

# THEOLOGY FROM THE GLOBAL SOUTH PERSPECTIVES ON CHRISTIAN AID'S WORK

POVERTY

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The ACT Alliance is a global coalition of churches and agencies engaged in development, humanitarian assistance and advocacy.

Front cover photograph: Clara Amblo Rosel sits in the small chapel in the multi-ethnic indigenous community of Santa Ana del Museruna, Bolivia. The community has been supported by Christian Aid partner CIPCA, which has provided local families with seeds, animals and agricultural training, and has helped them fight for their land rights.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The primary purpose of this paper is to complement Christian Aid's 2010 publication, *Theology and International Development*, which was written from the perspective of theologians in the global North. This new paper presents ideas and reflections from theologians across the global South and sets them within the framework of Christian Aid's relational theology. The paper may also be read in conjunction with Christian Aid's new publication *Partnership for Change: the power to end poverty* (April 2012), which sets out the organisation's strategic objectives for the years ahead.

Changing organisational priorities need to be reflected in a flexible theological approach, and the first two chapters of this report demonstrate how relational theological thinking underlies issues such as inequality and gender justice, and helps to address ways of working in a multi-faith context. The inclusion of southern perspectives allows these topics to be addressed in more detail than was possible in the 2010 paper.

The central chapters group theological reflection under the headings of Christian Aid's goals: equity and sustainability; just power relationships; and resilient and thriving societies.

These allow for the inclusion of particular southern perspectives on the familiar themes of climate change and HIV, as well as on such topics as globalisation and the global food crisis.

Theology and theological reflection in the context of international development have attracted unprecedented levels of interest in the last few years. As a result, several parts of this paper, in particular those dealing with theologies of partnership and with discrimination, are an outcome of theology consultations with church leaders and partners in Africa and Latin America during 2011.

In addition, 'doing' contextual theology is an increasingly popular activity among Christians in the global North. In this, we have much to learn from theologians in the South, and this is reflected in several contributions from South Africa (in chapters two and six).

As before, this remains a work in progress. Theological reflection is a luxury for hard-pressed people in many of the countries in which Christian Aid works. But the hope is that this paper will encourage other thinking to emerge and play a special part in Christian Aid's partnerships, and in our shared endeavours to bring about an end to poverty.

# INTRODUCTION

Christian Aid's 2010 publication, *Theology and International Development*, was a first attempt to bring together the biblical and doctrinal basis for our theological thinking and its application to the whole range of issues with which an international development agency is necessarily concerned. Drawing its inspiration from the work of the Swiss theologian Karl Barth and the wider movement generally known as 'Social Trinitarianism', that publication aimed to set out a Christian relational theology that would serve as a framework within which such matters as climate change, tax dodging and HIV could be discussed.

Given that its author was trained in a classical theological tradition, *Theology and International Development* did not pretend to be anything other than western in its inspiration and context. Since publication, its theology has been tested in wider contexts: for example, in relation to partnerships between development organisations and private enterprise that have an international focus; and in relation to gender-based violence – an issue that is of grave concern in some countries in which Christian Aid works. The fact that differently expressed theologies may emerge from the discussion of these issues and from other parts of the global South would not invalidate the use of a 'northern' theology in those contexts as well. In reality, however, the language of relationship is regularly and widely used, not least by people who would not see themselves as talking the language of relational theology.

It was always the intention to supplement the 2010 paper and its theology with theological reflections from the South. It is part of the ethos of Christian Aid that our partnership model includes listening to one another, learning from one another and doing theology together (see chapter two for more on this). It follows, therefore, that theologies from the South are important to us, both in developing our partnerships and also in formulating our common response to issues that are of mutual concern.

A large part of this new paper will, then, be given over to direct reflection from the global South. In particular, it will give space to topics that, for Christian Aid, have assumed greater prominence since 2010 – including, for example, gender justice and power relations – and will consider them, where possible, from a southern perspective. It will also give some attention to the changing nature of Christian Aid as an organisation. And it will hopefully provide additional theological detail where ongoing discussions and consultations have suggested that it is needed.

A word of warning, though. Much as we would like to highlight southern thinking on all matters of interest and concern to Christian Aid, we have to recognise that space for theological reflection is a luxury in contexts where communities are engaged in a daily struggle for survival and where faith leaders have their work cut out in sustaining their congregations. It is hoped that this paper might be used to facilitate discussions in places where such reflection might in due course be possible.

## **Religion and development: the international debate**

With the publication of *Theology and International Development*, it became evident that the paper tapped into a lively debate, not only in Britain and Ireland but also in continental Europe and beyond. And Christian Aid has engaged with these conversations with enthusiasm.

APRODEV, with its headquarters in Brussels, consists of 16 European development and humanitarian aid agencies who all work closely with the World Council of Churches and can therefore mostly be described as faith-based organisations. In summer 2011, APRODEV received a draft report on religion and development at its General Assembly, and requested a more fully worked version to be presented to it a year later. This exercise has highlighted the agencies' shared values and beliefs, while also revealing differences in ways of working, such as sources of funding, relationships with churches and the role of mission and evangelism.

There is widespread agreement among the agencies that human rights are of central importance, despite the lukewarm attitude to rights in some churches:

'We consider the Universal Declaration on Human Rights of the United Nations (1948) and the... more specific declarations of rights in relation to the Universal Declaration to be the most comprehensive and widely supported principles and framework to guide international development and cooperation. Human rights have been developed through complex, interacting historical processes, informed by experiences of oppression and totalitarianism, injustice and violations of human rights.

'Although human rights generally are consistent with biblical perspectives and priorities, they are not "owned" by Christians. St Paul, for example, adapts the ancient Greek virtues of good citizenship in his message (Philippians 4:8).

'Admittedly, there has been an ambiguous historical record with regard to "churches and human rights", such as using select passages of Scripture to deny equal rights to women or to justify the use of violence. In certain times and places, churches have been opposed to, rather than promoters of, basic human rights.

'We see these ambiguities also in other cultural contexts. Yet religions play an important role in interpretation and acceptance of human rights. Dialogical openness to other religions and cultural traditions can bring new perspectives to rights-based development work, for example the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam (1990).'<sup>1</sup>

The importance of human rights in the context of HIV was addressed in November 2011 at an international consultation on Theology, Human Rights and the HIV Response, organised by the Geneva-based Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance. The background paper to the consultation concluded:

'It seems that there is visible convergence between Christian understanding and mission for justice, compassion and human dignity, and the global human rights movement. There is room for concerted action on violations of human rights and for shared learning from people living with HIV and key populations on the most effective approaches. Continuing dialogue needs to be promoted and facilitated, to develop a shared understanding of the common values underlying human rights, and to articulate and implement effective, efficient and sustainable approaches that will move the world as rapidly as possible towards the "Three Zeroes" – zero new transmissions, zero AIDS-related deaths and zero discrimination.'<sup>2</sup>

Two factors arising out of these and similar discussions are worth bearing in mind. The first is the fact that religion and development is a distinction that is clearly made in the global North, but less so – or made in a different way – in the inherently religious countries of the global South. This is recognised by the UK's Department for International Development in its draft 'partnership principles':

'Most people in developing countries engage in some form of spiritual practice and believe that their faith is important and enables them to relate to the world... Faith groups feel they are motivated by values which are grounded in their religious beliefs. They can have a distinct understanding of development and a different relationship with poor people.'

The second key factor is the argument that concern for human rights is part of a solely northern agenda. This is

emphatically denied by European advocates, who point to the history of the Universal Declaration and the worldwide consultation that lay behind it. However, we should not forget that many theologians in the global South will be part of this religion-centred culture, and some of them will share a distrust of the human rights agenda: that is neither a criticism nor a plaudit, but simply a recognition of their context.

### **Southern theology and Christian Aid's strategy**

This paper will focus on aspects of Christian Aid's strategy, as outlined in the publication *Partnership for Change: the power to end poverty*. The chapter headings reflect the organisation's three main goals for empowerment, in furtherance of the aim to help marginalised or excluded communities free themselves from poverty. The goals identified are as follows: resilient and thriving societies, equity and sustainability, and just power relationships.

These headings are not as self-contained as they may appear. *Partnership for Change* is a blueprint for action that demands a rigorous separation of objectives. But when it comes to theological reflection, the categories are much less hard and fast. So the topics of gender and inequality are discussed in several places in this paper; climate change is treated in chapter five on 'Resilient and thriving societies', but might have been included under either of the other two headings as well; and the global food crisis, which appears in chapter three on 'Equity and sustainability', could equally well have come up for discussion under 'Resilient and thriving societies'.

Up to now, Christian Aid's work has been explicitly underpinned by relational theology formulated in the global North. With this paper, that theology has been developed and complemented by reflections of theologians from across the global South. As with the previous paper on theology and international development, this remains a work in progress and it is hoped that in due course it will be expanded and, where necessary, modified by contributions from theologians who share Christian Aid's vision of ending poverty in their own communities.

# 1 DEVELOPING RELATIONAL THEOLOGY

The theological model proposed in *Theology and International Development* deliberately allowed space for it to be developed in new or changing contexts. The three issues highlighted in this chapter are not new in the sense that they have long been a concern for Christian Aid partners. However, addressing gender-based violence and inequality are new priorities for the organisation; and working with people of other faiths, which was not treated in the 2010 paper but which is a vital part of Christian Aid's activity, has attracted too much significant attention from theologians to be overlooked here.

This chapter also recognises that theology is, in practice, being developed outside universities and churches: something that is becoming increasingly popular in the North as well as in the South. However, this 'uncontrolled' development can easily pose problems of orthodoxy, for example when Scripture is misused or misunderstood, and in dealing with this we have much to learn from our southern partners. So the issues discussed in this chapter conclude with reflections by the late Steve de Gruchy on 'doing theology' in a South African context.

## Gender justice

From 2012, gender becomes an increasingly important element in Christian Aid's strategy. It has already been widely recognised that women (who account for 75 per cent of the world's poor) are disproportionately affected by issues such as HIV and climate change. And closely related to this is the incidence of gender-based violence.

Southern women theologians, in particular, have highlighted violence in their regions, and have launched some scathing attacks on the churches both for their failure to address violence against women and for the patriarchal attitudes that persist within the churches, which they see as contributing significantly to the problem.

In 2011 the **University of KwaZulu-Natal** published *Religion and HIV and AIDS: Charting the Terrain*. Edited by Beverley Haddad, this is a review of the literature on all aspects of the subject, running to over 400 pages. In a chapter entitled 'Transforming masculinities towards gender justice', Adriaan van Klinken surveys the work of African women theologians in particular on the subject of sexual violence.

'[African women theologians] [i]n their publications on HIV and AIDS have addressed different forms of sexual violence: the strategic use of sexual violence

as an instrument of war in the recent history of genocide and violence in countries like Rwanda and Congo; sexual violence in formal or institutional relations such as at schools and in the workplace and churches; and sexual violence in domestic spheres. These women theologians, while addressing different contexts in which sexual violence takes place, all understand this violence in terms of power. [Isabel Apawo] Phiri states: "At the centre of violence against women is a demonstration of who is in power".<sup>3</sup> As with sexual decision making, sexual violence raises the issue of male domination in sexual relationships. Trying to explain situations of sexual violence, Tinyiko Maluleke and Sarojini Nadar point to what they call the unholy trinity of religion, culture and the subsequent power of gender socialization as reinforcing a culture of violence against women.<sup>4</sup> With regard to the role of religion they note that sacred texts are often used by religious leaders to justify sexual violence. This is supported by Phiri in her work with faith communities on sexual violence where she found the belief that the man owns the woman in a marriage relationship. Phiri notes that this facilitates sexual violence because sex is used as a weapon of domination.<sup>5</sup> Likewise, [Fulata Lusungu] Moyo points out that women are taught in church to keep silent about violence in marriage and again she explains this from the notion of male headship: "As the head, the man deserves all the respect. Therefore anything that would lead to his losing respect should not be made known to others."<sup>6</sup> Further, Maluleke and Nadar note that women do not receive support from their religious traditions in cases of violence.<sup>7</sup> This observation is confirmed by Beverley Haddad who points to the silence of churches on issues of violence against women and appeals for the breaking of this silence by calling men to account:

"The church can no longer assert to be the moral watchdog of society without challenging men to take responsibility for their sexual behaviour. Issues of gender violence, HIV/AIDS, and the links between the two cannot be dealt with without addressing men's abuse of power in relating to women, and dare I suggest without addressing the abuse of power within the structures of the church. One cannot theologise nor moralise while patriarchy continues unabated... Attitudinal and behaviour patterns of men in church communities

have to change, and the onus is largely on the primarily male leadership to effect this change.”<sup>8</sup>

‘So here patriarchy is presented as the source of men’s abuse of power and churches are challenged to address this.’<sup>9</sup>

A Latin American perspective is provided by **ISEAT (Instituto Superior Ecueménico Andino de Teología)** in Bolivia. Its publication by Irene Tokarski on gender equality adopts an approach that reflects relational theology:

‘Relationality opens up to us a more inclusive and experimental perspective and invites us to be continually understanding each other as human beings that form part of the vital fabric of life. This relationality is characterised by being neither hierarchical nor a pyramid in form: rather it evokes a rounded, circular image and yet at the same time is open-ended and full of interconnections. It is a distinctive way of thinking of the world and of the human race. This image allows us to integrate better different experiences and distinctive aspects of a common problem, it gives greater recognition to the unexpected and can be more appropriately adapted to women’s everyday home life. In this paradigm of life, relationality opens for us a way to an interdependent justice, thus wiping out the dualism that identifies women with nature and men with reason, the spirit or the divine.’

