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THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON DEVELOPMENT: COMPARING ROMAN CATHOLIC, ECUMENICAL AND EVANGELICAL POSITIONS

ABSTRACT

Since the middle of the 20th century, Christian churches have been involved internationally in development activities. In recent years, international agencies and national governments have recognised the role of religions in international development. This article reviews theological views on international development. For this purpose, official documents of the Roman Catholic Church, the ecumenical movement and the World Evangelical Alliance/Lausanne Movement are compared regarding concepts of development and its role in the mission of the Church and views on the world and humankind, actions and actors of development and eschatology. The study finds wide agreement in many aspects, but also some differences between the theological traditions. It discusses theological aspects that are relevant for the praxis of Christian development work and identifies issues that may need further research.

1.   INTRODUCTION

Since its formation, the Christian church has been involved in social activities in the form of diakonia.

In the 19th century, the world mission movement led to the establishment of many mission hospitals, schools and activities for economic development. When the development paradigm became prominent in the 1960s, many Christian non-governmental organisations were formed and are active in the fields of relief and international development. Since that time, the term "development" itself is controversial and may imply different concepts, including modernisation, globalisation, human development, human rights, sustainable development, and even post-development (Kröck 2015). This article starts by using the term "development" in a very general sense, as an intentional activity aimed at bringing about good change (Sumner & Tribe 2008:9).

In spite of this history, the relationship between the praxis of development work and religion was difficult. Within the paradigm of modernisation, culture and religion were considered obstacles to development rather than assets. At the same time, the relationship between mission understood as proclamation and the social involvement of the Church was much debated between evangelicals and the ecumenical movement (Ott 2007; Hardmeier 2009:19-49). In recent years, the United Nations, the World Bank and many national governments have recognised the role, which religious bodies may play in international development (World Bank 2001; Kusch 2007). Yet, the tendency of mission drift can be observed in Christian faith-based organisations, thus reducing their Christian distinctiveness (Lin 2019).

In this context, the study attempts to review theological views related to development and to encourage reflections on how they can be applied to the praxis of development work. For this purpose, official documents of the Roman Catholic Church, the ecumenical movement and the World Evangelical Alliance/Lausanne Movement will be compared. This article aims to study how different theological concepts have been linked to international development, to encourage Christian mission and aid agencies to reflect on the theological foundations of their work, and to identify topics relevant for Christian development work, which may need more attention in theological education and research.

2.   MATERIAL AND METHOD

Over the past decades, a wide spectrum of books and articles dealing with theological views on poverty and development have been published. For this study, a few publications have been selected that can be regarded as not simply individual views, but as widely accepted by the abovementioned theological traditions. The article focuses on documents published in the first decades of the 21st century; it also includes references to documents

from the 1960s to the 1980s. The following paragraphs briefly characterise these documents.

2.1   Documents from the Roman Catholic Church

2.1.1 *Populorum progressio* – On the development of peoples (1967)

The encyclical *Populorum progressio* was published by Pope Paul VI after the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) during the decade when most of the former colonies in Africa and Asia gained political independence and there was great optimism in international development. This is reflected in the frequent use of the term "progress". The growing disparity between rich and poor nations (Paul VI 1967:§8) is a major concern, as it is considered to endanger peace (Paul VI 1967:§76) and may lead to violent revolutions (Paul VI 1967:§11). The ultimate goal of development is viewed as a "full-bodied humanism", which "points the way toward God" (Paul VI 1967:§42) and

> involves building a human community where men can live truly human lives, free from discrimination on account of race, religion or nationality, free from servitude to other men or to natural forces which they cannot yet control satisfactorily (Paul VI 1967:§47).

2.1.2 *Caritas in veritate* – On integral human development in charity and truth (2009)

Although Pope Benedict XVI's encyclical letter *Caritas in veritate* (Charity in truth) has many references to *Populorum progressio*, it prefers the phrase "integral human development", with the principal concern to improve the actual living conditions of the people in a given region (Benedict XVI 2009:§47). The term "integral" is used to indicate that "progress of a merely economic and technological kind is insufficient" (Benedict XVI 2009:§23) and that the "people's spiritual and moral welfare" (Benedict XVI 2009:§76) needs to be taken into account. The relationship to God is understood as the basis of the relationships between human beings (Benedict XVI 2009:§34) and the natural environment, which will be used with "a responsibility towards the poor, towards future generations and towards humanity as a whole" (Benedict XVI 2009:§48).

