alia – develop the band “inclu-fusion”, which gave a concert at the summer circus festival in Dortmund. Young people with and without disabilities made music together, attended a festival together, and had fun spending time together.

This last example is at a very local level. It did not require much money, specific infrastructure, etc.: it just brought together young people with and without disabilities from the same neighbourhood. And it shows in a very simple way what inclusion is all about: the people with and without disabilities living together routinely in society. Germany still has a long way to go on implementing inclusion in society. But a start has been made, and institutions like Bethel are working on developing inclusion further to make this utopian vision become a reality.



# Inclusiveness in the North-South Ecumenical Relationship

Alternatives to Global Economic Patterns

*Thomas Fender*

Concerning the global economic structures, there is an obvious injustice between the northern and the southern hemisphere. Both hemispheres are related to each other, but they are not equal: on a lot of issues, The South depends on the North. Due to the international interconnectedness of the capital markets and manufacturing processes, the social injustice has risen.

If we called the relationship between South and North a game, the rules would be determined mainly by the North. These rules are not fair and do not inure to the benefit of the people living in the South. The rules of the game are unjust, because they support the interests of the nations in the North, meaning that they only allow conditional participation from the nations in the South. When we talk of this phenomenon I called “a game”, we name it globalisation.

Globalisation also took place in the churches. For a long time, injustice ruled the relationships of churches in the North and churches in the South. But this has started to change in recent years. Before, the understanding of partnership was more like a sponsorship or godparent-ship by which the churches of the North dominated the churches in the South. But this understanding is becoming less and less common. We are aiming for an understanding of partnership at an equal level by both sides. Churches from all over the world will meet on equal footing. A successful example of this is the CAP Camp, which we have been running for several years.

## The CAP Camp

The letters C, A, and P are the French-language abbreviation for *Comrads, Artisans et Partners* (in English: comrades, artisans, and partners). The CAP Camp is an international youth meeting whose roots go back to the 1980s. Since then, every two years, young people from Africa and Europe have met together at this camp. They range in age between 18 and 30 years old and belong to the participating churches. The CAP Camp lasts three weeks.

In 2014, the CAP Camp took place in Germany for the first time. Thirty people met in July and August at the former monasteries of Möllenbeck and Frenswegen. They were members of the EPR (Eglise Presbytérienne au *Rwanda*) in Rwanda, the PKBN (Presbyterian Church) in Belgium, the URCSA (Uniting Reformed Church in South Africa), and the Evangelical-Reformed Church in Germany. The theme of

the camp was “Seeds of Love and Freedom”. While the radio reported news of war in the Middle East, we worked without any conflict on issues of social and ecological justice. In our Bible studies, we reflected on the following questions: How can we let love sprout in a situation full of hatred? What signs of freedom can our churches pass on in our countries?

We had country presentations. We sang together, celebrated services, played games, and worked together on social projects. For many attendees, the CAP Camp was their first experience with people from other cultures and with global Christianity. Two years ago, in Rwanda, this caused some trouble. There had been heated discussions about homosexuality, questions of lifestyle, and comprehension of the Bible (hermeneutics). This year, there were moments that made the differences between the churches obvious. But the participants really embraced the theme of “Seeds of Love and Freedom”: every discussion was also an implicit expression of their will to understand each other. It seemed to be natural and almost simple for the camp’s participants to accept each other and enjoy and celebrate the community within their differences.

We had a variety of work projects during the three weeks of camp. These included: working the elderly in a care centre, helping with the gardening work at a cemetery, working with children in a kindergarten, preparing a breakfast for the needy, and helping at a school for children with mental disabilities. These work projects challenged the participants not just physically, but also mentally. They were informed about their work projects the night before and sometimes had expectations that were very different from what the actual work asked of them. In the reflections from campers, one could see that their community was strengthened by these work projects and that they also impressed the local community. The locals who witnessed the work of the campers were amazed by the commitment of these young people who wanted to make a difference.

One outstanding part of the camp was certainly the visit to the former concentration camp of Bergen-Belsen and the campers’ thoughts about it as reflected through their own cultural contexts of apartheid, genocide, hatred, and racism. The second week was centred on the topics of ecological and climate justice, with a tour of local farms and reflections on responsible living. In the third week, the programme was very much focused on thinking about the weekend spent with host families as well as the whole camp, and preparation for the closing service with the theme “Seeds of Faith”. In between these larger parts of the programme, we engaged the participants in team-building games, sport, visits to cities, and preparation meetings. We also tried to give them moments of rest and free time.

At the end of the camp, we asked the participants what they had learned about intercultural and ecumenical relationships. As if it were a matter of course for this community, most of the participants did not understand the question. For them, it was important to have experienced communion as one big family, to have shared joy and challenges. What we thought to be a challenge at the very beginning quickly became a gift for all participants. During this last camp, friendships occurred that we would call “ecumenical” – but they don’t need this description.

Sixteen of the participants were female; eight were male. The supporting team was made up of five females and one male. The leaders were five females (both lead-

ers from Belgium were female) and three males. We were happy about the majority being women, because the visiting delegations in particular had very well-balanced teams; this gave the young women at the camp the opportunity to experience and learn about intercultural and ecumenical relationships. A great spirit of equality prevailed within the camp, since every camper was equally involved in all the tasks like kitchen duty, leading devotions, and being in charge of songs or games. Through all the challenges that were given to the campers – preparing the service, working on projects, or playing team-building games – they treated one another respectfully and no one was left out. Everyone worked together to achieve the best result. All the groups were mixed by nationality and gender from the first day, and it was a joy to see how well these mixed groups worked together.

## Bible studies

In the Bible studies, prepared by nation, we worked on different topics within the context of the four participating countries. The Bible study of South Africa, “Seeds of Faith”, was an excellent introduction to the topic of the camp for the campers and focused on the question of where our churches are planting seeds of love and freedom within our societies. The Rwandan Bible study, “Seeds of Hate”, used the story of Joseph and his brothers to lead the group into a reflection of how we can avoid planting seeds of hate and how to recognise situations that ask us to plant seeds of love. The Belgian Bible study, “God’s Creation”, broached the issue of individual responsibility and the conflict between nature and human beings. In the German Bible study, “Foods, Fair Trade”, participants discovered the background of fair trade and the difference between conventional and fairly traded products, as related to the question, “Who is our neighbour?” At the end, the participants gave very positive feedback about the general topics and the Bible studies. A lot of them indicated that the Bible studies had really made a difference in their lives and had influenced their spiritual journey. It was good to see how biblical interpretations during the Bible studies differed among the various countries and how the participants learned to understand and tolerate one another’s positions.