The writer is clear-sighted about the divisions and opposition that result from pursuing a policy of gender equality:

‘Transforming a patriarchal culture of domination is not possible without disturbing underlying conflicts. Jesus told us that he came to put fire and dissent on earth (Luke 12:49-53). But there are different ways of confronting these conflicts.

‘We can go on avoiding conflicts but that would simply be to put them off. We can avoid them or keep giving in to the imposition of domination, but it is not possible to build the kingdom of justice like that. Jesus did not avoid conflicts but resisted injustice and violence: “If anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also” (Matthew 5:39).

‘...However we find more ways of transforming our reality if we can find a variety of solutions to our conflicts. Transformation seeks to create a bigger pie and share it out with everyone. That is to say, create

more and more possibilities for men and women in constructing new concepts of gender. In this way we can arrive at a solution where everyone wins something.

‘This form of struggle and of confronting conflicts along the way demands a lot of imagination and creativity, willingness to change, questioning whether it will always be like this, and the capacity to allow ourselves to be transformed.’

And Tokarski concludes with a resounding challenge to the churches:

‘We believe that the process of negotiation and transformation has begun... Looking at the history of our churches, it is inconceivable that we continue to allow ourselves the luxury of scorning the contribution of women.

‘With this process begun, in which we dare to change and be changed/transformed by others, we fear, even dread, resistance. Rational arguments do not help much; only love overcomes fear. We must fear less and love more, with respect and justice.’<sup>10</sup>

## **Inequality**

The relationships that are the particular focus of thinking theologically about international development are all marked to some degree by disparity in power relations. In the case of gender-based violence, this will be revealed in the obvious exercise of an individual’s greater physical strength. Where multinationals deprive poor countries of the taxes due to them, their power is rooted deep in global financial structures, but it is a power imbalance nonetheless.

In Latin America the main cause of poverty is seen specifically as inequality, which is most obviously seen in the gap between rich and poor people. Underlying and perpetuating that inequality is discrimination, particularly on the grounds of race and, related to that, religion.

In order to address inequality, as a preliminary to theological reflection we need first to identify its forms. This was an approach that was followed at a Christian Aid consultation held in September 2011 in Copacabana, Bolivia, under the title ‘**South American inter-faith dialogue on inequalities**’. Over three days, representatives from Bolivia, Brazil, Peru and Colombia discussed the nature of inequality in their own social contexts and considered the role of their respective religions – Christianity (represented by Roman

Catholics, Methodists and Anglicans), Andean religion and the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé religion – in promoting equality.

One charge that was levelled at the church, and which of course is not peculiar to Latin America, is that the church itself legitimises unequal structures. But it would be a mistake to point only to gender – the most obvious manifestation of inequality in the church worldwide. In the South American context, young people and indigenous people were also quoted as being systematically excluded from the areas of church life where they would be able to bring much needed renewal. The requirement to look at ourselves and to search out inequality applies just as much to the church community as to the socio-political one.

It was further suggested that structural discrimination in a church setting is possible because theology is manipulated in order to create and perpetuate inequalities. The example cited was of prosperity gospel teaching, where theology is used to create a rich/poor divide between the leaders of the church and their people.

Power itself is of course ambiguous, and its ambiguity is clear in mainstream theological thinking. Is it positive (as in the case of Jesus exercising his divine authority over the forces of nature and disease, and challenging the legitimacy of earthly structures), or is it negative (the irresistible force of God in Old Testament theology, for example)?

There is a similar dilemma in reflecting on contemporary inequalities. In seeking to ‘empower’ people, are we giving power to passive recipients? Is acting against inequality paternalistic? Or is it the opposite – a process that leads to self-empowerment? The need for a constant questioning that stems from humility is unmistakable.

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## What characteristics of God inspire us to work for equality?

- God is father and mother – and so moves the community towards equality.
- God shows unbounded love – as Jesus embraced people on the fringes of society.
- God reveals solidarity with human beings.
- God is a fighter – ‘lutador’ in Portuguese (Spanish: ‘luchador’) – and in fighting, brings about transformation.
- God builds community, as is commemorated in the Eucharist.

In reflecting theologically on these matters, the delegates considered the question: ‘What characteristics of God inspire us to work for equality?’ (see box, below left). Further to that discussion, they considered how we express the Trinity: as a triangle, with God the Father at the apex, or as a circle that leads to a dance (a rondo)? The model we choose is significant if we are to understand the three Persons of God as modelling equality.

The view of God as a God of justice and of compassion was not absent from this discussion, but it was not the immediate reaction of the delegates. The divine attributes they highlighted may perhaps be seen as above all community values, while the interesting addition of the fighter God surely reflects the regional context of memories of civil war in the recent past.

In relational theology, the characteristics that we discern in God also characterise our relationships with one another. So the specific cultural contexts that throw new light on the perceived nature of God help to develop the relational model still further.

## Interfaith relations: extending relational thinking

Christian Aid supports a significant number of partners whose work includes building relationships with different faith groups. Interfaith working is perhaps most evident in the context of disasters, where, for example, a Muslim NGO may be the organisation best placed to provide assistance on the ground. Alternatively, the interfaith element may be less obvious but equally important as, for example, the provision of training in HIV prevention given by Christian groups but opened up to leaders of other faiths as well. The work that has been done by the Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh in training local imams is a case in point. Yet again, interfaith working may be a prerequisite, as in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory, where Christian Aid’s partner Al-Haq (in Ramallah) monitors abuses by both sides in the conflict.

However, encouraging different faith groups to work together out of necessity, or because of a common interest, is a far cry from integrating such mutual working into the theological thinking of those groups in any systematic way. Yet a theology that has relationships at its core should surely be able to formulate a view as to what constitutes ‘good’ relationships with people of other faiths.

A specialist in interfaith working, Alan Race, has distinguished two distinct approaches to interfaith dialogue. The first he terms a 'tradition-specific' approach, which he defines as follows: 'Dialogue is a form of relationship that expands one's own horizons of faith and leads to a transformation of outlook without any pretension to stand outside of one's own faith-tradition.'<sup>11</sup> This approach is probably the most common in the global South, although some groups may stop short of admitting any expansion of their personal faith. This reluctance stems from the fear that each faith will lose its distinctive view of God, which can all too easily result in the claim that 'we all believe the same thing really', when we clearly do not.

Race calls his second approach 'deep-dialogue', which he sees as resulting in a 'new religious consciousness'<sup>12</sup> where participants go beyond tolerance of other religions and allow themselves to be transformed by their interaction. He incorporates both approaches into a 'dialogue grid',<sup>13</sup> which looks like this:

	<b>Style of dialogue</b>	<b>Goal of dialogue</b>	<b>Fruit of dialogue</b>
<b>Process A:</b>	exchange	understanding	discovery
<b>Process B:</b>	negotiation	tolerance	acceptance
<b>Process C:</b>	interaction	communion	transformation

By far, the majority of interfaith encounters are represented in processes A and B and model a tradition-specific approach. These processes are easily represented in terms of relational theology, in that they create or restore relationships between groups of human beings. Process C, modelling a 'deep-dialogue' approach, is much more radical in the relationships it reflects: a transformation of the relationship between human beings and God, as well as with one another.

And such transformation is exemplified by the work of the Beirut-based NGO ADYAN, and spelt out in the theology that inspires it.

### **ADYAN, Lebanon and a theology of encounter**

The **Lebanese Foundation for Interfaith Studies and Spiritual Solidarity (the ADYAN Foundation)** in Beirut is an independent multi-faith NGO, headed up by an academic at St Joseph's University, **Fr Fadi Daou**. ADYAN aims to spread a culture of reconciliation, mutual understanding and solidarity between people from different religious groups, by means of shared activities, conferences and so on,

focusing in particular on young people. Fr Daou describes its work as follows:

'Members are engaged in different communities, but their testimony is that it is not just individual religions that invite their members to do good to one another: it goes beyond that and also beyond tolerance. Solidarity is based not only on civic values but on faith experiences. People are tolerant of other religions because we believe that we have something in common with others and so we undertake religious studies together. This promotes a better understanding of each religion and of issues in our wider society.

'We don't do dialogue in the formal sense. We go beyond that by studying together and promoting common values. There is an annual spiritual solidarity day on the last Saturday in October. It focuses on a single shared value, such as peace, and we ask religious leaders to agree on a common text to express that value, and celebrate both our unity and our specificity. It is based on awareness and critical reflection: it's not enough to say "we're all brothers and sisters so no problem". Our role is to push people to go further than just having a nice time together. For example, we will look at religious pluralism not just from a faith perspective but from a social and political viewpoint as well.'<sup>14</sup>

### **Towards a 'theology of encounter' or 'theology of the other'**

Fr Daou talks about developing a theology through dialogue, for example a theology of encounter that is approached from Muslim and Christian perspectives, and both in the context of the Middle East. This is not a traditional Christian-Muslim dialogue; rather it is a discussion through academic dialogue. And he concludes that 'sharing a Middle East perspective on universal issues leads to a theology of the other'.

These ideas have also been developed by **Dr Nayla Tabbara**, a Sunni Muslim who lectures in the science of religions at St Joseph's University in Lebanon and works closely with Fr Daou. In an article entitled 'Christians and Muslims of the Arab Near East: what kind of encounter?'<sup>15</sup> she argues that near-eastern Islam is caught up in a 'theological and identity crisis' that has its roots in the beginnings of Islam, when the then new religion was taken hostage by politics. She then asks whether Eastern Christians are hostage to this crisis, before outlining a theology of Christian-Muslim encounter.

There are three pairs of concepts and a final outcome in her outline:

- (a) *Recognition and reciprocity*: ‘Muslims cannot open up to the other without a minimum of reciprocity. Recognizing the religions of the Book, Muslims need to be recognized as belonging to a holy religion if they are to embark on a path of faith among people of different revealed religions... Encounter can only happen when one is recognized.’ Yet, says Dr Tabbara, although the Christian religion and its diversity is recognised in the Quran, this theological position is not always followed.
- (b) *Witness and mutual responsibility*: ‘Besides agreements between human beings, that we are commanded to observe, the Quran speaks of an agreement between God and human beings that theologians call “the primordial covenant” [between God and the sons of Adam]. So recipients of God’s messages, Jews, Christians, and Muslims, are called to be witnesses of God. They are called to be pure, good, modest, but above all just [equitable], thinking and judging according to God’s ethics and not an ethics based on ignorance which always privileges those who are rich and influential.’ So an encounter between Christians and Muslims takes place in a context of mutual recognition and mutual reciprocity: they help one another to be true witnesses to God.
- (c) *Knowledge and emulation*: to get to know the other’s religion, beliefs, practices and values. ‘This is not only with the aim of getting to know each other better but to know oneself better by articulating theological discourse and communicating it to others. It is also an invitation to emulate others through good works, through caring for one another and creation and through acts of personal devotion.’
- (d) *The other’s path to God*: this is Fr Daou’s spiritual solidarity, ‘where someone is no longer beside another, but they are together before God. Moreover, the other becomes the mirror of God. In practical terms in the Near East this means that encounter with the other becomes Encounter with God; and one’s neighbours are Christians and Muslims alike.’

According to Dr Tabbara, the aim of this ‘Christian-Muslim encounter’ is this ultimate spiritual solidarity, ‘where the gaze is directed to the other-world, resolving at the same time problems in this one, namely reciprocal recognition and, on the part of Muslims, the giving up of the fiction of

an Islamic state and medieval paradigms’. This is no mere theorising. At ADYAN events, participants do indeed pray together and this experience feeds into their engagement in their own communities. The relational model is obvious, as human beings repair their relationship with [their] God and with one another. It seems that for this group, it is the process of establishing a spiritual solidarity – the shared time and place of prayer – that characterises the relationship between their religions, without the need to confess a shared (and possibly compromised) form of belief. Dr Tabbara cites a particularly striking visual example of this process: St Catherine’s monastery in Egypt’s Sinai desert, where a mosque has been constructed within the grounds of the monastery to enable Muslim workers to pray there.