2.1.3 *Evangelii gaudium* – On the proclamation of the gospel in today's world (2013)

Pope Francis published the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* (The joy of the Gospel) only eight months after he took office. It refers to the 2008/2009 financial crisis and voices opposition to "an economy of exclusion", "the new idolatry of money", and "inequality which spawns violence" (Francis I 2013:§53-55). The "evil embedded in the structures of a society" (Francis I 2013:§59) is understood to be caused by "a rejection of ethics and a rejection of God" (Francis I 2013:§57). The document discusses

> the 'social dimension of evangelisation' based in the understanding that God 'redeems not only the individual person, but also the social relations existing between men' (Francis I 2013:§178).

Francis (2013:§241) admits that "the Church does not have solutions for every particular issue", but wants her to propose "fundamental values of human life and convictions which can then find expression in political activity".

2.1.4 *Laudato si* – On the care for our common home (2015)

The care for the earth is the focus of Francis' encyclical letter *Laudato si* (Praise be to You). Like the previous articles, it is critical of development and market economy as "an undifferentiated and one-dimensional paradigm" of exploiting the earth's goods with the goal of unlimited growth (Francis 2015:§106). Francis (2015:§13) supports a "sustainable and integral" or "authentic development", aiming "to bring about an integral improvement in the quality of human life" (Francis 2015:§147, 192). Sustainable and integral development has to "deal with both problems: the reduction of pollution and the development of poorer countries and regions" (Francis 2015:§175). God is understood to play a central role in authentic development as "his divine presence, which ensures the subsistence and growth of each being, continues the work of creation" (Francis 2015:§80). Francis (2015:§231) views "social love [as] the key to authentic development".

2.2 Documents from the ecumenical movement (World Council of Churches)

2.2.1 Reports of the 4th Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Uppsala (1968)

The 4th Assembly of the World Council of Churches was held at Uppsala, Sweden, at a time of many former colonies gaining political independence, the Vietnam war fuelling student protests in many countries, tensions between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union, and the Biafra war in Nigeria. Development was a major topic of the Assembly (Jack 1968:1045-1046). The World Council of Churches (1969:367) took this topic up with the understanding that physical and social needs are not secondary to spiritual needs. The reports of the Assembly stress the need for the Church to fight against injustice manifested in economic inequality and caused by political and economic structures (Jack 1968:1046). The remedy to injustice was noticed in increased financial aid to developing countries and radical structural changes (Jack 1968:1047).

2.2.2 Mission and evangelism: An ecumenical affirmation (1982)

This document is a follow-up of the debate on mission at the World Council of Churches Assembly in Nairobi (1975) and the world mission conference in Melbourne (1980) (World Council of Churches 2005:1). It does not use the term "development", but speaks of social action and of challenging social structures (World Council of Churches 2005:21). The proclamation of the gospel and the struggles for justice are considered to be indivisible (World Council of Churches 2005:2), as "the evangelistic witness will also speak to the structures of this world; its economic, political and societal institutions" (World Council of Churches 2005:14). The theological basis for the churches' social action is the kingdom of God, "which is God's promise to the poor of the earth" (World Council of Churches 2005:2).

> As the Spirit of God is constantly at work … in places that to us are least expected, Christians should use every opportunity to join hands with their neighbours, to work together to be communities of freedom, peace and mutual respect (World Council of Churches 2005:29).