## Strengthening intercultural and ecumenical relationship

Campers first needed to experience one another’s differences before they could learn during the camp that the differences on the surface do not matter. In the final feedback, an overwhelming number of people pointed out the feeling of having found a new international family. They experienced open-minded people and took this memory back home. The camp theme, “Seeds of Love and Freedom”, became the metaphor for the spirit the participants experienced in the camp. As many of the evaluation forms attested, the campers experienced peace, fellowship, and friendship. One camper wrote, “In the beginning the challenge was to meet each of you, [sic] the challenge has become the gift.”

Taking all of the reflections, evaluations, and feedback rounds together, one can say that this year's CAP Camp really strengthened the intercultural and ecumenical relationship between the participating delegations. As a camp for youth with little international experience who are leaders in their home churches in the youth movement, this camp plays an important role in raising awareness of the worldwide Christian reformed family and acting as a meeting point for the ecumenical world.

I consider the CAP Camp to be a successful example of equal partnership. Not only does it develop the cooperation of the participating youth, but it also improves the teamwork within the teams coming from different countries, who plan the following camp a year in advance. The programme and contents are discussed and decided in collaboration. These procedures ensure that there is no dependence within the contact and structures of the relationship: the rules of the game are not fixed by only one side. Agreements have to be made jointly. To date, this process has been very successful, in spite of different interests.

The venue changes every year and the local responsibility to organise the camp is transferred from one hand to another every two years. This makes the CAP Camp a successful example of how to think and act inclusively in a way that explicitly differs from the global economic pattern. And this example is given by the Church.

# From Accommodation to Acceptance

Asylum Seekers and Refugees in a Rural Region of Germany

*Silvia Scheffer*

Dear brothers and sisters, you are invited now to take a walk around in a beautiful rural region in the centre of Germany. It is the region of our Evangelical Church of Kurhessen-Waldeck, located in the area roughly 100 km north of Frankfurt. The biggest city is Kassel, with approximately 200,000 inhabitants, of which 23,000 are students of the university. Another important place is the city of Marburg, with its old and still-famous university. What shapes our church and its congregations is where our members live, ranging from villages of less than 200 inhabitants to small cities of up to 20,000 or 30,000. Public transport is crucial. There are trains and buses, but without a car, mobility remains limited. This is one of the core problems for everyone in the area, no matter whether they are “indigenous” locals or new immigrants. Poor mobility makes it difficult to access supermarkets, health care, schools, and advice and service centres, as well as culture, friends, and family.

We are currently facing a serious demographic change triggered by internal migration to urban areas, where there is work, education, dense infrastructure, and the whole range of promising city advantages. Our church members’ numbers are on the decline, and we are undergoing a process of reshaping our structures, oscillating between centralisation and decentralisation, between governance and maintaining the congregations’ authenticity and identity.

## How people in the region make their living

Two companies known worldwide, Volkswagen and the B. Braun medical and pharmaceutical company, are the biggest employers. There is a wide range of small- and medium-sized companies and trades. Health care and elder care services, including mobile home services and old people’s homes, are a growing and an important branch of entrepreneurship and employment. Simultaneously, the renewable energy industry is growing; solar fields, wind farms and biogas plants are a common sight in this region.

Continuing our walk, you can observe a certain set of shops and services in the larger villages and in each small town: supermarket, stadium, hairdresser, nail studio, pedicure studio, Thai massage outlet, pizzeria, and Turkish snack bar offering pizza and *Döner* kebabs, bratwurst or schnitzel. This very menu reflects the immigration to post-war Germany. Pizza is a well-known world food, the must-have and entry ticket into the fast food and snack food business. *Döner* is what the owner



of the Turkish snack bar contributes from his own country, and with bratwurst or schnitzel the owner greets Germany. A simple menu tells a multilayered story of immigrant identity, including world foods and items from the country of origin and country of reception. The likely Turkish owner of the snack bar may no longer be the one behind the counter. That employee will probably be from Pakistan or Afghanistan, and the woman who cleans may hold a Bulgarian passport. The variety of businesses and services widens with the size of the village or the small town: shopping centres, hospitals and all kinds of schools, culture programmes and sport and fitness facilities, restaurants, gambling halls, etc.

The inner parts of these villages and towns consist of old framed buildings surrounded by new housing areas. Carefully restored old structures and spacious new low-energy buildings are the places where people live. Here they design their gardens and verandas, manoeuvre clean cars into carports, each of which should be a little more stylish than their neighbour's, and eagerly plan their children's after-school activities. In a large unrestored farmhouse, an old woman has remained alone. Her children have moved to bigger cities; other relatives and friends have passed away. Her only reliable contacts are the nurse who comes twice a week and the young man who brings her Meals on Wheels every day at noon. These are some of the impressions you might have on our walk.

## New inhabitants and challenges

Now imagine refugees coming to this region, refugees and asylum seekers from Syria, Somalia, Eritrea, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Serbia. The Syrians have escaped from ongoing war, terror, and destruction; the Somalis, Eritreans, Afghans, Pakistanis, and Serbians from almost-chronic conflicts, discrimination, and violence, along with a lack of any future opportunities. They all have a certain image of Europe and of Germany: successful, strong, prosperous and rich, providing democracy, safety, jobs, education, healthcare, etc. "Once you have entered Germany, everything will take a turn for the better."

These high expectations are brought back down to earth as soon as people apply for political asylum, become registered in a reception centre, and are sent to refugee housing somewhere in the country, with "somewhere" sometimes turning out to be in the middle of nowhere. Many of the refugee accommodations are former army barracks, or former hotels or pensions in countryside that is beautiful, but far from settlements and infrastructure.

The number of refugees has risen dramatically. There are neither enough places nor enough staff to handle this situation properly. It is not that we do not have the means or abilities or know-how; it is the political will that is taking so long.

Let me describe some of the legal conditions of an asylum procedure in Germany. A person who has applied for political asylum must be granted a hearing. He or she must describe how they arrived in Germany, the reason they left their home country, and why they fear returning there. Rejected applicants can lodge an appeal in court. In case of another rejection, they have the chance for a follow-up application, then a petition to the county's parliament, and finally the county's commission

on humanitarian hardship. Each of these legal steps must fulfil certain preconditions, for which professional advice and experience are recommended.