While it is a theology that is still in its early stages of formulation, this particular approach to interfaith work, emerging out of a specific Middle Eastern context, goes far beyond the rather weak expressions of goodwill that are familiar from interfaith meetings in the global North. Moreover, as the academics quoted here recognise, it fits extremely well with relational theology, in that it reinforces many of its precepts and deepens its expression of spirituality. It is further developed in the recent thinking (though not necessarily the practice) of theologians in the global North. Alan Race suggests that such an approach leads to ‘interspirituality’, while Keith Ward refers to ‘convergent spirituality’<sup>16</sup> – although the idea of different faiths contributing diverse perspectives on a single truth may be a step too far for those approaching interfaith dialogue from a tradition-specific point of view.

### **Doing theology: learning from our partners**

The **University of KwaZulu-Natal** is a long-standing partner of Christian Aid. It is a partnership that is much more than a funding relationship<sup>17</sup> and one that involves the frequent exchange of ideas. Over a number of years, several academics in the School of Religion and Theology, most notably **Gerald West** and the late **Steve de Gruchy**, have developed ways of ‘doing theology’ with communities of lay people who have no theological training, and in particular with communities of people who are poor or marginalised.

In Britain and Ireland at the present time there are a significant number of local groups who are also keen on doing theology for themselves, often (but by no means always) including reflection on the context in which they live. This is clearly an area in which we can learn from the work

## ‘Unless theological reflection on the ground remains in dialogue with previous generations of Christians, as well as with Christians from other cultures and contexts, it can become something less than theology’

Steve de Gruchy

and experience of our partners rather than try to reinvent the wheel ourselves, perhaps less than successfully. Since Gerald West’s thinking will feature in more detail in chapter six, this section deals with some of the challenges of doing theology that are faced by northern and southern theologians alike.

In an article published in 1999,<sup>18</sup> while he was working at the Kalahari Desert School of Theology,<sup>19</sup> Steve de Gruchy examined the relationship between academic theology and theological educators, and the ‘people of God in Africa’ – a relationship that carries overtones of unequal power. This is partly to do with the inequality between people who are highly educated and those who are not. Underlying this is a further inequality: between the Bible as a highly revered book, and the often less than respected insights of the worshipping community. The fact that the Bible is often the only book in a poor home ‘gives it a power beyond and different to that ascribed by traditional theology, even of the fundamentalist kind’.

‘Theology in Africa has to address the problem of the captivity of and by the Bible. It is clear to me that amongst the rural Christian communities that I work with, the Bible is imprisoned in a strange set of preconceived notions that blunts its radical message and leads in turn to it becoming a tool of control. For all the reverence for the Bible, there has been little recognition of the fundamental message of the Bible – grace. The Bible has become a rulebook, a code of law, that lays down the rights and wrongs of God against the community and the internal critique of such a notion in the very Bible itself is not appreciated.’<sup>20</sup>

De Gruchy goes on to consider whether so-called contextual theology is genuinely contextual, and concludes that it is not, because so much of it happens in relatively affluent urban areas.

‘If theology in Africa is to be done contextually, then it also has to be done rurally... the very rhythm and experience of life in the rural areas has to shape theological reflection... Far from the imposing testimony to the power of human beings afforded by big cities, the rural areas with their majestic views, large skies, and desperate reliance upon rain and sun on the one hand, and their pathetic scenes of poverty and loneliness on the other, hold before humanity a truth of God and the world that theology cannot afford to lose.’<sup>21</sup>

Finally he reflects on knowledge as power:

‘[T]o take the content of the faith from a western European background and dump it upon people in Africa is extremely disempowering. Yet at the same time to withhold and refuse to share the content can itself be disempowering. We all know the adage that knowledge is power, and the choice by those who have had the benefit of a classical theological training to withhold that knowledge from others because it is deemed irrelevant to their situation, can be paternalistic...

‘This point is underlined by another concern: contextual theology can become myopic and isolationist. Unless theological reflection on the ground remains in dialogue with previous generations of Christians, as well as with Christians from other cultures and contexts, it can become something less than theology. So doing theology in Africa needs a continued discussion and sharing of the tradition and wisdom of the wider church family. The key concern is to find creative ways to share this content in relationship to the over-riding concern to impart a process. So we recognize that we are talking not just about the contextualization of theology, but also the contextualization of methodology.’<sup>22</sup>

### African Instituted Churches (AICs)

‘The overall purpose of AICs is to use African world views, philosophies, languages and cultures to interpret the Christian faith and, to a certain extent, to integrate them into Christianity...

‘In their attempts to make Christianity more meaningful and relevant to their constituencies, AICs encounter some challenges. Notable among them is the formulation of theology without being guided by the experience of the wider church – the problems the wider church has grappled with and the resultant decisions that have been taken. There is also the challenge of analysing some

cultural beliefs and practices and deciding what is compatible with Scripture and what is contrary to it. Another challenge is accessing theological education that provides a holistic view of culture and theology...

‘AICs have attempted, with considerable success, to rid Christianity of some western cultural and philosophical embellishments, thereby making it more appealing to Africans. What remains is for African Christian scholars to further assist them in developing Christian theologies that are thoroughly African yet truly biblical.’<sup>23</sup>

It is all too easy to separate the doing of theology in a distinctive African context from our own efforts to do theology together in our local church and communities. But however much we may want to believe that we do not face the same pitfalls, the experience of the KwaZulu-Natal academics clearly suggests that we do, with the added danger that we may not recognise them.

The challenges of doing contextual theology are summed up in the experience of the African Instituted Churches, who have successfully integrated their context into their expressions of faith, but not always in a way that is consistent with the biblical teaching that is so important to them. (See bottom of previous page.)

So the experience of our partners and of churches in the South, as reflected in the extracts above, alerts us to the danger of not reflecting the genuine context in which we live; it draws our attention to the unequal power between the people leading (or simply facilitating) theological discussion and those who take part in it; it reminds us that some may use the 'power' of the Bible for their own ends; and it highlights the importance of the wider context of being Christian, both historically and geographically.

## 2 A CHANGING ORGANISATION INFORMED BY THEOLOGY

*'Our supporters and partners have taught us that change happens only when people fight hard for it, and the wider the web of involvement, the greater the impact... In the past our partners have almost exclusively been frontline civil society organisations and church-based groups. Those partnerships will strengthen. Yet long experience teaches us that in order to fight poverty we must actively seek to enter into partnership with a much wider group of partners and allies.'*  
– Partnership for Change, p13

### Changing ways of working: theologies of partnership

The 'partnership' relationship between Christian Aid and a variety of grassroots and/or faith-based organisations has always been central to our work, however the nature of that partnership is changing. A Christian Aid perspectives paper on partnership published in October 2004 states that 'the terms "partnership" and "partner" are generally used loosely and imprecisely within the organisation to refer to those southern and northern organisations with which Christian Aid has a funding relationship'. It restates the conviction that working through local partner organisations 'is more likely to ensure lasting, locally owned development and the eradication of poverty and injustice'.

The 2004 paper also suggests that the concept of partnership was becoming used more widely, for example, in 'relationships with our own supporters and donors,

including government agencies such as the Department for International Development and Development Cooperation Ireland'. It is important to bear in mind, though, that these individuals and agencies may not see themselves as our partners, and may even reject the term, in which case the term 'partner' is not really appropriate.

It is nonetheless true that the concept of partnership is evolving and, in the future, is likely to embrace non-funding relationships as well as funding ones. This is already the case where, for example, Christian Aid offers its partner organisations accompaniment rather than direct funding. In determining who our partners are, and the nature of our relationship with them, a theological approach helps pinpoint what is required of all of us for the relationship to work well.

In March 2011, representatives of Christian Aid met in Nairobi with representatives of the **Anglican Communion** to reflect on partnership. The consultation brought together representatives of both bodies from both the UK and Africa. They received case studies of partnership in different countries and reflected on the nature and characteristics of partnership, as well as its theological basis. The actors identified were as follows: Christian Aid; British churches and supporters; churches overseas; the brokers of relationships; and the recipients of both aid and advocacy. Fringe players such as advisors or consultants might also be included. The contextual importance of partnerships was also stressed.

### A case study of partnership<sup>24</sup>

**Council of Anglican Provinces of Africa (CAPA)** in partnership with Christian Aid: a multi-faith SAVE project in three Anglican Provinces in Africa (the DRC, Kenya and Nigeria).

There were three key questions relating to positive experiences, challenges and theological motivation, as follows:

(i) What is good about this partnership?

- It was based on shared convictions and aspirations.

- It was strategic: Christian Aid opted to work with CAPA because of the added value it would bring to the programme (CAPA's extensive coverage, influential base and experience in mobilising and coordinating continental initiatives).

- It was empowering of CAPA and the three Anglican Provinces.

(ii) What is challenging about this partnership?

- The choice of where to intervene was influenced

by Christian Aid's geographical focus.

- CAPA would want to use an intervention such as SAVE as an entry into the community and to move the community into addressing other pressing social problems, but Christian Aid has yet to embrace such an approach.

(iii) What is the theological motivation?

- Jesus came so that people might have life in all its fullness (John 10:10). As his disciples we are to

protect people from those things that deprive them of the fullness of life that God intended for them and promote those things that enhance the quality of life.

- Jesus shared our vulnerability. Although he knew no sin, he died for us. Christians who may not be living with HIV have a responsibility to those who suffer among us because of the virus.
- Jesus died for all. So we too must reach out to all people without discrimination.

## ‘There is a spiritual as well as a physical dimension to development’

Christian Aid consultation on partnership, Nairobi

### Comment

The essence of this partnership is encapsulated in the opening statement: that it was based on ‘shared convictions and aspirations’. Theologically, this is understood to be based on the relationship between those who are and those who are not affected by HIV. There is no suggestion that this is an unequal relationship. Rather, it is one *rooted in the nature of Jesus Christ who ‘shared our vulnerability’*. Since we are all the vulnerable children of God, we have a responsibility to respond to our brothers and sisters in need. Surprisingly, this distinctive shared vulnerability was not specified in the more general theological understanding of members of the consultation (see below), although it could be said to be subsumed in the idea of God entering into relationship with human beings.

There is, nonetheless, an honest acknowledgement of differences between the policies of the two organisations; and the importance of this, alongside shared values and a shared prophetic vision, was recognised by the consultation when they came to look at the characteristics of partnership. Other partnership qualities that were highlighted included ‘reconciling’, ‘transparency’, ‘trust’ and mutual ‘stewardship of our gifts and giftings’. These closely reflected the theological characteristics that were subsequently discerned by the participants.

### The theological basis of partnership

Independently of the case studies, the participants in the consultation were invited to respond to the following question:

*What understanding of God underlies our work in partnership?*

To which they responded:

- God is all-powerful, transcendent, unknowable.
- God is forgiving.
- God is compassionate.
- We are invited to share in God’s vision and/or mission.
- God created us equal and free.
- God is characterised by freedom and justice.
- God is generous, and gives us stewardship of his gifts.
- God enters into relationship.

While the forgiving and compassionate nature of God is clearly a model for partners’ behaviour to one another, the transcendent nature of God seems to reflect the recognition that partnership brings its own unforeseen rewards and consequences. The stewardship of God’s gifts and participation in God’s mission, on the other hand, are both indicators of a common, shared behaviour.

Although the two topics were discussed at different times, it would have been surprising if the theological understanding of partnership, as rooted in people’s understanding of God, had not reflected something of their non-theological reflection as well. So, for example, the generosity of God in giving us stewardship of creation is echoed in the understanding of partnership as shared stewardship. The fact of God creating us equal and free underlies the fact that differences will arise between partners, while the forgiving, reconciling characteristic of God is seen as reflected in the partners themselves.

### The role of mission

When North meets South, the question of mission and evangelism is often the elephant in the room. Christian Aid does not engage in evangelism – a policy that many of our faith-based partners find almost incomprehensible. It therefore seems sensible to clarify the faith element (from the point of view of both partners) in the partnership relationship.

The Nairobi consultation suggested the following faith aspects, which may be either implicit or explicit in the work of partners:

- Mission and development is not the same thing as pure evangelism.
- Christian Aid is demonstrating a form of Christian witness insofar as it is putting faith into action.
- Staff motivation may stem from Christian faith.
- Working together may result in people growing in faith.
- Both the churches and Christian Aid have a holistic mission.
- There is a spiritual as well as a physical dimension to development [seen most clearly in HIV work].
- Both partners are working on the basis of gospel values.

Statements along these lines would seem to be helpful in order to avoid misunderstanding and false preconceptions.