2.2.3 Together towards life: Mission and evangelism in changing landscapes (2012)

The new World Council of Churches Affirmation on Mission and Evangelism was prepared to provide new directions for an understanding and practice of mission and evangelism. It seeks a broad consensus, even beyond the World Council of Churches member churches (World Council of Churches 2012:3). It frequently uses the term "transformation" as relating to international development. Mission is understood as being transformative, working for life in its fullness, and opposing structures that oppress life (World Council of Churches 2012:13, 37). It aims to restore the relationships between God and humanity and all of creation (World Council of Churches 2012:17). The ecological dimension plays an important role in the document, which understands God's mission in a cosmic sense (World Council of Churches 2012:5). The document advocates mission (including this kind of transformation) from the margins "through people who appear to be excluded" (World Council of Churches 2012:14). This is opposed to "mission from the centre [which] is motivated by an attitude of paternalism and a superiority complex" and "has equated Christianity with Western culture" (World Council of Churches 2012:16).

2.2.4 ACT Alliance: Our understanding of development (2013)

Action by Churches Together (ACT) Alliance is a coalition of Protestant and Orthodox Churches and church-related organisations engaged in humanitarian, development and advocacy work. Its members are associated with the World Council of Churches or the Lutheran World Federation. The document uses the term "transformational development", which is based on a theological understanding

> that all persons are created in the image of God with the right and potential to live just, humane and dignified lives in sustainable communities (ACT Alliance 2013:2).

Its aim is to promote all peoples' human and God-given rights, by

> the empowerment of communities most affected by oppressive structures [and] the transformation of values and structures that lead to over consumption and the lack of sharing of available resources (ACT Alliance 2013:2).

The central concepts of transformational development are, among others, participation, empowerment, non-discrimination, cultural and

spiritual sensitivity, promoting peace, reconciliation and right relationships, as well as environmental sustainability (ACT Alliance 2013:3-5).

2.3   Documents from the evangelical movement[1]

2.3.1 The Lausanne Covenant (1974)

The political, social and theological challenges of the 1960s formed the background to the 1st International Congress on World Evangelization, held in July 1974, in Lausanne, Switzerland, with over 2,400 participants from 150 nations. Although the congress focused on evangelism understood as "the proclamation of the historical, biblical Christ as Saviour and Lord" (Lausanne Movement 1974:3), the role of social responsibility in Christian mission was controversially debated. The Lausanne Covenant refers to "the poverty of millions and […] the injustices which cause it" (Lausanne Movement 1974:6). Both evangelism and sociopolitical involvement are recognised as Christian duty and are linked, but evangelism is considered primary in the mission of the Church (Lausanne Movement 1974:4). The Lausanne congress ignited a debate that led to major changes in the evangelical theology of mission (Hardmeier 2009:24).

2.3.2 Evangelism and social responsibility: An evangelical commitment (1982)

This report is the outcome of the international consultation in Grand Rapids organised by the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization and the World Evangelical Fellowship. It took a position in the polarisation between the World Council of Churches and the evangelical movement (Lausanne Movement 1982:1). It deals with the spiritual basis of social service, the relationship between evangelism and social responsibility, eschatological questions, and the practice of social responsibility. The report criticises an unhealthy dichotomy between "soul and body, the individual and society, redemption and creation" (Lausanne Movement & World Evangelical Fellowship 1982:15) and understands evangelism and social responsibility as "integrally related in our proclamation of, and obedience to the gospel" (Lausanne Movement & World Evangelical Fellowship 1982:19). The document distinguishes "social service" from "social action". The former may include "international development" and be viewed as "universally accepted as a Christian obligation" (Lausanne Movement & World Evangelical Fellowship 1982:37), while the latter is proposed to be taken up by "groups and movements which concern

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1   In this article, the term "evangelical" refers to the World Evangelical Alliance and the Lausanne Movement.

themselves with specific needs in society" rather than the Church itself (Lausanne Movement & World Evangelical Fellowship 1982:39-41).

2.3.3 Micah Network Declaration on Integral Mission (2001)

The Micah Network is a coalition of Christian relief, development and justice organisations from 75 countries, with the aims to encourage integral mission and to advocate the rights of the poor and oppressed. In 2014, it merged with Micah Challenge to form Micah Global. The Declaration on Integral Mission was approved by 140 leaders of Christian organisations from 50 countries who met in Oxford in September 2001. The declaration defines "integral mission" or "holistic transformation" as "the proclamation and demonstration of the gospel" (Micah Network 2001:1). It avoids the term "development", because this

> imposes a narrow and linear economic model of development and fails to recognise the need for transformation in so-called 'developed' countries (Micah Network 2001:2).