This is where the diaconic advice centres come in; they provide free support and advice. Lawyers should be used, but not everyone can afford to use one. The legal procedure described usually takes years: years of waiting and fearing that one's life will be wasted feeling homeless and forgotten. Even if a refugee has the right to take a job after nine months of registering, their situation does not necessarily improve. Refugees placed in the housing described above have little chance of finding a job. They usually do not speak German, nor do they possess a car, since their licence is not accepted in Germany. They cannot show a residence permit, only a paper with a declaration of their status as an asylum applicant. These facts are discouraging to many possible employers, who do not want additional paperwork or uncertainty. This limits refugees to certain sectors such as restaurant kitchens and cleaning companies. Those who are aged between 16 and 25 years might be lucky and given the chance to attend a school for vocational training. Small children might go to a kindergarten. Children from 6 to 16 years have to attend school. Some of the young men join the local football teams. Kindergarten, school, and football are the important links to local communities.

One term has been barely mentioned up to now: Church. Together with diakonia, the institutional Church plays important parts in refugee protection. Social advocacy is provided at both political and practical levels. Church resolutions and campaigns are a necessary means of attracting public and media attention. Professional social work coupled with voluntary activities provides direct support for asylum seekers and refugees. Solidarity with the stranger is an accepted guideline in resolutions, sermons, and campaigns for donations.

## Inclusion to be developed

But these practices do not automatically lead us to inclusion, the accepting of a person in her entire being and as full member of an existing community, and furthermore developing this community with full respect for the needs and gifts of all its members. Inclusion means challenge and change. The crucial point is reached: institutional church congregations are social organisations, defined by place, local tradition, family relations, and friendships. Members share common experiences like school, birthday parties, recreational activities, clubs, and hobbies. Church and religion are part of these commonly shared experiences and traditions. In this setting, church and religion are neither the reason nor the centre of common experience, but one part of it.

The opening of these structures towards strangers and towards refugees can hardly be achieved by just paying lip service to Leviticus 19:33 ("remember you were strangers in Egypt") or Matthew 25:35 ("I was a stranger and you invited me"). Both remembrance and invitation need to be translated into the current situation. That means a lot of information has to be given, about asylum and the typical hopes, wishes, needs of asylum seekers. Questions have to be answered: Who are these

people? Are they criminals? Do they deserve our support? How should that support be given?

Once such questions have been answered, there will always be volunteers offering very practical ideas. Language classes, sport activities, playgroups for children with their parents, afternoon coffee meetings and cooking groups come into existence and attract attention. More people join them, and in time these ideas become normal and something to be proud of. Refugees get invited to church services and even take active parts in reading or singing, whether in a Christian or interreligious context. Many of our congregations have developed and implemented methods such as these to invite and welcome refugees. Some refugees can even start on a professional education in church administration or Diaconia.

We cannot yet talk about inclusive communities. What we can talk about are communities taking steps on the way towards inclusion. This way has to be continued at the communal and congregational levels. In awareness of this situation, the Synod of the Evangelical Church of Kurhessen-Waldeck has passed a resolution on inclusion that defines it as an attitude that extends to strangers as well. Some needs are emphasised for congregations to take into account in all their activities. Congregations are called to strengthen good practices, to assume and maintain an attitude of invitation, and to accept and believe that all are welcome in the diversity of society. With the growing number of refugee men and women in our congregations, encouraged by the resolution of our synod, we may yet pass a decisive threshold: a change from regarding refugees as persons to be patronised to persons who participate.

# Inclusiveness in Germany of Refugees and Asylum Seekers

*Johann Weusmann*

*Do not mistreat the stranger or oppress him,  
for you were strangers in Egypt.  
Exodus 22:21*

## Introduction

Under Article 1 of the 1951 *United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*, a refugee is a person who “owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country”.

What is the situation of people who have to leave everything behind when they arrive in countries such as Germany? How are these people perceived? What are their rights? In my paper I will try to answer some of these questions not only from a legal background but also from a humanitarian perspective. First, I will provide some information on the right to asylum under the German constitution. I will then talk about the refugee crises in the Mediterranean. Finally, I will shed some light on the situation of African refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants in Germany.

## The human right to asylum under the German constitution

During the Second World War, the effects of the Nazi dictatorship and the Holocaust led many Germans to seek asylum all over the world. Jewish people left the country in great numbers after the Nuremberg Laws were introduced in 1935. Bearing this in mind, the drafters of the new German constitution provided for a rather generous asylum regime. Article 16 of the Basic Law enacted post-war stated simply that “persons persecuted on political grounds shall have the right to asylum.” This provision was part of the Bill of Rights, and the only article in the constitution that dealt exclusively with people other than German citizens.

The young Federal Republic of Germany initially faced the immigration of about 20 million people originating from territories in Eastern Europe such as Pomerania, Silesia, East Prussia, the Sudetenland, and other areas that had previously been contained in the German Empire and became part of Russia and Poland after the war. These people were displaced from their homes, but unlike the refugees in the

decades to come, they had one distinct advantage: they were ethnic Germans and therefore were not considered to be asylum seekers.

In the 1960s and 1970s, migrant workers moved to West Germany as so-called guest workers to work in the industrial sector at jobs that required little qualification. This programme was initiated by the German government to address the labour shortage caused by the fast-growing German economy. As part of this policy, West Germany signed bilateral recruitment agreements with Italy (1955), Spain (1960), Greece (1960), Turkey (1961), Morocco (1963), Portugal (1964), Tunisia (1965), and Yugoslavia (1968). The German government saw these agreements as a form of development aid, with the hope that the guest workers would learn useful skills in Germany that would help them improve their own countries after returning home. In reality, this did not happen. The agreement with Turkey ended in 1973, for example, but few workers returned home, because there were too few good jobs in Turkey. Instead they brought over their spouses and family members and settled in ethnic enclaves. But even the children born to guest workers received only the right to reside in Germany, without being granted citizenship.