## Conclusion

The Nairobi consultation enabled representatives to do theology together, although the case study was presented from a specifically southern theological viewpoint. The experience is an important one, not least because it was in a context that may in the future be the setting for further division, even schism, in the Anglican Communion. How will Christian Aid work with its partners if, say, the Anglican church in Kenya or Nigeria breaks away from the Anglican Communion over the issues of homosexuality and women bishops? This potential schism is rooted in forms of discrimination that are in direct conflict with Christian Aid's beliefs and, arguably, with biblical teaching. If partnership is to survive and transcend such differences, a shared theology and mutual understanding of the underlying faith principles that inspire us are surely essential. We cannot pretend those differences do not exist. As the participants in the consultation recognised, we have to acknowledge our differences and work together on the basis of the principles of faith that we share.

In the wider context of eradicating poverty, it is always worth bearing in mind that faith-based organisations have better access than most to religious leaders whose views are contrary to their own. Faith-based organisations are in a position to support processes that allow people from both the North and South to change, and the values that they have in common can act as a framework for discussions and partnership.

The final Statement of Commitment from Nairobi referred to 'deepening our understanding of the relational nature of partnership, grounded in a spirit of mutuality and careful stewardship of God's resources entrusted to us for the poor and vulnerable', and to 'reflecting theologically together to understand our different and complementary gifts and strengths as we are each called to participate in God's mission and action in the world'. How we go about this task of deepening our mutual understanding will surely influence our approach to partnership in years to come.

## Changing goals: enterprise development in the global South

*'God's relationality is one that is also characterised by innovation and creativity, bringing forth new patterns of existence and new forms of wealth.'* – Peter Sedgwick.<sup>25</sup>

Christian Aid's ambition to see poverty eradicated cannot be realised without the commitment and engagement of

the private sector. This necessarily expands the idea of partnership, with Christian Aid acting as a broker, a bridge between southern partners and businesses in either the South or the North, in addition to its more traditional role of enabling people and communities to move out of poverty by setting up their own small businesses.

The key challenge in this new kind of relationship lies in the unequal power of the parties involved. Inevitably business will hold the power, and there will always be the temptation for that power to be misused. So an important question is whether inviting business to participate directly in the work of poverty eradication will help to repair the damaged relationship between rich and poor (by reducing the inequality between them), or harm it further (by increasing inequality still more). And a further question is whether such innovative engagement will be characterised by the human creativity that Sedgwick believes should be celebrated. For Christian Aid, the role of broker includes ensuring that it is not the case of just a few people benefiting disproportionately from a commercial relationship.

While Christian business leaders in the global North, such as Stephen Green and Charles Green, have argued that business is a force for good and for transforming society, there are no equivalent individual voices to be heard in the South. On the other hand, there are other voices to be heard worldwide, such as the voice of the Quakers, whose principles are relevant to new forms of enterprise development. For example,

*'The guiding principle which Friends should keep in mind in making an income, whether by work or by investment, should be the good of others and of the community at large, and not simply of themselves or their own family. Friends should, even at the risk of loss, strive to be strictly honest and truthful in their dealings; should refuse to manufacture or deal in commodities that are hurtful, and should be vigilant against obtaining an undue profit at the cost of the community. If Friends are investing, thought should be given, not only to security and the rate of interest, but to the conditions under which the income is produced and the effect which the investment may have on the welfare of all, through social or environmental impact, at home or elsewhere.'*<sup>26</sup>

Just as individual Christians in the global North have commented on the ethics and values of the business world, so too individual voices in the South are beginning

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to emerge from this new way of approaching development. Through Christian Aid's partnership with the coffee-growing collective Soppexcca in Nicaragua, many poor people have been able to set up their own business. One of them, Miguel Angel Zelaya, understands the undertaking in terms of national and international relationships, with a view of God that reflects his own business context: 'God is in charge of the inner part of us. He demands honesty, love and responsibility to your neighbour. That's why Soppexcca does what it does. Reaching out to others is very human and very Christian. That's why our brothers in Europe are reaching out to us. And I will pray for them too, because God has no limit and no distance.'<sup>27</sup>

While a developed reflection on business that might reflect God's gift of creativity and Christian Aid's partnership values has yet to emerge from our southern partners, it is clearly an area of exciting potential, both practically and theologically.

# 3 EQUITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

*'Instead of globalizing the market and profit mechanisms, we need to globalize other cultural values, such as solidarity, collective compassion for victims, respect for cultures, sharing of goods, effective integration with nature, and feelings of humanity and mercy for the humiliated and offended.'* – Leonardo Boff<sup>28</sup>

*'Inequality is the main block to rooting out poverty from the world... Growth in the world needs to be constrained and its benefits shared more equally. We need alternative models of economic development and transformation of global systems to allow everyone to play a productive role...'* – Partnership for Change, p11

## Challenging globalisation

**Hope S Antone** from the Philippines is a distinguished theologian who until recently worked for Christian Aid's partner the Christian Conference of Asia. Antone has drawn attention to the ambiguity of globalisation. For some it is 'a magic wand which can eliminate poverty from Asia', while for others, whom she characterises as 'activists and workers with people', it is divisive and exploitative – both of people and the planet. So, she argues, globalisation really means 'a new colonialism that manifests itself through *economic domination* [where transnational corporations take advantage of cheap materials and cheap labour], *cultural aggression* [directed against local people's values, lifestyles and the environment], and *political imperialism* [that is, unjust power relations]. In addition to this unholy trinity is the effect of globalisation on the environment – *a real ecological threat*.'

Antone highlights two responses to this, both relating not so much to economics as to people's religious and spiritual lives:

'Many of our Asian peoples, including some churches, do not see globalisation as a problem. Hence for them, the **response is one of bliss and contentment** in being a part of the "borderless world" or the "global village" that has been made possible through internet links, ecumenical travel and ecumenical networking. They even recognise globalisation as having made it possible for Christianity to return to and take root in Asia. As such, they also believe that globalisation can be a means to **globalise Christianity** further in order to fulfil Christ's Great Commission in such a plural region as Asia...

'Another response is at the opposite pole of globalisation. If globalisation is seen as "a process

which brings rapid and unsettling change into traditional societies", then one response takes the form of **fundamentalism** or the "return to the old stable way of life"... Fundamentalism is basically a "reactionary emotional movement" among those who are experiencing rapid disintegration of their cultures, their traditions, their beliefs and ways of life. Consequently, fundamentalism is expressed in different ways: intentional re-education or indoctrination of the members of the group, a strong intolerance of or enmity towards others outside the group or those deemed to be disloyal to the group, or even violence against those who are seen as a threat to the group. This is true of religious fundamentalism, which does not only occur in non-Christian religions but also within some Christian groups.

'So the impact of globalisation upon the religious or spiritual life of the people is very real. Instead of dismissing the so-called fundamentalists, some ecumenical Asian Christians are now trying to understand what their concerns really are. One very clear concern, for example, is the need to challenge the values of the present culture, which are threatening the social fabric of society. In fact, these values are the very ones embodied in and promoted by the ways of transnational corporations and the global lending institutions – consumerism, individualism, materialism, competitiveness, indebtedness, and profit-oriented mentality.'<sup>29</sup>

## Changing the global economy

Theologians in both Latin America and Africa have argued for a development of liberation theology that would enable theologians to take account of complexity of today's globalised society and that would enable them to move beyond their immediate context.

The Kenyan theologian **Professor Jesse N K Mugambi** has argued for what he terms a 'theology of reconstruction'. While his starting point is African liberation theologies, there is a challenge then to take on the task of reconstruction once the oppressor has relinquished power, which has the corresponding challenge of doing theology in a new way.

Professor Mugambi's model is the Old Testament book of Nehemiah, whose theme of rebuilding ranges from families, to societies, to entire nations:

## ‘The goods of the earth were created by God to be used wisely by all. . . they must be shared equitably, in accordance with justice and charity’

The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church

‘At this time in history, the figure of Nehemiah is most encouraging and most inspiring for Africa today. We can find and emulate prophets of hope, who encourage the poor and weak to keep struggling, even in the midst of great disaster.’

He goes on to suggest that ‘Jesus Christ was more of a reconstruction theologian than a liberation theologian’, and he sees the Sermon on the Mount as an outline of ‘reconstructive’ theology, pointing out that a new social consciousness was needed if the Aramaic community were to regain their dignity under the Roman Empire,<sup>30</sup> although this may not be the ideal parallel to draw with Africa today.

A further biblical model, in his view, is Revelation 21:1-5, which he interprets as a challenge to work for social reconstruction.<sup>31</sup> Here, the promise of a new heaven and a new earth is clearly understood to be very much of this world, and not an image of the world to come.

In addressing the food crisis in particular, Mugambi and others have pointed to biblical sources (manna in the desert, the feeding of the 5,000) to argue that God’s will is for people to have enough to eat. Their main concern, though, is to point to the historical factors that they see as underlying the crisis, as a result of which Africans are growing and eating exotic foods that are not well adapted to the local environment and which, in consequence, yield less or become expensive as a result of necessary irrigation. So they advocate for a return to ‘the indigenous foods that God had so generously blessed Africa with. Food crops such as cassava and yams are well adapted to the African climate and thus [there is] the need to return to the roots.’<sup>32</sup>

The Kenyan writer quoted here has commended the willingness of reconstruction theologians to work with experts from other academic disciplines. He also sounds a warning about preserving the truly African and Christian nature of African theology: ‘There are some people especially in the Catholic theological circles, who feel that the reconstruction theology is bringing with it aspects of religious relativism and syncretistic practices. Their fears too need to be addressed, if the reconstruction model is to survive the test of time.’<sup>33</sup>

### The global food crisis

A Malaysian Jesuit theologian, **Fr Jojo Fung**, currently working in the Philippines, has written on the need to develop a theological discourse on sustenance in relation to sustainability and solidarity.<sup>34</sup> He attributes the global food

crisis to five key factors: the use of land to produce biofuels rather than food; the activities of speculative investors; unprecedented population growth and globalisation (which means that people are vulnerable to increasing costs of imports); climatic changes; and protectionist policies that restrict the trade of exporting countries.

In discussing the nature of God as provider of basic sustenance, Fung cites similar biblical texts to Mugambi and others, but complements them with the teachings of the church that focus on the environment and the goods of the earth being for the common good. He quotes extensively from the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, which contains such fundamental statements as ‘the goods of the earth were created by God to be used wisely by all... they must be shared equitably, in accordance with justice and charity’. (§ 481).

Fung’s outline of a theology of sustenance reads as follows:

‘A theology of sustenance needs to explain sustenance in relation to sustainability and solidarity. The Creator God sustains the earth and its environment because God is in solidarity with creation.

‘The earth and humanity are always sustained by the God of abundance and are thus sustainable in the theological sense. This arises from God’s offer of life in abundance to all (John 10:10) and at all times. In other words, the God of covenantal fidelity will never leave creation in a state of deprivation and dire need of the basic amenities, given the offer of a relationship with God through the Son. Sustainability in the theological sense is the state of life in which all “im-planeted” creatures enjoy the fullness of life that is ever holistic and wholesome, and this enables all to receive God’s free offer of new life, and hence relish filial intimacy with God. Indeed, the God of sustenance is the God of the everlasting sustainability of God’s creation. Hence the notion of sustenance and sustainability are mutually interrelated.

‘God’s solidarity, on the other hand, is based on the covenant that God has entered with all of creation (Genesis 8:21-22) and more specifically with the people of Israel... As God has entered a covenant with all, the covenantal solidarity of God enjoins all who love God to love all through the sharing of goods and the care of the environment. This covenantal spirit is indeed the basis of solidarity

with all of God's creation. Solidarity, as John Paul II explains in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, § 38, is "a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good, that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all". Solidarity ("we") is the basis for the "cultural habits of the other". In this way, solidarity points to an "I" in a "we" because it enables the "I" to fulfil her/himself only within a network of relations with others. This solidarity is not only for now but also for the future, and thus is intergenerational in perspective. Inspired by love, solidarity enables one to "see in the neighbour another self" who is the *imago Dei* – the otherness of God in our midst.

'This covenantal solidarity that God has entered with humankind is the basis for God's actions of sustaining creation. And since God is the Redeemer of humankind and creation, covenantal solidarity is at the same time salvific solidarity. Covenantal and salvific solidarity is the basis of God's gratuitous offer of sustenance that is holistic – from the provision of material sustenance for bodily existence to the offer of eternal life – so that all humankind of diverse cultures and religions come to share in the new life offered in Jesus.'

Thus, using the language of relational theology, Fung lays down a challenge to the church in Asia to generate a theological discourse on sustenance that presents a God of sustenance who fosters greater solidarity among the different peoples of Asia.