Local churches are understood to play a central role in integral mission (Micah Network 2001:2), but they need to work

> with the poor and other stakeholders like civil society, government and the private sector with mutual respect and a recognition of the distinctive role of each partner (Micah Network 2001:3).

2.3.4 The Cape Town Commitment (2011)

This document was endorsed by the Third Lausanne Congress held in October 2010 in Cape Town, with over 4,000 Christian leaders from 198 countries. It is based on the commandment to love God and one's neighbour. The document hardly speaks of "development", but uses the term "integral mission", including "the proclamation and demonstration of the gospel" (Lausanne Movement 2011:19) as spelled out in the Micah declaration on integral mission. The document speaks about "God's good news … for individual persons, and for society, and for creation" (Lausanne Movement 2011:13), but it focuses mainly on the individual. However, it also demands to fight against systems of evil and injustice (Lausanne Movement 2011:15), racism and ethnocentrism (Lausanne Movement 2011:14) and laments "the widespread abuse and destruction of the earth's resources, including its bio-diversity [and] the threat of climate change" (Lausanne Movement 2011:30).

2.4   Method and limitations

The documents were studied, starting with a few deductive categories and adding more inductively as they arose from the texts. The following topics were major categories of comparison: concepts of development; understanding of mission; problems and their root causes; goals of development; eschatological understanding; development activities and actors; motivation, and the role of spirituality.

Regarding the limitations of this study, it is understood that these documents are a selection that may not cover all relevant topics. Choosing documents, which are considered to be widely accepted, may be another limitation, as persons with differing views and agendas were involved in formulating them. This may have led to the attempt to accommodate a wide range of topics and opinions and sometimes resulted in vague statements rather than clear positions. Still, the selected documents are expected to give an overview of positions held by the respective theological traditions.

3.   FINDINGS

Volf and Croasmun (2019) propose that theology should be concerned with the human quest for flourishing life, an idea that can easily be linked to the concept of development. I use their three dimensions as categories of my review:

- circumstantial: view of the world and humankind (cosmology, hamartiology and anthropology);

- affective: hope and eschatology, and

- agential: actions and actors of development (ecclesiology, missiology, pneumatology).

Before reviewing these three categories, I will discuss the concepts of "development" and its role in the mission of the Church.

3.1   Concepts of development and its role in the mission of the Church

While different terms are used, all recent documents indicate that the respective church bodies understand development not purely economically but holistically, including human well-being, political freedom, fair social and economic structures, the care of creation, as well as reconciliation with God and fellow human beings. They use the terms "integral human development", "transformational development", "holistic transformation"

and "integral mission", but there seems to be no fundamental differences in meaning.

The documents from all three groups widely agree regarding the goals of development work. Volf and Croasmun's dimension of circumstances plays a major role with justice and freedom (World Council of Churches 1969:368; 2005:19 Lausanne Movement 1974:3; Lausanne Movement & World Evangelical Fellowship 1982:36), human well-being and the reduction of poverty (Paul VI 1967:§76; Benedict XVI 2009:§47; Francis I 2013:§221, 215, §175; World Council of Churches 2012:19; Lausanne Movement 2011:38). Several documents also mention the restoration of relationships between God, other human beings and the remainder of creation (Benedict XVI 2009:§53; Lausanne Movement 2011:13; World Council of Churches 2012:17). Love as the agential dimension is also frequently mentioned. It is a leading category for *Caritas in veritas* and the *Cape Town Commitment*. Pope Francis I (2015:§231) wants the Church to demonstrate "the ideal of a 'civilization of love'". In the Roman-Catholic context, the term "solidarity" is often used. More recent documents mention stewardship of creation or sustainable living as a goal of development (Francis I 2013:§183; 2015:§116; Lausanne Movement 2011:38; ACT Alliance 2013:2). Joy as the affective dimension of flourishing life is hardly mentioned, an exception being *Evangelii gaudium* (the gospel of joy). However, the term "dignity", which is used in many documents, may also be related to the affective dimension.