The constitutional provision on asylum in Article 16 of the Basic Law initially only attracted a few refugees from around the world. Between 1953 and 1978, a total of 178,000 applicants for asylum arrived in the Federal Republic of Germany (an average of 7,100 per annum). Beginning in 1985, conflicts and crises such as the outbreak of civil war in Sri Lanka and the persecution of the Tamil minority (in 1985), and later on the war and ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia (from 1991/92 to 1995) led to an increased influx of refugees into Germany. As a result, politicians and certain interest groups started stoking the fears that Germany was being overrun by asylum seekers. Eventually, the influx of refugees created momentum behind a constitutional reform of the right to asylum. As a result, the new Article 16a was introduced. It still guarantees the right to asylum, but this right cannot any longer be invoked by those who enter Germany's territory from a "safe third country" or those who are nationals of a "safe country of origin".

In 1992, approximately 440,000 asylum seekers came to Germany, which was more than all of the people seeking asylum in the rest of the European states put together. On the other hand, only 5 per cent of these applications were accepted by the German authorities. The constitutional reforms took effect in 1993, and these together with other legal changes have brought the number of asylum seekers down from 440,000 in 1992 to less than 30,000 in 2008.

The constitutional changes in Germany had immediate effect on the numbers of asylum seekers coming from the African continent. Their numbers dropped from 67,408 in 1992 to not more than 4,420 in 2008. This is a decline of about 93.5 per cent. African asylum seekers are particularly affected by the "safe third country" rule. It virtually requires them to enter the German territory by plane, since all neighbouring countries in Europe are considered to be "safe". Anyone who travels overland has to be sent back to the safe (European) country they travelled through. On the other hand, anyone who wants to enter Germany by plane requires an entry visa. All of this does not make Germany accessible for refugees from Africa.

Not until 2005 did a new immigration law come into effect that altered the legal method of immigration to Germany. For the first time ever, the German state acknowledged itself as an “immigration country”: the country had become the second most popular migration destination in the world, after the United States. Although the practical changes to the immigration procedures were relatively minor, new immigration categories like the ones for highly skilled professionals and scientists were introduced in order to render the German labour market more attractive to valuable professionals. The evolution of German immigration law clearly shows that the immigration of skilled employees and academics has been facilitated, while the labour market remains closed to unskilled workers.

Nowadays, the conflicts and wars in other parts of the world have increased the number of people seeking asylum in Germany to its highest level in 14 years, with a jump of about 64 per cent in 2013. Germany received 127,023 asylum applications in 2013, an increase of 64 per cent over the previous year. The main countries of origin of asylum seekers were Serbia, Russia, Syria, Macedonia, Afghanistan, Bosnia, Kosovo, Iran, Pakistan, and Iraq. Out of all the applications, only about 14 per cent were approved. However, compared with other EU member states, Germany had by far the highest number of asylum seekers in 2013. The number of asylum applications rose by 59 per cent in the first six months of 2014, reaching **77,109 requests**. The vast majority of asylum seekers came from **Syria**: nearly 13,000 people. On the other hand, the number of those from Russia sharply decreased, from 10,000 down to 2,865.

At the same time, the number of refugees rose worldwide. More than 1 million people submitted applications for asylum in 2013. By the middle of 2013 there were some 987,000 pending cases of asylum seekers, and the numbers are still trending upward. Overall, there are more than 19.5 million refugees around the world today under the mandate of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. Another 5.1 million Palestinian refugees are registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency.

It is important to remember that developing countries host more than 80 per cent of the world’s refugees. People fleeing conflict or persecution often end up in a neighbouring country – but many do not want to settle there permanently. Pakistan, with 1.6 million refugees, ranks highest for sheltering refugees. The vast majority of Afghan refugees are in Pakistan and Iran. Most Syrian refugees are in neighbouring Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq, and most have not made formal asylum claims.

## The refugee crises in the Mediterranean

The situation of African refugees is poor in Germany and not much better in the rest of Europe. Yet many African people flee their home countries because of oppression, violence, or hunger. Conflicts in the DRC, Somalia, Eritrea, and the Darfur region of Sudan, as well as the crisis with militant groups like Boko Haram in Nigeria are all cases in point. Most refugees are hosted by neighbouring countries in refugee camps. But such situations do not provide them with prospects of a better future. It

is for this reason that some African immigrants try to reach Europe on risky trips by boat, very often organised by smugglers. A report published by Save The Children, indicates that 58,000 migrants were rescued off the coast of Italy in the first half of 2014, more than twice the total during all of 2013 and close to the record number of arrivals in 2011 during the Arab Spring uprisings.

The *Mediterranean* has become Europe's *sea of death*. Since 2000, some 22,000 migrants have died trying to cross the *Mediterranean Sea*. It has become a gruesome reality that the bodies of drowned migrants are pulled up in fishing nets or are found on the beaches of Lampedusa and elsewhere. Because of several severe incidents with hundreds of fatalities, as well as an increasing resistance to Italian and European border control policy, the Italian coastguard began rescuing refugees off the Italian coast in October 2013 when more than 360 men, women, and children – mostly Eritreans – drowned after their overcrowded boat capsized a mile off the Sicilian island of Lampedusa. With encouragement from the media, public opinion and the impending European elections in spring 2014 led to the Italian coastguard's rescue programme, called "Mare Nostrum". During the first year of Mare Nostrum's operation, the units of the Italian Navy engaged in 421 operations and rescued 150,810 migrants. In just one weekend, 19-20 July 2014, about 8,000 people were rescued from drowning in the Mediterranean Sea. However, the Italian government shut down Mare Nostrum in late 2014 because of its monthly costs of some € 9 million. The EU is reluctant to provide a similar operation because governments fear that rescue missions create an unintended "pull factor" for both migrants and smugglers. Instead, the EU border agency Frontex will begin coordinating a new operation called "Triton". Rather than replicating the Italian mission, Triton will focus on border surveillance and operate only within 30 miles of the Italian coast. Its budget, 2.9 million euro, is less than a third of Mare Nostrum's. In 2015, the EU introduced plans to have the participating member countries' navy sink migrant ships in the Mediterranean once their passengers had been rescued, in an attempt to destroy the business model of the traffickers.