Implied in this is the awareness of food as gift, an understanding that permeates the Hebrew Bible from Genesis onwards. A UK academic, the Rev Professor Tim Gorringer, has noted how this sense was strongly linked with a knowledge of the fragility of the food supply, and has emphasised that the gift of plenty was contingent on just practices. The failure to acknowledge that gift has led to new injustices in the global North that have exacerbated the food crisis in the global South. Gorringer concludes:

'To know food as gift is not only to be aware of the immense amount of labour, of justice and injustice, which lies behind everything we eat. It is also about our self-understanding. The "fast food nation"... knows nothing of good as gift... Fast food... subjects food to the routinised processes learned first in car factories, cuts costs so that food is produced

dangerously and unhealthily, pays as low wages as possible and is not made to be eaten with reverence.'<sup>35</sup>

Such attitudes are, as Gorringer notes, challenged by the Christian understanding of food that is focused in the Eucharist (derived from a Greek verb meaning 'to give thanks').<sup>36</sup> Without that awareness of gift, without an attitude of thanksgiving, the crisis of sustainability in the global South must, sooner or later, surely threaten the North as well.

### **Sustainable care: the churches and HIV**

For many years, **Canon Gideon Byamugisha** has been challenging the churches, first in his native Uganda and subsequently worldwide, to respond to the HIV epidemic with care and compassion: a response that is both theologically sound and socially and economically sustainable. In November 2009, on the 20th anniversary of the Strategies for Hope initiative, Canon Gideon was awarded the Niwano Peace Prize medal. The extracts below are from his acceptance speech, published under the title 'Combating AIDS: does religion help or hinder?'<sup>37</sup>

The speech analyses different attitudes to God, which, Canon Gideon argues, are reflected in specific behaviours with respect to HIV. As he puts it, 'tell me what you believe and I can tell you what response you are likely to adopt on HIV'. In other words, as argued elsewhere in this paper, people's approaches to key issues in international development are a reflection of their understanding of God. In the case of HIV, this relates particularly to people's willingness to engage in a response that is sustainable and that reflects the church's tradition of care and compassion.

'I am going to share four points on where I think that religion can hinder or help.

'I have come across people who say that they **don't believe in God**, because there is no God – and that in itself is a religion. Don't say it's not a religion. It's a religion of not believing in God. But in this category of people there are two types of responses you can get. One is that, since they now know that there is no protector above them, then they will take all chances to make sure that they maximise their living. If you no longer know that there is an arbiter for you, then you are your own arbiter. If you believe that life happens by chance, then you will be motivated to maximise your chances of survival. On the other hand, if you

believe that everything happens at random, you may adopt a fatalistic attitude, a nihilistic attitude which says that there is no point in defending myself against AIDS, or in protecting my neighbour against death. So you are likely to have these two attitudes influencing what happens on the ground – some participating in prevention and care, while others let infections happen, and death happen, because after all, it's pointless.

'I have also met people who say that there is a **powerful God**. Not only is he powerful – he is omniscient. And not only is he omniscient, he is also omnipotent. He's as strong as you can imagine. And, they say, if this God is willing, I will survive HIV. So they surrender all their reasoning faculties, all their possible actions, to God, and they say, "Inshallah! If God helps me, I will escape. If he doesn't help me, too bad!" Now these people, as you can see, if you are unlucky enough to have them in your AIDS programme – their fatalistic attitude, their resignation attitude to things they can't change – these are actually people who also believe in what they call predestination, that there is no way, nothing that you can do to add on your life. If God has fixed that you will die at 30, that is it. If God has said you will die at 70, that is it – so they don't do much in protecting themselves against infection, because they know that their protection is in the hands of someone who is omnipotent.

'There is another group which says, "Yes, we know there is a powerful God. But this God does not protect just anyone. **This God is very selective. He only protects those who love him**, those who accept his commandments." So the more you love him and obey his commands, the more dividends you receive. It's like a profit investment fund. The more capital you put in, the more profits you get. So these people spend their time making sure that they obey well... they say if you obey God, then you are rewarded with long life, many children, a good job, and so forth. And so, in their reasoning, AIDS cannot attack someone who obeys God. That's why, probably, the friends of Job were not really convinced that Job was as righteous as he was claiming, because in their religious attitude, they had never seen someone who was suffering the misfortunes which Job was going through... This attitude did not end with Job. It even persisted in Jesus's time. And they were asking Jesus, "This

boy who is blind, is he the one who sinned, or his parents?" And it has not ended. It is still with us... in those people's mindset you are sick for the sins you have committed. I was in Nigeria, and they had this poster in church, and it had big words – it was saying "Jesus forgives sins. Even AIDS". In their mindset, they know that once you behave well, you are free from HIV; once you misbehave, you are punished with a death-causing disease. No wonder that there is so much stigma and shame and discrimination that goes on still among the people who have such an attitude.

'There is another group I have met, which says, "**You cannot fathom God. You cannot prescribe in detail what he does or doesn't do**. True, he may invite us to participate in his kingdom of health, wellbeing and justice, but you cannot link the absence of justice, or the presence of health, or the absence of health, to the behaviour of an individual. Maybe the problem is at a family level. Maybe the problem is at a community level. Maybe the problem is at a national level. Maybe the problem is at the global level." And these people do everything they can to use their reasoning, their brains, their partnerships, the resources at their disposal, to make sure that they research so much about the cause of illness, the cause of ill health and what they can do to fight ill health. They blame less, and they support more. They look for information and give it. They try to change people's attitudes. They try to build communication skills. They try to give people negotiation skills also – how to negotiate abstinence, how to negotiate safe sex, how to give yourself self-care in a reasonable way, and so forth... They also speak truth to power. They advocate among parliaments, among presidents, among local leaders, among council leaders... to say: "If we create a supportive environment, then we will create a situation where safer behaviours and safer actions are known, are made easier to adopt, are made popular, and they are almost as automatic as they are routine. If we don't, then we create environments where unsafe behaviours are common, are easy to adopt, are popular and almost routine – so that it doesn't surprise you that people are drinking unboiled water; or that they are sleeping in beds without mosquito nets if they are in tropical climates; or that they are having sex without putting on condoms when they have not tested themselves for HIV. Because the environment – the economic environment, the social

and cultural environment, the spiritual environment – is such that it allows unsafe behaviours to become common, to be routine, to be popular among the people who are practising them.”

Canon Gideon’s concluding argument, therefore, is for religious leaders and communities to be given the necessary tools, information and communication skills so that ‘they can turn their liabilities into assets of change and transformation’.

## **Conclusion**

The goal of equity and sustainability underlies all aspects of development work and is essential if that transformation is to come about. Perhaps for that reason, theological comment on the big issues of globalisation and food is not hard to find. This is where theology has its most urgent application and where, as Canon Gideon suggests with respect to HIV, religious attitudes are particularly powerful in helping to bring about change.

# 4 JUST POWER RELATIONSHIPS

*'Many groups are reluctant to address power imbalances and prefer to remain "neutral". Christian Aid is not neutral: our work is based on a fundamental identification with the rights and aspirations of oppressed women and men living in poverty. They must have the power to influence and change the structures and processes that keep them poor. We must give voice to the most marginalised and support them to transform power imbalances at every level, from the household to the global.'*

– *Partnership for Change*, p12

## **The nature of (in)equality: made in God's image**

'God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness"' (Genesis 1:26). This verse is, of course, at the heart of our relationship with God and with one another. However, it is important to reflect on just what we understand by 'image' and 'likeness'. This is not an academic nicety: that understanding can be, and is, used to justify exclusion as well as inclusion, so it is important to address it.

The writer of Genesis uses terms that are instantly recognised as characteristics of human beings, in the sense, say, that siblings share a certain likeness with one another and with their parents. So it is tempting to see in Genesis 1:26 a similar understanding of likeness: you can see my human father's likeness in me. This becomes problematic when that human, male 'likeness' is held up as a model for God, who becomes a kind of super dad. So, for example, those who are hostile to accepting and supporting people of a different sexual orientation from their own will claim that homosexuality is wrong because gay people do not reflect their view (whether that view is conscious or unconscious) of God as a heterosexual male. The 'image' of God thus becomes a means of arguing for exclusion.

Theologians have always recognised that the reality is much more complex. In orthodox Christian doctrine, God is Trinity. Creating the world is not the exclusive prerogative of a male father figure. God the Holy Spirit was present at creation (Genesis 1:2) as was God the Son (John 1:1). Barth puts it like this:

*'It is God Himself, it is the same God in unimpaired unity, who according to the Biblical understanding of revelation is the revealing God [ie. God the Father] and the event of revelation [ie. God the Son] and its effect on man [ie. God the Holy Spirit]. It does not seem possible, nor is any*

attempt made in the Bible, to dissolve the unity of the self-revealing God...'<sup>38</sup>

If the God of Genesis 1:26 is seen in this light, God is not superman. God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. How we somehow reflect that mystery in our own being is itself a mystery. But once we understand 'image' and 'likeness' in this way, perhaps as a divine spark rather than human resemblance, that becomes a basis not for exclusion but for inclusion. To be human is to reflect the divine, and that is the basis of our relationality. The Malaysian theologian Fr Jojo Fung refers to this relationship as the 'reverential beholding of the other', which leads him to advocate honouring the differences between people of other faiths and which, he suggests, enables the church to discover the omnipresence of God.<sup>39</sup>

## **Liberation theology**

*If I have rejected the cause of my male or female slaves, when they brought a complaint against me; what then shall I do when God rises up? When he makes inquiry, what shall I answer him? Did not he who made me in the womb make them? And did not one fashion us in the womb? (Job 31:13-15)*

*Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. (Philippians 2:5-7)*

While Job protested his innocence in the face of all kinds of possible accusations, including exercising unjust power over some of his fellow human beings, the early church reflected on a new form of inequality: where the Son of God gives up his equality with God the Father and voluntarily takes on equal status with human beings. Not only is Jesus Christ no longer equal with God, he does not even enjoy equality with those human beings who would exercise power over him.

Liberation theologians do not share Job's starting point of universal human equality. Rather, in coming from a context of vast inequalities they see equality as something to be achieved thanks to human solidarity: a solidarity that is prefigured in Jesus' solidarity with the human race through his incarnation. As Douglas A Hicks puts it, 'In

## 'Christians cannot forgo their responsibility to say a prophetic word about unjust economic conditions'

Gustavo Gutiérrez

accompanying the poor to realise their dignity, humans become agents in a liberation process that moves towards full realisation of equality before God.<sup>40</sup> Quite what that 'equality before God' consists of is unclear, given the complexity of the socio-political situations that gave rise to liberation theology, but at the very least it must imply human beings treating one another as equals. And that must also imply that some human beings surrender power in order to replace unequal power structures with equal ones.

In an interview with Daniel Hartnett in 2003, Peruvian theologian **Gustavo Gutiérrez** explained the relationship between theology and equality (see box below).<sup>41</sup>

### Gender

#### Ivonne Gebara: God for women

**Ivonne Gebara**, a Brazilian theologian, has criticised liberation theologians for their male theology, while acknowledging that this may be unintentional. She notes: 'Leonardo Boff does not say explicitly that God, invisible mystery, is male, but the language, culture and theology lead effectively to this understanding.' She takes up Boff's statement (in *The Maternal Face of God*) that 'the feminine is implicit because it forms a part of the human reality of the man Jesus', and argues that what is merely implicit 'is not evident in its own originality. It is an inclusion in something that already has its specific worth'. Being truly inclusive, on the other hand, makes both masculine and feminine explicit.<sup>42</sup>

In challenging this merely implicit inclusiveness, Gebara first asks how poor women experience God and the power of God, and in so doing she sets out an understanding of power as the power to live, which is particularly relevant to any discussion of just power relations.

'If the God of women is in their image, that is, poor and defenceless, he is also radically different from them because he is someone who has power, which is marked by a special form of love. To say that God is in women's image means that their experience of God is the image of their world, their culture, their questions. But how does it happen that women, themselves poor and without power on the social and political level, look for a God who has power? How is it that they want the intervention of an all-powerful being and that they call him God, when their daily experience is so different? Do they call upon an all-powerful God, the antithesis of their weakness, hoping that he will use his power to come to their aid?

'If, as the prophetic tradition says, to know God is to experience him, what knowledge or, more precisely, what actual experience do women have of the power of God? In the lives of the poor women whom I have met... I have observed an experience of a power that is totally different. This power seems over and above all known powers; it is simply the power to live! In spite of all the contradictions and paradoxes, and even the disaffections involving this inconceivable

## The injustice of poverty – Gustavo Gutiérrez

I am firmly convinced that poverty – this sub-human condition in which the majority of humanity lives today – is more than a social issue. Poverty poses a major challenge to every Christian conscience and therefore to theology as well.

People today often talk about contextual theologies but, in point of fact, theology has always been contextual. Some theologies, it is true, may be more conscious of and explicit about their contextuality, but all theological investigation is

necessarily carried out within a specific historical context. When Augustine wrote *The City of God*, he was reflecting on what it meant for him and for his contemporaries to live the gospel within a specific context of serious historical transformations.