The three church traditions understand mission as including the proclamation of the gospel and social service and action. The word of the gospel should be accompanied by deeds of love, in order to be heard and accepted (Micah Network 2001:1; World Council of Churches 2012:31; Francis I 2013:§199). On the other hand, the preaching and acceptance of the gospel is understood to have social consequences, as people change their behaviour, seek the good of others and build interpersonal and community relationships (Micah Network 2001:1; World Council of Churches 2012:32; Francis I 2013:§178). Evangelical documents stress the central role of evangelism as proclamation in the mission of the Church (Lausanne Movement & World Evangelical Fellowship 1982:20; Lausanne Movement 2011:35).

The relationship between witness and social service is also dealt with in the document *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World* (WCC, PCFID & WEA 2011), which was jointly prepared by representatives of the three traditions. It states:

> For Christians it is a privilege and joy to give an accounting for the hope that is within them and to do so with gentleness and respect (cf. 1 Peter 3:15)." (World Council of Churches 2011:3).

> Acts of service, such as providing education, health care, relief services and acts of justice and advocacy are an integral part of witnessing to the gospel. The exploitation of situations of poverty and need has no place in Christian outreach. Christians should denounce and refrain from offering all forms of allurements, including financial incentives and rewards, in their acts of service. (World Council of Churches 2011:4).

Related to mission is the term "salvation", which is understood in different ways in the documents. *Together Towards Life* has a wide perspective of salvation, as evangelism

> makes explicit and unambiguous the centrality of the incarnation, suffering, and resurrection of Jesus Christ without setting limits to the saving grace of God" (World Council of Churches 2012:29).

Similarly, the World Council of Churches (1969:367) Assembly in Uppsala remained vague about man's response to Jesus Christ, which "often … does not appear as a religious choice at all". The consultation on *Evangelism and Social Responsibility* recognised personal, social and cosmic dimensions of salvation (Lausanne Movement 1982:23), but most of the participants preferred "to reserve the vocabulary of salvation for the experience of reconciliation with God through Christ and its direct consequences" (Lausanne Movement & World Evangelical Fellowship 1982:24). In the *Cape Town Commitment*, the term "salvation" is also used in the latter sense. For the Roman Catholic Church, on the other hand, salvation is strongly linked to the Church (Francis I 2013:§30, 112).

3.2   Circumstantial aspects: The world and humankind

There is general agreement regarding the situation of the world and its problems such as poverty, economic inequalities, unjust political and economic structures, as well as environmental destruction. There is also agreement in terms of understanding the alienation of human beings from God as the root cause of these problems. Pope Francis I (2015:§66) summarises this as follows:

> human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself.

> According to the Bible, these three vital relationships have been broken, both outwardly and within us. This rupture is sin.

This alienation has corrupted cultures and systems, causing them to generate poverty, discrimination, dehumanisation and the destruction of the earth. Criticism of the dominant economic system can be found in all three groups of documents. All groups use the term "idolatry" in this respect, indicating a "spiritual crisis" (EKD 2015:50).

These views shift the perspective of development as a need for "underdeveloped regions" to understanding it as a "great transformation" (Bundesregierung Globale Umweltveränderungen 2011) of the global economic system and lifestyles towards a more sustainable way of life. If the churches, which have approved these documents, take them seriously, the spiritual aspects of sustainable development should play more important roles in their activities.

In terms of anthropology, there is general agreement on human beings as created in the image of God. This gives them dignity regardless of who they are and is the basis for their participation in any development activities concerning them (Paul VI 1967:§25; Micah Network 2001:2; ACT Alliance 2013:2).

3.3   Affective aspects: Hope and eschatology

As many people involved in international development are frustrated and may become cynical, hope is a commodity in demand. Theology may provide a long-term perspective that goes even beyond human history. Nearly all documents studied express hope, due to the expected eschatological victory of Christ. There is also agreement that kingdom values should already now be manifested in the church (Lausanne Movement 1982:36; Micah Network 2001:2; World Council of Churches 2012:17) and "spill over into society as a whole" (Lausanne Movement & World Evangelical Fellowship 1982:29) and thus "generate[s] history" (Francis I 2013:§131).