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) estimates that there are up to 600,000 African migrants in Libya waiting for their chance to cross into Europe. This has generated fears in Italy that the country will be overrun by streams of refugees. As a result, African refugees are faced with more restrictions, stronger controls at EU borders, and faster deportation for those who do manage to reach the shores of Europe. At the same time, conditions in the assembly and deportation camps of Mediterranean EU states are not much better than those prevailing in Libya. The situation of the refugees has now reached the proportions of a major humanitarian crisis and requires urgent action from all countries. But despite their legal and moral responsibility to provide protection to those in need, EU member states cannot agree on a burden-sharing mechanism. And they are even more reluctant to address the intolerable situation of refugees and asylum seekers given the current economic and financial crisis, although the United Nations Commissioner for Refugees called the European system "dysfunctional" as early as 2008 and urged EU member states to help find homes for those fleeing conflict, persecution, or extreme poverty. So far no sustainable solutions have been reached.



## The situation of refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants in Germany

In comparison to the situation of refugees in the Mediterranean, the circumstances are much better for those refugees and asylum seekers who manage to find their way into Germany and fall under German residence law (*Aufenthaltsgesetz*). They have immediate access to a comprehensive social security system, which makes the German asylum scheme very efficient. In fact, refugees and asylum seekers are fully guaranteed food, clothing, and housing for the duration of their stay. This may seem comfortable at first glance, but it is not. A refugee who seeks asylum must be prepared for a long wait. It currently takes about eight months to process an asylum application. Individual cases can go faster – or considerably slower.

First, the stay has to be legalised. This is only possible through an application for asylum. Other possibilities, e.g., humanitarian reasons, are generally not accepted. Because the constitutional right to asylum is restricted to people persecuted by state actors for political reasons, applications for other reasons have no chance of success. Asylum seekers are subject to a rigid distribution system among the sixteen federal states and may be placed in any of three different types of accommodation. For a period of up to three months after their asylum applications have been filed, asylum seekers are obliged to stay in an **initial reception centre** established and maintained by the individual federal states. There are different standards in the German federal states, but each applicant must be provided at least 6.5 square metres (70 square feet). Very often several people from different countries have to share one room. In addition to the narrow space, the lack of privacy is a serious problem, considering that many refugees are traumatised or have various physical illnesses. Initial reception facilities very often can be characterised as camps where refugees have a difficult time finding rest. Asylum seekers get access to independent procedural advice for free, but the standards for legal advice vary between the individual federal states. Unlike the compulsory school attendance for children, legal and procedural advice as well as qualified social counselling is not mandatory in all states, nor is language teaching or childcare.

Once their obligation to stay in the initial reception centre has ended, asylum seekers are “as a rule” to be accommodated in “collective accommodation” centres. These accommodation centres are usually located within the same federal state. For many municipalities, the establishment and maintenance of collective accommodation has often not proven efficient, in particular because of decreasing numbers of asylum applications from the mid 1990s onwards, and especially between 2002 and 2007. Accordingly, many collective accommodation centres were closed during that period, and municipalities increasingly turned to accommodating asylum seekers in apartments.

A „residence requirement“ obliges asylum seekers to stay in the municipality to which they have been allocated for the entire duration of their procedure, including appeal proceedings. In practice, however, most federal states have since loosened these restrictions on mobility and communication, which are seen as a mere deterrent.



The federal states are entitled by law to organise the distribution and the accommodation of asylum seekers within their territories. In many cases, states have delegated the responsibility for accommodation to municipalities. The authorities responsible can decide at their discretion whether the management of the centres is to be carried out by the local governments themselves or whether this task is transferred to NGOs or facility management companies.

For daily needs, such as food, asylum seekers receive food packages, store coupons, or cash. They are not allowed to work during their first four months in Germany. Afterwards, the situation does not get much easier, since regulations require the preferential hiring of German workers, EU nationals, or recognised refugees. The latter requirement only lapses after a minimum stay of 15 months.

## Practical experiences

This is, in short, the procedure provided for by law. In practical terms, however, it can lead to a number of problems. One example is the situation in Lebach, a municipality located in the federal state of Saarland that is part of the Rhenish Church. It hosts one of the central points for admission of refugees to the country. In the past, the duration of a refugee's stay at the Lebach admission centre was several years. We have repeatedly urged the state government to shorten the duration of the stay, but this did not happen until recently, when the increasing number of refugees exhausted the capacity in Lebach. Last September, the Saarland government decided to expedite the allocation of refugees to municipalities. Because the respective local authorities were unprepared, however, they were very often not in a position to provide procedural advice or other forms of refugee advice. Our diaconia division, which offers advice at the Lebach admission centre, will now start a new pilot project to assist refugees all across the municipalities of this federal state.

The situation is different in North Rhine-Westphalia, where the Rhenish Church has most of its congregations. In this much bigger federal state, the number of refugees is much higher. As a result, they are sometimes transferred to collective accommodation centres and from there to municipalities, only a few days after reaching the initial reception centres they are supposed to stay in for approximately three months. This deprives too many refugees of their right to have access to independent procedural advice. We have also experienced problems where municipalities are themselves under high but also self-inflicted pressure. In Duisburg, for example, there used to be more than 20 collective centres in the 1990s. They were gradually closed, until only two remain today. Now new accommodation must be secured, resulting in an agitated atmosphere and an even more explosive mood among the local population towards refugees.

It should be noted that federal states and municipalities are hopelessly overwhelmed with the increased numbers of asylum seekers in Germany. Churches are therefore worried about the effective implementation of our human-rights-based humanitarian asylum system. There are, however, also cities like Leverkusen, who decided a long time ago to refrain from using collective accommodation centres. In-

stead, they provide apartments to their refugees in order to integrate them better into society. As a result, these refugees do not experience any conflicts in the neighborhoods of their communities. This may prove to be an exemplary model for other cities.

The right to asylum is very restricted. The asylum seeker has to prove his or her political persecution. Other reasons are to a large extent excluded. This explains the high percentage of rejected cases. But how, for example, should an underaged refugee from Afghanistan prove his or her individual case of persecution two or three years after his or her arrival in Germany?

In addition to an asylum seeker's reasons for asylum, their health is also tested as to whether it would impede deportation, but health reasons are rarely a factor. Most cases therefore end with the decision to reject the application for asylum. Depending on whether the application was rejected on its merits or because the application was clearly unfounded, the asylum seeker must leave Germany within a month or within a week. Those who fail to do so are threatened with deportation, which can also lead to detention pending deportation. It is possible to take legal action, provided the asylum seeker can afford a lawyer, but legal actions have no suspensory effect. In many cases, the asylum application fails at this stage. As a result, many asylum seekers either opt for a so-called voluntary return or face deportation to their country of origin. A large number of asylum seekers decide to disappear or go into hiding, in a situation recognised as irregular residence. Many refugees, however, cannot leave the country or be deported from Germany for various reasons, so their stay in Germany is tolerated under "exceptional leave to remain". This status lasts until the duty to depart can be enforced.