Our context today is characterized by a glaring disparity between the rich and the poor. No serious Christian can quietly ignore this situation. It is no longer possible for someone to say, 'Well, I didn't know' about

the suffering of the poor. Poverty has a visibility today that it did not have in the past. The faces of the poor must now be confronted. And we also understand the causes of poverty and the conditions that perpetuate it. There was a time when poverty was considered to be an unavoidable fate, but such a view is no longer possible or responsible. Now we know that poverty is not simply a misfortune; it is an injustice.

Of course, there always remains the practical

question: what must we do in order to abolish poverty? Theology does not pretend to have all the technical solutions to poverty, but it reminds us never to forget the poor and also that God is at stake in our response to poverty. An active concern for the poor is not only an obligation for those who feel a political vocation; all Christians must take the gospel message of justice and equality seriously. Christians cannot forgo their responsibility to say a prophetic word about unjust economic conditions.

power, it possesses in popular culture some elements of a real saviour.

'...In the midst of this world in which there is so little choice and so many contradictions, however, one can pick up this reference to God, perceived as someone who has power unlike any other. The difference seems to lie in the idea that, in spite of everything, someone or something wants the world to be other than it is. And this otherness is a counter-current to present injustice.

'...In [the] daily life of women, scarcely ever is there heard any case against God. The truth is that there is no reckoning of accounts with God when prayers are not answered. People are always asking for things, but he can refuse to grant what they ask for. There is a submission to life on God's terms in spite of contradictions and paradoxes. This is part of the logic of the culture of the poor. God does not give answers to theoretical questions. God simply sustains life, is in life, is in us at every moment. Besides one does not have the time to pose complicated questions to him!<sup>43</sup>

## Inequality: a challenge for the churches in Latin America

'Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect' (Romans 12:2).

Speaking at Christian Aid's London office in June 2011, the Archbishop of Brazil, the **Rt Rev Mauricio de Andrade**, used this verse to call for the churches to be more involved in advocacy. In facing inequality, he said,

the church is called not to be 'conformed to this world' but to discern God's will and take on a transformational role. The archbishop's emphasis was very much on this world, not the next, and he cited with approval the words of another archbishop, Dom Helder Camara: 'We never can be afraid of utopia... when we dream alone it's only a dream. When men [sic] dream [together] it's a reality'.

## Ezra Chitando and masculinities

### I have a dream

*I dream of a world*

*Where men respect women*

*Where men protect children*

*Where men promote life.*

*I have this vision of another world*

*A world that exudes the following qualities:*

*Justice*

*Peace*

*Compassion.*

*I yearn for a world*

*Where men are strong enough to care*

*Tender enough to love*

*Loving enough to protect.*

*I have glimpses of another world:*

*Faithful men*

*Caring men*

*Sensitive men.*

*Dear God, work with us to bring this world;*

*Dear Men, let us work to bring this world;*

*Dear Women, let us work to bring this world.*

*Dear Men: Are we man enough*

*To embrace this dream and world?*

– Ezra Chitando

**Ezra Chitando** is a Zimbabwean theologian who has written extensively on HIV as well as on theological education. In 2007, the World Council of Churches published his two-volume work on the African churches and HIV, the first book entitled *Living with Hope*, and the second *Acting in Hope*. In the latter volume Chitando writes about gender, with a particular focus on masculinities, a theme that he develops further in his contribution to a book he edited in 2008, *Mainstreaming HIV and AIDS in Theological Education*.<sup>44</sup>

Chitando's starting point is the argument that religion affects gender. He writes:

'Christianity, like most other religions, is patriarchal. Before churches embark on outreach programmes to transform society's masculinities, they need to address masculinities within themselves. The combination of indigenous African and biblical patriarchy has led many men to assert power and authority over women. In most instances, men in church are as susceptible to patriarchy as those outside. Churches must help their male members to

respect the rights of women and children and to forgo the privileges bestowed by patriarchy.

'...The pulpit should also be appropriated in the struggle to transform masculinities. Sermons that challenge men to embrace gender justice must be preached with clarity and compassion. This is important, since masculinity can and does change. Churches must remind men that true discipleship entails questioning traditional (both Christian and indigenous) attitudes towards masculinity.<sup>46</sup>

This twofold message, which recognises biblical and traditional patriarchy and calls on the church to act prophetically in rejecting that model, is a particularly challenging one in the African context. And Chitando goes on to address a related practical issue – the low level of engagement of men in caring for the sick:

'Churches in Africa, motivated by the quest for justice, are required to encourage men to be more visible in the provision of care to the sick. Hiding behind the lame excuse that it is "uncultural" to undertake chores is unconvincing in the face of the HIV epidemic. Men affiliated to churches must be at the forefront in demonstrating justice, love and compassion. Macho attitudes must be replaced with those that show sensitivity and solidarity.

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## The Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT)

Although the topic of masculinities is a relative newcomer to theological reflection on HIV, its relevance has been acknowledged for some years, as commentators have increasingly recognised that gender is as much about male behaviours as about women. The Fifth General Assembly of EATWOT in 2001 noted:

'There is hope when we try to understand the Word of God through gender perspectives, critiquing texts that are violent and affirming texts that bring

wholeness to women and men. Women first bore witness that Jesus was alive. There is hope when women are treated with dignity. There is hope when men listen to women's voices, and when they critique their own socialization as men for the sake of a new humanity. A particular challenge for men is to redefine their masculinity in the current patriarchal system, as part of human liberation. There is hope when women and men strive to usher in a new humanity and a new creation.<sup>45</sup>

'No culture stands still. Cultures – African cultures included – are always changing. Each generation upholds what it values from the previous generation. It also modifies or rejects outright those beliefs and practices that it finds objectionable. The challenges posed by the HIV epidemic demand that men in Africa play more prominent roles in home-based care.

'The role of men in home-based care in contexts of HIV in Africa must not be confined to the domestic sphere. It must extend to men in positions of authority in church, politics and society. It is men who dominate government ministries that oversee health and National AIDS Councils. Male politicians wield power as residents. They must ensure that home-based care programmes receive adequate resources. They need to undergo "behaviour change" regarding the allocation of resources.

'Caring men do not allocate more resources to the army at the expense of hospitals. Caring men ensure that church programmes on HIV are not mere status symbols that demonstrate political/theological correctness. Caring men do not neglect the needs of orphans and vulnerable children. Caring men endeavour to make a difference in contexts of HIV.<sup>47</sup>

Chitando's plea for behaviour change is based on the gospel message of love, justice and compassion. He also cites with approval the sacred texts of other religions that refer to equality between women and men, while warning that 'progressive' sections of such texts tend to be suppressed by the men who do the job of interpreting them:

'Many Africans argue that it is God and the ancestors who are responsible for establishing gender roles. African women theologians like [Musa] Dube dispute this and place emphasis on human agency in the formation of gender roles. They argue that religion in its various forms tends to promote unequal power relations between men and women. Myths of creation and stories of how sin came into the world are used in religion to perpetuate the subordination of women in society. Proverbs and other oral forms tend to reinforce women's inferior social status.<sup>48</sup>

However, Chitando's most forceful comments are directed against male African theologians, whom he lambasts for failing to reflect theologically on HIV. 'As men who enjoy the dividends of patriarchy', he comments, 'they perhaps realize that engaging with HIV means losing their privileges.'<sup>49</sup> He

suggests that this is also connected with the fact that the African cultures that many of them were keen to defend were inextricably linked to the spread of the epidemic (through practices such as widow inheritance, widow cleansing and so on). He concludes, unapologetically, that he has been deliberately harsh towards leading African theologians:

‘This is because African theology has all the while maintained it is contextually sensitive and relevant. Where was this contextual sensitivity when AIDS became a leading cause of death in the 1990s? Did African theologians quietly endorse the verdict that the epidemic was “God’s punishment”? The overall effect of such theological poverty was that churches in Africa did not benefit from visionary leadership when it was desperately needed.’<sup>50</sup>

In a more recent article, Chitando has suggested that the challenge to what he terms ‘hegemonic masculinity’ begins in the Gospels: ‘In a revolutionary way, Jesus turned the established ideas about a “real man” upside down. Where a “real man” was defined in terms of his distance from women, Jesus freely interacted with women. Where a “real man” was defined by his material wealth, Jesus did not have any earthly possessions to brag about.’ And he quotes with approval the Norwegian theologian Halvor Moxnes who argues that ‘Jesus and his male followers embraced a new counter-masculinity that birthed a different set of values.’<sup>51</sup>

In Chitando’s opinion, the Ugandan activist Canon Gideon Byamugisha has made a special contribution to this debate, in his conviction that not only women but men too need to be empowered, in order to challenge patriarchy and the benefits that men enjoy.<sup>52</sup> In any theological discussion of inequality, this is a concept that deserves full consideration.

## Discrimination

Working in the multi-faith context of India, **Monica Melanchthon** has highlighted how people living with HIV have, through sharing their sacred texts, overcome both social and religious discrimination. She starts from the principle that ‘any reading or interpretation of the [sacred] text in the context of HIV and AIDS has to be carried out in association of gender, class and caste; and we also need to be particularly cognisant of the effect of religious views on sexual behaviour’. Furthermore, religious pluralism is a fact:

‘The Bible no longer holds a privileged or pre-eminent place in a multi-scriptural society. It is seen as one sacred narrative among many in human history and

relativised, often without Christian consent. We may choose to deny this reality but it is essential that theologians take into account the many sacred texts that have come to claim the allegiance of people in our world... It is by learning and understanding how other religious communities hear, read, interpret and appropriate their sacred texts that we all benefit. Any identifiable resonances between diverse scriptural traditions will enhance united action and mutual support and enable a religiously and culturally inclusive approach to religion and HIV.’

So, Melanchthon suggests, a collaborate reading of common texts can break down religious prejudices. However, it is perhaps in the breaking down of barriers of caste and social class in India that the shared experience of HIV is most remarkable.

‘The state of Andhra Pradesh in southern India has the highest HIV incidence in the country. Recently, Devahi Selina, a theologian and activist, described a community of people living with HIV in Guntur that sees itself as an HIV kulam, roughly translated as caste or sub-caste. Even as she notes the danger of thinking in caste categories, she highlights the fact that this kulam is different because one’s membership is not determined by birth or profession. It does not embrace or practise any of the characteristic features of caste affiliation. It is instead a community of HIV positive people who have transcended traditional caste identities and draw strength from and build upon their stigmatised identity. Solidarity has been forged on the basis of the common experience of alienation and rejection. It has enabled those from the dominant castes within the kulam to become sensitive to the disempowering and discriminating power of the caste system. They have also transcended religious identities and are appreciative of each other’s liturgical and worship practices, with an emphasis on life in the here and now. While not certain if they engage in any joint reading of sacred texts, it seems that if equipped to do so, this would contribute further to their solidarity across traditional divides of caste and religion.’<sup>53</sup>

In this case, it appears, the formation of a new community founded on equitable power relations has enabled people to escape the broken structures of their former communities marked by discrimination based on religion and social class.

# 5 RESILIENT AND THRIVING SOCIETIES

*'All men, women and children have the right to "life in all its fullness": to enjoy a fair share of the wealth and rich opportunities our planet offers, in ways that safeguard its ecosystems and finite resources.'*

– Partnership for Change, p22

## God and suffering

*'Is suffering and exile to be generalised into something God is doing to you? Or is it rather something that is done to you by conflicting interests of various political powers?'*

– Eep Talstra

This question, posed by the South African theologian **Eep Talstra**,<sup>54</sup> is an implied criticism of the view of many Christians in the global South that God is responsible for the ill fortune caused by natural disaster or human oppression. On the contrary, argues Talstra, God shares in his people's suffering. His argument is that the most devastating event in Israel's history, the exile in Babylon in the sixth century BC, is seen by Old Testament writers as a metaphor for deprivation. And that the whole history of God and Israel includes the experience of suffering on both sides. Thus God is portrayed through language that expresses, for example, inner conflict: 'I thought to scatter them and blot out the memory of them from humankind; but I feared provocation by the enemy, for their adversaries might misunderstand and say, "Our hand is triumphant; it was not the Lord who did all this"' (Deuteronomy 32:26-27). Ezekiel 36 describes God's disappointment in his people, but there is still a great promise offered to them: 'A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh' (Ezekiel 36:26).

A key text for Talstra is Isaiah 63:

*'[God] is not simply to be blamed for the pain of Israel; he participates in it and he is addressed in lament with the prayer to end the pain of both parties: "return to us" (Isaiah 63:17)... Israel's awareness of God being vulnerable and being hurt by his people is the basis for the lament and the appeal to God...'<sup>55</sup>*

He goes on to suggest that, thanks to this language of lament, African theologians see hope in a God who 'refuses to be made a hostage of the mechanism of evil and punishment'. And he concludes:

*'Israel's experience of continued existence is explained as a deed of God, who presents himself as*

*a God who knows that really hurts. Going through suffering and exile, human life has continued since... God himself by his conflict of emotions has created a way out.'<sup>56</sup>*

Talstra's article begins with the observation that the starting point of African theologians is the role of people and their religion in the context of suffering – a position that enables him to posit contextual analogies between the Babylonian exile and post-colonial Africa. South American liberation theology follows a similar path. It begins with experience – living alongside people who are suffering – and only subsequently moves on to theological reflection. As a participant in the Bolivia consultation (see chapter one) suggested:

*'We mustn't lose sight of the fact that the starting point is the person who suffers and reflection comes out of the sufferer's story. Liberation theology therefore complements relational theology, which examines both parties to the relationship.'*

## Resilience and the churches

When it comes to building societies and communities that are adaptable in the face of disaster or alive to new possibilities for development, southern thinkers seem to focus more on practical action and less on theological justification. So, for example, the role of the churches in responding to natural disasters is frequently stressed; why it should be their response and how that sits with the work of national or local government are questions that are rarely asked.

For development workers, churches are an obvious means of communicating essential information. Networks of churches extend into remote rural areas and their pastors are regarded as speaking with an authority that few politicians enjoy. At the height of the HIV crisis in Uganda, for example, vital information about prevention and treatment was rapidly transmitted, while care networks based on the existing practice of Christian communities were relatively easy to establish.

However, seen from the inside, some commentators offer a rather different picture. For **Professor Jesse N K Mugambi** of the University of Nairobi, local church communities are not to be seen as a convenient tool for the use of outsiders, however well-meaning. Religion is an integral part not only of community life, but also of community action. In a contribution to a seminar on adaptation to climate change

## ‘Development is a long-term challenge, rather than a short-term engagement as often portrayed by aid agencies’

Professor Jesse N K Mugambi

that took place at Trinity Church, Copenhagen, in December 2009,<sup>57</sup> Professor Mugambi said this:

‘African communities are struggling for survival while adapting to climate change in the best ways they can manage with the meagre resources at their disposal, often with little or no support from their own governments or from anywhere else. Religion is the most important focus for social mobilisation in Africa – through Traditional African Religion, African Christianity and African Islam. Any externally sourced adaptation initiatives which ignore, overlook or denigrate African religiosity will not succeed, because they will be rejected as alienating innovations by the majority of African communities to whom religion is the essence of life and the basis for personal and communal identity.’

Professor Mugambi’s example of ‘acceptable’ climate change adaptation in eastern Kenya relates to community-based rainwater harvesting techniques, where rain is collected for use during prolonged dry periods. Water is stored in sand dams and over a period of some 30 years this has had a transforming effect. Mugambi comments, ‘Development is a long-term challenge, rather than a short-term engagement as often portrayed by aid agencies.’ The community in question has understood that ‘by working with nature rather than against nature, they could rehabilitate their habitat for themselves and for their future generations’.

His comments are interesting in that they reflect the widespread resentment in sub-Saharan Africa that the North has largely caused the climate crisis and is now imposing its own solutions. Theologically, the key idea has to do with ‘working *with* nature’ and with the implicit suggestion that African communities with their religious orientation are best placed to understand this and to act accordingly. And this raises two questions: first, what hope is there for those who have allegedly caused the climate crisis? And second, how can the idea of working with nature be best expressed theologically? An answer to the first is suggested by a South African theologian, while a possible answer to the second lies in the development of ecofeminism, which has come to prominence particularly, not in Africa, but in Asia.

### Climate change: ‘confessing guilt’

The climate change discourse, particularly in the global North, has been dominated by the language of guilt.

Commentators have urged the rich to ‘repent’ of excessive carbon emissions – both their own and those of previous generations – in order that the poor, or others with a small carbon footprint, may be ‘redeemed’ from the threat of catastrophic climate change.

To divide North and South in terms of carbon emissions is of course an oversimplification, as it fails to take account of the contribution of rich individuals and corporate entities and of the emerging economies in the South, as well as of the ‘carbon-poor’ in the rich North. This is acknowledged by **Professor Ernst Conradie**, a theologian from South Africa – a country with ever-growing rates of emissions.<sup>58</sup> Professor Conradie writes about ‘confessing guilt’, drawing on a very specific context, that of the South African discourse of confessing guilt in the context of apartheid, suggesting that racial apartheid has been replaced by consumer apartheid:

‘The levels of consumption enjoyed by the affluent (in South Africa) raise serious questions of global justice. It can only be sustained at the expense of others – the poor, coming generations and other living organisms. It would simply not be possible for the planet’s entire human population to replicate the lifestyle of the world’s affluent centre. The solution cannot be a system of consumer apartheid that upholds affluent binge habits but denies the poor a decent standard of living. The affluent who wreaked environmental havoc so that they might attain a comfortable and healthy lifestyle clearly cannot caution others not to seek a comparable standard of living, because that would jeopardise ecological sustainability.’<sup>59</sup>

There is, says Conradie, a need for a new moral vision, which Christians are well placed to bring to the international debate – as, indeed, the World Council of Churches and a number of religious NGOs have endeavoured to do over the past decade. The crucial question, though, is whether Christians can talk about this moral vision on their own terms, rather than in the more secular terminology relating to the need for public morality. He concludes:

‘It is somewhat of an indictment on the church that it has thus far largely failed to see the relevance of its own vision. It has merely reiterated what is offered in secular discourse. Christian discourse on climate change is apparently not taking its own message seriously and has largely failed to make the distinct contribution that it can indeed make.’

So is a Christian confession of guilt appropriate in the light of global inequalities? While the idea of ‘confessing guilt’ has particular resonances in the South African context,<sup>60</sup> its general meaning is about taking responsibility for what is wrong and not shifting the blame elsewhere. So while the discussion here is confined to climate change, the basic concept may be applied across the board in discussing inequalities. In the following extracts, Conradie uses apartheid as a kind of parable for carbon emissions, distinguishing the ‘beneficiaries’ of both systems.

‘The beneficiaries [of apartheid] included many pious, hard-working and frugal people who may or may not have supported the apartheid policies. This remains one of the unanswered enigmas of apartheid: why did so many “good people” support an evil system? Under what conditions is such a selective morality possible?’

‘During the transition period in South Africa from 1990 to 1994 the evils of apartheid were widely denounced. It became difficult to find people who would acknowledge that they ever supported apartheid. Nevertheless, during and beyond this period there emerged ongoing discourse on the notion of corporate guilt, including the guilt of one’s ancestors. This was widely discussed but seldom analysed in Afrikaner circles, partly because the term “Afrikaner” became more and more controversial as a form of self-description. Many distanced themselves from the term, probably because they wished to distance themselves from such guilt and responsibility. They could easily enough distance themselves from the gross violations of human rights perpetrated by certain individuals. Being a tacit beneficiary of apartheid was discussed much less in the white English-speaking community where this notion would also be relevant.’

Yet being a beneficiary implies some form of guilt simply by virtue of being a beneficiary of the system, whether willingly or unwillingly.

The 1990 Rustenberg declaration included a confession by church leaders that ‘we have in different ways practised, supported, permitted or refused to resist apartheid’. Specifically, as beneficiaries of apartheid, they said: ‘We have been unwilling to suffer, loving our comfort more than God’s justice and clinging to our privilege rather than binding ourselves to the poor and oppressed of our land.’

It is not hard to see the parallel here with the ‘beneficiaries’ of climate change. The key question then becomes: what would be required to bring people to a sense of responsibility, and is the Christian language of confessing guilt, forgiveness and reconciliation appropriate? Here, Conradie admits that a more secular formulation, the ‘ethics of responsibility’ might be preferable. And his argument for a distinctive theological approach rather peters out with his awareness that this ‘confession’ is all about confessing to the victims of climate change, rather than to God. In consequence, the question of the redemption of the beneficiaries is left hanging: one answer seems to be to stand in solidarity with the victims of climate change, but it remains unclear how notions of guilt contribute to the removal of inequalities.<sup>61</sup>

In terms of relational theology, though, it seems that ‘confessing guilt’ is one way in which damaged relationships may be restored, both between human ‘beneficiaries’ and ‘victims’, and between people and God.

### Ecofeminism

The term ‘ecofeminism’ seems to have been first used in around 1980 at a conference in the United States entitled ‘Women and Life on Earth’. From the outset the emphasis was on interconnectedness, with notions of sacredness and spirituality being an important part of this. **Vandana Shiva**, an Indian physicist and philosopher with a Hindu background, has gone so far as to argue that sacredness is a conservation category. Using terms that would not be out of place in relational theology, she emphasises the centrality of biodiversity and the importance of women’s indigenous knowledge in the face of commercial advances and opposition:

‘In the indigenous setting, sacredness is a large part of conservation. Sacredness encompasses the intrinsic value of diversity; sacredness denotes a relationship of the part to the whole – a relationship that recognises and preserves integrity. Profane [ie. manufactured] seed violates the integrity of ecological cycles and linkages and fragments agricultural ecosystems and the relationships responsible for sustainable production.’<sup>62</sup>

**Professor Heather Eaton** sets this in an easily recognisable development context:

‘We need to realise that the basic context of the intersection of women, religion and ecology is really

lived close to the ground and around the world. Here, in the daily and unremitting survival requirements, women from distinct religious traditions often collaborate to make life manageable and desirable. Here is where we unite together for clean water for children in schools, for non-toxic food, and for an end to violence. It is on the land that women eke out a barely subsistence living for their families and themselves, and pray for change. It is here that our spiritualities are woven into the fabric of our lives and land, consciously or not, within coherent theoretical frameworks, or not...<sup>63</sup>

In her account of the work of Ivonne Gebara, the Brazilian theologian quoted in the previous chapter, Rosemary Radford Ruether shows how Gebara places the 'embodied experiences of women in daily life' (as portrayed by Eaton) in a network of relationships: 'This interdependence and contextuality includes not only other humans, but the nonhuman world, ultimately the whole body of the cosmos in which we are embedded in our particular location.' Thus, she concludes, 'the person is constituted in and by relationships' and this interrelationality is reflected in our understanding of God as Trinity.<sup>64</sup>

## Conclusion

In a reflection inspired by the Japanese tsunami of 2011 and the Arab Spring that same year, the Malaysian Jesuit Fr Jojo Fung – already quoted several times in previous chapters – writes this:

'The grievance of the hearts and the groaning of the earth are theological moments when God "bursts into" human consciousness with the profound truths about who we are to one another and what the earth is to humankind. In hearts where basic aspirations are left unheeded and unfulfilled, the power of uprising is unleashed that breaks down cultural and religious barriers and topples autocracy, paving the way for just democratic governance. In an aggrieved planet that moans in aches of birthpang [sic], ruptures need to be harmonized to ensure sustainability in the humankind-earth relationship. The grievances and groaning allude to the need for dialogic reverence amongst humankind and before God's creation to ensure the sustainability of just democratic rule and of our planetary home earth.'<sup>65</sup>

Thus, the sustainability of resilient and thriving communities has been seen by a range of theologians in the global South as rooted in both political and theological relationships – and it is the issue of climate change that highlights additionally, and above all, those communities' relationship with the world around us.

# 6 A CHANGING WORLD VIEWED THEOLOGICALLY

*'The world in which we operate is changing dramatically. Power is shifting to the rapidly growing economies of the global east and south. New ideological and religious tensions are emerging. The power and mobility of global capital has proved difficult for governments and intergovernmental bodies to harness for the common good...*

*'In this new world, we will continue to hold firmly to Christian Aid's enduring principles and values, while seeking to build trusting relationships with partners who have the potential to help end poverty.'*

– *Partnership for Change*, p8

## Change and the churches

In the past couple of decades, as southern theologians have become increasingly vocal and productive, a clear theme has emerged among those coming from the established churches. Essentially, their argument is that the churches need to change in order to address the poverty of their people. For African theologians, this seems to result from developments in both the economic and political spheres, and in theology.

## Liberation and salvation

The late **Jean-Marc Ela**, an academic Catholic theologian from Cameroon, writes eloquently of what he calls the 'recolonisation' of Africa, where the oppression of the original colonisers has been replaced by the tyranny of institutions such as the World Bank. In this view, liberation theology is clearly relevant, however Ela insists, as do others, that liberation must go together with salvation. In other words, once people are free there have to be structures in place to enable them to live in freedom. This is a view that is completely consistent with the ambition of Poverty Over: 'life before death' is what Christian Aid is about. Ela's view also coincides with that of the Accra bishops' conference, which declared that liberation is not only spiritual: it impacts on the 'individual and collective concrete life of humanity'.