According to the German residence act, exceptional leave to remain means that the deportation of a foreigner obliged to depart the country is officially suspended. The obligation to depart is not lifted. The exceptional leave to remain is a status of toleration, but it is not a residence permit. If a refugee is given exceptional leave to remain, this serves purely to clarify their legal status and does not legalise their stay in Germany. Exceptional leave to remain is issued if the deportation of the person concerned is not possible due to legal or actual reasons (e.g., poor health). If deportation is deferred for more than 18 months, a residence permit is issued. In order for this to occur, it must be impossible for the foreigner in question to leave the country (through no fault of his/her own), and there must be no foreseeable prospect of deportation being permitted. Exceptional leave to remain does not mean that the person is given a work permit for Germany. Gainful employment for the time the leave is valid is granted only after a minimum of one year. In addition, exceptional leave to remain may be associated with different requirements, e.g., geographic restrictions. It expires when the foreigner leaves the country. Thousands of refugees have been granted exceptional leave to remain. They fear the withdrawal of this status at any time. They are excluded from integration measures and have to report to the local authorities constantly. In many cases, this status lasts for years. The continued uncertainty about their stay frustrates the people concerned and causes them psychological distress. School-age children are discouraged by their lack of future prospects, which is in turn often reflected in bad performance in school.

The churches have long advocated for those with exceptional leave to remain. This status affects about 86,000 people, some of whom have been living in Germany for over six years. The German Federal Government is now considering issuing residence permits, provided the foreigners concerned are in a position to make a living on their own. The latter requirement is a condition attached to many residence permits. A person can lose this permit if he or she does not meet the conditions attached to it.

Refugees who have exhausted all legal remedies to obtain a residence permit may take their case to a “hardship commission”. An application to this commission can be successful in cases of exceptionally qualified personnel or for humanitarian reasons. Each federal state has set up such a hardship commission, and members of these commissions include representatives of the Protestant and Catholic Church.

As a very last resort, churches themselves can offer asylum. The Christian faith of congregants makes them feel it is their duty to protect people from deportation if there is reasonable doubt concerning their safe return. These congregations place themselves between a refugee and the relevant public authority in order to bring about the re-examination of a particular case to prevent deportation. Obviously this is not in compliance with the law. But state action, despite its inherent lawfulness, can also be perceived as irreconcilable with the conscience of Christians, and may lead them to breach the legal norms. This is why people acting on behalf of a congregation providing church asylum have to be prepared to accept full legal responsibility for their actions. Investigations related to church asylum cases have so far mostly been completed without any legal actions, since state authorities, in general, do not see a reason to institute them. In some cases, however, ministers or members of the church council have had to pay a fine. During the church asylum, all relevant legal, social, and humanitarian aspects are re-examined. It often turns out that the authorities’ decision needs to be revised and that a new asylum procedure has a chance to be successful.

## Restrictive migration policy in contrast to German realities

The restrictive migration policy in Germany contrasts with the current realities of German society. Over the past sixty years, immigration has become an important issue for German society for economic, demographic, and humanitarian reasons. Over 14 million people with a migration background are living in Germany today. They are immigrants themselves or second-generation immigrants. One out of five marriages is a binational one, and one out of four children born in Germany has at least one foreign parent. Every third teenager in West Germany has a migration background, while in some areas this rises to almost 40 per cent. Meanwhile, it has been acknowledged that Germany is an “immigration country”. The federal government’s *Immigration Act*, which came into force in 2005, makes integration a statutory duty and introduces mandatory measures to promote integration, particularly in the form of language and orientation courses. Despite all its weaknesses, this piece of legislation is an important step for Germany in becoming a formal immigration country.

The churches have special capacity and means to coordinate volunteer support for refugees and can provide their own resources. This includes individual support to help refugees find their way into everyday life in Germany. Refugees need assistance in dealing with public authorities and housing, help with homework and language development for children and adults, gifts, donations, and practical help. Support organised by the churches could also involve introducing refugees into the social fabric of the local communities. Parishes can positively influence the situation in the community in terms of a welcoming culture. It is one of the basic tasks of the church to counteract racist attitudes, anti-Semitism, and xenophobia in all its forms.

In 2015, for example, the Synod of the Evangelical Church of the Rhineland provided €1 million for refugee programmes carried out by its church circuits and congregations. The recipients added a similar amount of money from their own resources to support such projects. Nevertheless, it has become clear that a lot more efforts and funding will be necessary in the years to come. As conflicts and extreme poverty continue to exist in many parts of our world today, the refugee crisis is far from being over.

It is true that Germany still has a long way to go before refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants feel included in society. For decades, politicians have insisted that Germany is not an integration country. This has led to the failed integration of the first generation of immigrants and has generated an overall sense of not-belonging. This in turn resulted in the development of parallel societies. Even as the immigrants failed to identify themselves as part of German culture and society, their presence created and enabled racism and discrimination in German society.

Only since the German Federal Government has begun working with immigrant groups and independent experts on a national integration plan has the way in which aspects of migration are dealt with begun changing. There is increasing recognition that immigration benefits the country. With the promotion of integration, immigrants are nowadays expected to voluntarily accept the values of German culture and learn the German language. But it is also acknowledged that encouraging integration is different from expecting assimilation. In fact, nationals and immigrants must move towards each other. In this respect we still have a long way to go: Germany is far from being a paradise of multiculturalism. Immigrants still encounter prejudice when seeking jobs and accommodation, or can even experience direct violence by some of the right-wing groups. It therefore remains an ongoing task for government, churches, and civil society at large to work towards more integration in our society, for everyone is a foreigner, nearly everywhere.

A rethinking of the asylum, refugee, and migration policy within the EU is needed. The struggle against the causes of poverty has to be intensified. Our focus must be to protect and assist the refugees, who are the most vulnerable people on earth. The human rights standards implemented within Europe must also apply to those at the borders of Europe. The external border of the European Union should not any longer be the outer border with the most deaths worldwide.

Refugees must have access to an effective and fair asylum procedure. They cannot and must not be rejected from the outset. But this at the same time means that we need a new European system to regulate immigration. Energy should not only

be expended in protecting against refugees; we need a Europe that, given the global refugee reality, accepts its own responsibility. The EU's systematic participation in resettlement programmes is a possible aspect. In view of the disaster in Syria, a much greater acceptance rate for Syrian refugees is also necessary.

## Conclusion

Persecution, conflict, and war, as well as extreme poverty, are the root causes for the flight of refugees. These reasons need to be addressed if we are to overcome the refugee crisis. It is true that the problem cannot be solved by simply opening the borders of Europe. Nevertheless, those refugees who have entered European territory need to be treated with human dignity and respect. They deserve not only a proper asylum and refugee regime, but also a true chance of integration. Europe must live up to its own values when dealing with the most vulnerable in society. The churches have a very special calling in this regard.

# Liturgy Meditation



# Jesus Cleanses a Leper

Reflection on Matthew 8:1-4

Morning Prayer on 11 November 2014

*Silvia Scheffer*

Watching this scene with a photographer's eye, one would depict the sequence as follows:

*First picture:*

A man is walking downhill, followed by a crowd. At the bottom of the hill, a person with some sort of disability is moving towards him.

*Second picture:*

The man is standing at the bottom of the hill, with the disabled person kneeling in front of him and talking in his direction.

As we zoom into the picture now, we can recognise the second man as a leper.

*Third picture:*

The first man's hand is stretched out to the second man.

*Fourth picture:*

The first man's outstretched hand is placed on the second man's body. Something is different in this scene.

Zooming in again brings an explanation: the second man's body no longer shows any signs of leprosy. The man has been cleansed.

*Fifth picture:*

The first man is talking to the second man.

The picture of interest is number four: the outstretched hand touching the leper's body, which does not show any more symptoms.

The very short text in Matthew 8 does not give further descriptions, but our imagination can easily add some details.

The first man acts with obvious ease. He does not hesitate to stretch out his hand and touch an untouchable. The touch makes the former untouchable a normal person.

The second man, the leper, is not introduced as a passive person, as the second picture shows. In all his disability and disease, he knows what he wants and he is acting. He moves towards the first man, kneels in front of him, and asks him to make him clean.



The short story ends with the first man's trust in the second man's ability to act for himself and offer the right gifts in the temple.

Dear brothers and sisters, this dense little story guides us to so many preconditions for inclusion. I want to depict just three of these.

The first is to see who is there, what is going on, what is to be done.

The second is to touch. In this context, it is another word for respecting and accepting a person in his or her entire being.

The third is to trust in a person's abilities.

The last seems the most difficult, since it means the sharing of control and power.

May God enable us to trust and to share.

# The Feeding of the Five Thousand

Matthew 14:13-21

## PRAYER

God of creation, God of wonders, God of love,  
We thank you for every blessing we receive, and  
For the miracles that come every morning of our lives.

We thank you for opening possibilities for us  
To participate in your continuing creation and in your work among the people,  
Especially among the marginalised, excluded, and vulnerable.

We thank you for situations of need, which offer opportunities for us  
To reflect and respond in ways that create miracles.

Help us to grow in faith in you, and to be ever faithful.  
Keep our hearts open to share, to give, to love, to be one with all of your creation.

In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

## THE GATHERING

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THE GATHERED COMMUNITY

## CALL TO PRAISE

## HYMN OF PRAISE

Sing With Hearts  
Hymnal of Faith Journey #17  
Words: Jonathan Malicsi  
Music: Kalinga Traditional Melody

Sing to God, dance to God, hearts and souls united  
Come offer joyful praises in melodies of gladness.

1. May every heart open up to your glory,  
Let all the heavens hear our hearts rejoice;  
For you are God: you bestow on us graces,  
From you begin the music in our voice.

O Lord we sing, with joyful hearts  
With soul and body offer we our hearts.

2. May each one's soul blossom out with your beauty,  
Let every being feel our loving theme;

For you are God: you have granted us wisdom,  
And you fulfill reality and dream.

3. May all our bodies resound to your music,  
Let earth itself move with our feet and hands;  
For you are God: you inspire and uplift us,  
From you there flows all rhythm in our dance.

## MORNING PRAYER

### SCRIPTURE READING

Matthew 14:13-21

#### *Reader 1*

When Jesus heard what had happened to John the Baptist,  
that he had been put to death by Herod,  
He got on a boat and went away to a deserted place by himself.  
But the crowds heard where he headed,  
and followed him on foot from many towns and villages.  
When Jesus arrived and saw a large crowd,  
He had compassion on them  
and healed those who were sick.  
When it was evening, the disciples came to him.

#### *Reader 2*

This is a remote place, and it's already getting late.  
Send the crowds away  
so that they can go to the villages and buy food for themselves.

#### *Reader 1*

But Jesus answered:

#### *Reader 3*

Don't send them away.  
You feed them!

#### *Reader 2*

But that's impossible!  
All we have is five small loaves of bread and two fish.

*Reader 3*

Bring what you have to me.

*Reader 1*

So the disciples brought him the loaves and fish,  
and Jesus told the people to sit down on the grass.  
He took the five loaves and two fish,  
looked up to heaven,  
blessed them,  
and broke the bread into pieces.  
Then he gave the bread to the disciples,  
and the disciples passed them to the crowds.  
And everyone ate until they were full.  
Afterward, they filled twelve baskets with the leftovers.  
In total, about five thousand men had eaten,  
not to mention all the women and children.

**Silence**

## MEDITATION

### HYMN OF UNITY

Christian Unity  
Hymnal of Faith Journey #272  
Words: Luna Dingayan  
Music: Melody from the Mountain Province

1. Jesus Christ our Lord we pray, that our life shall be  
Living channels of faith and love, Christian unity.

*Bless, O Christ, we humbly pray, this our Christian unity  
So our faith and love shall be following your way.*

2. When the way may seem so hard, and our faith is tried,  
May we help each other, Lord, carry each one's load.

3. May we help each other grow in our faith in you;  
May you help us to forgive, and your grace to show.

*Bless, O Christ, we humbly pray, this our Christian unity  
So our faith and love shall be following your way.*

4. As we seek, Lord, to reclaim living faith of old,  
May the lessons of the past guide us in the tasks.

5. Our commitment be renewed to your mission, Lord;  
Make us channels of unity, following your way.

*Bless, O Christ, we humbly pray, this our Christian unity  
So our faith and love shall be following your way.*

## PRAYER

God of creation, God of wonders, God of love,  
We thank you for every blessing we receive, and  
For miracles that come every morning of our lives.