Ela's challenge to the churches reads like this:

*'If we shut Christianity up in the universe of sin, grace and the sacraments, don't we risk voiding the historical dimensions of salvation in Jesus Christ? ...Seated at the table of the West, the church seems to have thrown us "poor, poor blacks" nothing but crumbs. It has been unwilling to force imperialist countries to look honestly at their African enterprises.'*<sup>66</sup>

## Advocating for equality

Other challenges to the churches have come from Anglican leaders in Brazil, a country where inequality is the main cause of poverty. So **Archbishop Maurício Andrade** quotes St Paul:

*"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2).* In his letters Paul presents himself as a man in love with his mission; he has a conviction that faith commitment has strength and power. And he is someone who is aware of the world, aware of people's problems. This commitment needs to be assumed by us as a transformation commitment!

*'One aspect of this commitment is to assume that churches need to be involved in advocacy, reading the Old Testament through the lens of today: in a plural and democratic society, there are new and different forms of the relationship between church and state... So advocacy must reflect the teaching of both the Bible and theology and popular and technical wisdom. Revealing the signs of the proximity of the Kingdom of God must be how our churches do advocacy: we testify to the Kingdom of God in a reality of anti-Kingdom, which is characterised by all forms of inequality.'*<sup>67</sup>

## Diakonia

Archbishop Andrade's call for an advocating church is balanced by that of the **Rt Rev Sebastião Armando Gameleira Soares**, Bishop of Recife, who has set out a vision of a serving church, again in the context of addressing poverty and inequality. The language of service, or *diakonia*,<sup>68</sup> is far from indicating a passive mindset. Bishop Sebastião argues:

*'The goal of diakonia is prophetic in that it necessarily involves the socio-political element of faith that challenges oppressive structures. Everything in the church is diakonia because the church represents an alternative social movement (in Barth's phrase, a "conspiracy of witnesses" against the social system). Thus the church is where the powerless and the dispossessed come together. More broadly, the "Kingdom of God" affirms God's sovereignty over creation and human society, where exercising justice results in shalom, that state of peace where people*

## 'Human beings are called to work with God to bring about [a] new reality, breaking down social barriers and striving for peace'

The Rt Rev Sebastião Armando Gameleira Soares

"beat their swords into ploughshares" (Isaiah 2:4) and "the wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid" (Isaiah 11:6).

'Human beings are called to work with God to bring about this new reality, breaking down social barriers and striving for peace. The good news of Jesus is that "to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God" (John 1:12), and as God's children we share in God's purposes.

'The method of diakonia is **service** ("the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve", Mark 10:46) and the identification of Jesus with the suffering servant of Isaiah from earliest times underlines the fact that this service is costly. This costly service is lived out in the church's work of social transformation. "Religion" is just one of the means by which this transformation may be carried out, along with, for example, teaching and socio-political action.'<sup>69</sup>

Taken together, these challenges presented by Brazilian church leaders represent a powerful call to their churches. Both are presenting the church as an alternative social movement: the church is proclaiming the Kingdom of God in a social context of 'anti-kingdom' in order to bring about equality; and in so doing the church is engaging in transformation through a prophetic form of service to all who are without power.

### The persecuted church

Where the church is itself facing injustice, considerations of advocacy and socio-political intervention are secondary to day-to-day survival. Like the early church as presented in the New Testament (for example, in Revelation 2 and 3) it may be forced into self-examination.

The **Rt Rev Chad Gandiya** has been the Anglican Bishop of Harare Diocese in Zimbabwe since 2009. During that time, a faction led by his excommunicated predecessor, supported by the Zimbabwean president, has seized church buildings and put them to other uses, including schools and brothels. Deprived of many of their churches, Bishop Chad and his flock have had to think afresh about the meaning of 'being church'.

'We encourage our people that whenever they meet each other they should use this greeting, "Christian seek not yet repose, watch and pray" ...One needs to know where one stands in faith because when the going gets tough faith sustains you. People have come to realise that church is people not the building.

As a leader, I'm very glad that the lesson that perhaps would have taken a very long time to teach and accept, people accept. We live in hope.'<sup>70</sup>

### Southern approaches to the Bible

At the end of chapter one we saw how the late Steve de Gruchy viewed the challenges of 'doing theology' with poor communities in South Africa. Another theologian from the School of Religion and Theology at the University of KwaZulu-Natal who has done pioneering work in contextual Bible study is **Gerald West**. Some of West's writing examines the process by which people interpret the Bible through the lens of their own cultural, social and political context, and relates it to a much bigger context. In this respect, then, it is true to say that West's theology is oriented to a changing world.

Foremost among the concerns of West and many others in today's South Africa is the failure of the church to move on from the apartheid years and its triumphant struggle against an unjust society: 'Our struggle *against* apartheid demanded new [Bible] readings and theologies of us. Our struggle for full liberation and life requires that we build on what we have learned.' He warns of the danger of forgetting the theologies that resourced the struggle and of returning to patterns of the past, concluding that 'this is our deepening interpretative crisis'.<sup>71</sup>

However, when it comes to the insights of poor and marginalised communities, West has a warning that is perhaps particularly relevant to Christians in the global North: 'Biblical scholars either romanticise or idealise the contribution of the poor and marginalised or they minimise and rationalise that community's contribution'.<sup>72</sup> In other words, there is a danger that *uncritical listening* can undermine the whole process just as much as an attitude of intellectual superiority.

West has distinguished three factors in African biblical hermeneutics.<sup>73</sup> There is on the one hand the biblical text, and on the other, the African context. But what is also important is how these two things are brought into dialogue. So there has to be 'a real flesh and blood reader' – an African interpretative presence who *appropriates* the biblical text into their own context. Because, West argues, in the African context, biblical interpretation is never an end in itself. It is always about changing the African context. People read the Bible *in the expectation that they themselves and their society will be transformed*.

This gives a very powerful place to the Bible and its interpretation. One area, highlighted by West, where this has been – and is – particularly effective, is in feminist theology. Where women theologians have brought both religion and culture together, things do begin to change. Typically there is present (in the ‘real flesh and blood reader’) an opposition to colonialism and to the understanding of the Bible that the colonial missionaries brought with them, but there is also an attitude of trust towards the Bible itself. There is the belief that the Bible, despite being part of the colonial missionary package, has good news for Africa, and the conviction that Africans can illuminate the biblical message in a way that western biblical scholarship has so far failed to do.

West uses the term ‘inculturation hermeneutics’ to refer to the response of African Christians to their experience that ‘African social and cultural concerns were not reflected in missionary and western academic forms of biblical interpretation’. In other words, people’s interpretation of the Bible is deliberately informed by their life experience within their African culture. Bound up with this is the recognition that this interpretation will always, in some sense, be in opposition to the forms of biblical interpretation inherited from missionary Christianity and western academic studies. However, this is not to downplay the importance of the Bible as a critique of contemporary African culture.

### **St Mark’s Gospel and structural sin**

In a 2006 article, West offers a practical illustration of these concepts, by reporting on a Bible study on Mark 12:41-44 (the story of the poor widow who contributed two small coins to the temple treasury).<sup>74</sup> He begins by inviting people taking part in the study to make connections between this short passage and those on either side of it in Mark 12; he then goes on to show how the text fits into a much wider context (Mark 11:27 – 13:2), which relates to the temple in Jerusalem, culminating in Jesus’ condemnation of it as what West calls ‘an oppressive institution that is administered by corrupt and oppressive officials’. West then adds an extensive socio-historical understanding of the temple that ‘enhances the emerging picture of systemic injustice’. He concludes:

‘During the time of Jesus the temple was the hub of all commercial activity in Jerusalem and Judea. Jesus’s actions in the temple (Mark 11.11 – 13.2) can therefore be seen as a prophetic and symbolic rejection of this central religious, economic, and political system of Judaism (and Roman occupation).

However, Jesus was not only standing against the injustice of the temple system, he was also standing with the Jewish masses who were being oppressed and dispossessed by this system.’

The study participants are then asked how the Mark text speaks to their contexts:

‘All participants find resonances between their corporate reading of the Bible and their context. Some South African groups have argued that our government’s new economic policy actually results in increased unemployment, though it is designed, we are told, to create more jobs. Others argue that there are structures and systems in their churches and/or cultures that exploit and exclude the powerless (whether they be women or people who are living with HIV/AIDS) when they should be protecting and providing for them.’

West’s article ends with a consideration of the structural sin that Mark describes and the role of the individual in the system. Looking back to the story of the rich man who approaches Jesus in Mark 10:17-22 asking what he must do to inherit eternal life, he suggested that this was someone who was unable to give up the benefits of structural sin. His conclusion is as follows:

‘The scribes were active participants in and beneficiaries of structural sin, just as whites under apartheid were, and just as most Europeans and Americans are under the global empire of neo-liberal capitalism. Does not being fully aware of the system (like the lone scribe (12:28) and the rich man (10:17)) make that person any less a beneficiary of sin? I think not! Jesus makes it clear to the rich man that he must forsake the fruits of structural sin, return it to the poor from whom it was taken (by sinful structures) and then, and only then, follow Jesus (10:21). This particular person was unable to give up the wages of structural sin. Even the disciples of Jesus found it difficult to believe that Jesus was really condemning (and dismantling) the systemic sin of the temple.

‘The real danger of structural sin is that we usually do not recognise it. In order to see structural sin for what it is we need those who are the victims of particular structural sins to teach us. For example, women will teach us about the pervasive structural sin of patriarchy; black people will teach us about the enduring structural sin of racism; dalits will teach us

about the structural sin of caste; and the poor will teach us about the structural sin of global capitalism.

'If we are to detect and discern the structural sin of which we are a part and from which we benefit, the challenge for each of us is to ensure that such are our primary dialogue partners. When we do "see" systemic sin, we will then hear the challenge of Jesus to renounce its benefits and to dismantle it.'

### **Kairos moments**

As is well known, the word 'kairos' in New Testament Greek has the specific meaning of God's time, as opposed to the more general and more usual word for time, 'chronos'. The original Kairos Document was published in South Africa in 1985 and was the response of Christian theologians to apartheid, issued as a challenge to the church. The Kairos Document was understood as a moment of truth both for the church and the nation. The authors wrote: 'For very many Christians in South Africa this is the KAIROS, the moment of grace and opportunity, the favourable time in which God issues a challenge to decisive action.'

It is clear from this that kairos moments are not everyday events. There has been talk of declaring one in the context of climate change – heralding a decisive moment when people realised that behaviours had to change in order to save the planet – but this has not happened. Instead, it was the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory that provoked a follow-up to the South African document.

In December 2009, a group of Palestinian Christians published the Kairos Palestine Document, described as 'A moment of truth: A word of faith, hope and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering'.<sup>75</sup> The authors reflect on the great themes of faith, hope and love in the face of Israeli occupation and issue an emotional plea to the worldwide church, to leaders of other religions, and to the Palestinian people and the Israelis. The document is less academic than its South African model, but both documents are a declaration of trust in God at a crucial moment in history.

The South African document concludes: 'We are convinced that this challenge comes from God and that it is addressed to all of us. We see the present crisis or KAIROS as indeed a divine visitation.' And the final paragraph of the Palestinian Kairos reads: 'In the absence of all hope, we cry out our cry of hope. We believe that God's goodness will finally triumph over the evil of hate and of death that still persist in our land. We will see here "a new land" and "a new human being", capable of rising up in the spirit to love each of his or her brothers and sisters.'

So a new form of response to a crisis situation was taken up in a very different situation on the other side of the world. Interestingly, in 2010 the Kairos Palestine Document provoked a particular response from South Africa in the form of an Easter message, which, among other things, referred to the situation in the Holy Land as 'Israeli apartheid' and challenged Christian Zionism.<sup>76</sup> And while Kairos Palestine led to expressions of solidarity in many parts of the world from a range of Christian denominations,<sup>77</sup> the solidarity of South African Christians has added much weight to the Palestinians' call for support.

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# CONCLUSION

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The 2010 paper, *Theology and International Development*, ended with the expectation that ‘there will be other insights to take into account and other theologies to consider, as together with our supporters, our partners and our friends in global alliances, we seek new ways of exposing the scandal of poverty and of giving prophetic expression to the biblical vision of a new earth.’<sup>78</sup>

The aim of the present paper has been to present some of those insights and theologies. In addition, though, Christian Aid has been led to reflect on the nature of partnership and on some of the new relationships that follow from more recent initiatives to tackle poverty. The theological reflection on partnership presented in chapter two was developed by theologians from

South and North working together. This is the model that was followed in the Bolivia consultation (referred to in chapter one) in a multifaith context, and it could usefully be adopted and developed elsewhere.

As our ambition grows, so does our enthusiasm to reflect theologically on the new challenges presented by a changing organisation in a changing world. As the range of our activities broadens, so too must our theological consultations develop. *Partnership for Change* concludes: ‘Our generation has the tools and know-how to deliver [the vision of justice and peace]. Christian Aid’s task is to inspire the will to make that happen.’ The theological perspectives of the global South will have a significant part to play in inspiring that will.

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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