We thank you for opening possibilities for us  
To participate in your continuing creation and in your work among the people,  
Especially among those that are marginalized, excluded and are vulnerable.

We thank you for situations of need, which offer opportunities for us  
To reflect and respond in ways that create miracles.

Help us to grow in faith in you, and to be ever faithful.  
Keep our hearts open to share, to give, to love, to be one with all of your creation.

In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen

# The Feeding of the Five Thousand

Matthew 14:13-21

Artwork by Eulalia Clark

When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick. As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food." Jesus replied, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat." "We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish," they answered. "Bring them here to me," he said. And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.

After hearing what happened to John the Baptist, Jesus tried to withdraw to a private place – to have some quiet time. But he was already famous, so that when he reached the place, there was a large crowd waiting for him. Seeing them, he felt compassion, forgot about his original intention, and began healing.

Soon, it was evening. Sensing that the people must be hungry by then, the disciples suggested that Jesus send them away. Jesus, of course, said that they could stay. It so happened that there were five loaves of bread and two fish, which a little boy had given to the disciples earlier. Jesus took the bread, prayed, broke the loaves into pieces, and told the disciples to feed the people. There were five thousand of them, not counting the women and children, it was said, but there was enough for all. They even had twelve baskets of leftovers.

## *Some insights*

1. Some situations require intervention. Like the disciples, we have to investigate, immerse ourselves in the crowd, to know what resources are there. That is how the disciples found the five loaves and two fish.
2. Miracle 1: a boy offered his resources – fish and bread. This shows us the possibility that an answer to a problem, something needed, often comes from the unexpected: this time, from a little boy who was not even counted, and therefore was excluded. It tells us that power can also come from the vulnerable.

3. Jesus' command: sit in the grass. It is time to be quiet, to focus, to reflect, to open hearts and minds to new possibilities, to be amazed at the unexpected.

4. Jesus' command: feed the people. Feed the hungry. The call is for us to provide critical presence, to be there in a situation of concrete need. This means accompaniment and solidarity.

5. Jesus blessed the bread and fish. This represents gratitude for the bread and fish and everything that they represented – the resources of the earth, the going out into the sea to fish for the family's sustenance, the labour of a mother who had to prepare food as she was hurrying to see Jesus, the vulnerability, the surprise, the sharing...

6. Jesus shared with the people. He shared the bread with everyone present – women and men, young and old, weak and strong, whole and infirm, believers and non-believers. It was a sort of communion, a breaking of barriers that divided peoples, one from the other. It was a ritual of inclusiveness.

7. Miracle 2: the unimaginable happened. After the five thousand had been fed – again, not counting the women and children – there were still twelve baskets of leftovers. The others must have been moved by the sharing, which led them to draw from resources that were hidden. It awakens us to the possibility that transformation can happen when good deeds are done.

### *Notes*

Power can come from the vulnerable and excluded.

Transformation can happen when good deeds are done.

The earth's resources are enough for everyone when shared.

No matter how vulnerable or weak we may be, we can still make miracles happen!

# The Lost Sheep

Meditation on Matthew 18:10-14

- 18:10 Let it not seem to you that one of these little ones is of no value; for I say to you that in heaven their angels see at all times the face of my Father in heaven.
- 18:11 []
- 18:12 What would you say now? if a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone wandering away, will he not let the ninety-nine be, and go to the mountains in search of the wandering one?
- 18:13 And if he comes across it, truly I say to you, he has more joy over it than over the ninety-nine which have not gone out of the way.
- 18:14 Even so it is not the pleasure of your Father in heaven for one of these little ones to come to destruction.

May grace and peace come upon you from our Heavenly Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Matthew 18:10–14 is about the parable of the lost sheep. We are familiar with this parable: it tells us that we should not forget the one sheep that has wandered away. It is very important, and we should try our best to find it whether it is in the midst of the mountains or the wilderness.

The message of the Scripture is that even though the lost sheep is just one per cent of all the sheep we have, and it is the minority, it is still very important, because it is God's precious life. In a world in which we are so busy, we always have struggles where we cannot have enough time to complete all the tasks involved and solve all the problems. Therefore we are tempted to satisfy the needs of the majority and listen to the voices of the multitude.

However, our Lord Jesus is subversive and always reminds us to challenge the view of the secular world. In the context of this passage, we are talking about the little children and the little ones. They symbolise those who do not have much strength and are the weak ones. This parable is also about sheep. Sheep are mild-mannered animals that greatly fear threats and danger. I have heard a story about sheep: Once a tourist went to visit a flock of sheep. He was so playful that he used an automatic folding umbrella to frighten the flock of sheep. When he unfolded the umbrella, many sheep were scared and fell to the ground. Sheep, the little ones, and the little children all symbolise those who are weak and feel scared easily. They cannot protect themselves and need others to help and protect them. Even though the lost sheep is only one out of ninety-nine, it needs more care and protection, because it cannot protect itself and is more vulnerable to injuries than the others. The wolves may fear approaching a large flock of sheep, but not only one left alone. The strong ones know how to find resources and protect themselves.



The lost sheep is a precious life which too is loved by our Lord. Our Father in heaven views all human beings as his children. He loves us and wants to protect us from harm. He especially likes to take care of the weak children who cannot protect themselves,

When facing a world striving for power, majority means strength, and we always tend to look upon and listen to somebody who has higher status and more supporters. They symbolise power, and power means pressure. We tend to bow down to authorities who apply great pressure. I remember the Japanese writer Haruki Murakami, who received an award presented by Israel in 2009. In the award presentation ceremony, he made a speech with an analogy about “the egg and the high wall”. He said that in this world, there are a lot of powers in each system and structure. These powers are cool and without life, oppressing lives without giving anybody freedom. But eggs are lives, even though they are weak and are easy to break. We still stand on the side of the eggs because these are lives that we cherish.

Let’s not forget any one of the little lives that need protection. They need our mercy. They are lives, they are our brothers and sisters who are also created by our almighty Lord. As Jesus said, if we serve the little ones, we are serving our Lord Jesus.

May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your heart and mind safe in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

You are my hiding place  
You always fill my heart  
With songs of deliverance  
Whenever I am afraid  
I will trust in You

I will trust in You  
Let the weak say  
I am strong  
In the strength of the Lord

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