There are a few controversial views regarding the *already vs. not yet* realisation of God's kingdom. The earliest documents *Populorum progressio* and the World Council of Churches' General Assembly in Uppsala seem to be more on the *already* side, indicating hope for an (immanent) future (Paul VI 1967:§78-79) and finding opportunities "for moving with history towards the coming of the new humanity" (World Council of Churches 1969:370). The evangelical documents, on the other hand, clearly reject "the notion that people can ever build a utopia on earth" (Lausanne Movement 1974:9) and stress that "at his return, Jesus will … establish the universal reign of God" (Lausanne Movement 2011:10).

Evangelism and Social Responsibility distinguishes between Jesus being king *de facto* over his redeemed people and only *de jure* over the world and proposes to "reserve the expression 'the kingdom of God' for the acknowledged rule of Christ" (Lausanne Movement & World Evangelical Fellowship 1982:28).

Regarding the question of continuity or discontinuity between the present and the new creation, *Together Towards Life* strongly supports a position of continuity (World Council of Churches 2012:10, 14), while the consultation at Grand Rapids did not reach an agreement (Lausanne Movement & World Evangelical Fellowship 1982:25-36).

3.4   Agential aspects: Actions and actors

The Micah Declaration distinguishes four categories of activities (Micah Network 2001:2): "Welfare activities", "movement towards value transformation", "the empowerment of communities" and "co-operation in wider issues of justice". There seems to be a consensus on the general relevance of these categories of action. However, the considered documents emphasise different categories.

Although the *Cape Town Commitment* speaks of "God's good news … for individual persons, and for society, and for creation" (Lausanne Movement 2011:13), it seems to focus mainly on the individual dimension, as "repentance and faith in Jesus Christ are the first acts of obedience" that lead to ethical transformation (Lausanne Movement 2011:16). Similarly, in the Consultation on *Evangelism and Social Responsibility*, "social service", which may include "development", is considered "universally accepted as a Christian obligation" (Lausanne Movement & World Evangelical Fellowship 1982:37), while "social action", which involves political activity and transforming the structures of society, should be taken up by "groups and movements which concern themselves with specific needs in society", rather than the Church itself (Lausanne Movement & World Evangelical Fellowship 1982:39-41).

A similar focus on the individual can be found in the Roman Catholic documents. It recognises the task of "working to eliminate the structural causes of poverty" (Francis I 2013:§188), which shall be fostered by "enable[ing] the development of new convictions, attitudes and forms of life" (Francis I 2015:§202). The importance of transforming values is also recognised by the ACT Alliance (2013:2, 4) and the Micah Network (2001:3) speaking of the "need for integral discipleship involving … the transformation of the moral, intellectual, economic, cultural and political dimensions of our lives".

The ecumenical documents seem to put more emphasis on the transformation of unjust and oppressive systems and structures than those from Catholic and evangelical sources. This was particularly visible in the reports of the World Council of Churches' Assembly in Uppsala, which frequently used the term 'revolution' (World Council of Churches 1969:369; Jack 1968:1046ff). The churches' calling is understood "to transform power structures" (World Council of Churches 2012:14; see also ACT Alliance 2013:2) and "the evangelistic witness [should] also speak to the structures of this world; its economic, political and societal institutions" (World Council of Churches 2005:14).

Besides the question of what is to be done, the question of who is involved is important. As can be expected in documents originating from churches, the Church is considered an important actor. This is particularly clear in the evangelical documents, which view "the Church … at the very centre of God's cosmic purpose" (Lausanne Movement 1974:4; Micah Network 2001:2). The three groups expect churches to be "a radically alternative society" (Lausanne Movement & World Evangelical Fellowship 1982:36), a "diaconal community manifesting the power of service" (World Council of Churches 2012:28), and a "civilization of love" (Francis I 2015:§231).

Documents from all three groups support the cooperation of Christians with groups and organisations working for similar goals (Paul VI 1967:§87; Francis I 2013:§241; World Council of Churches 1969:371; 2005:29; Lausanne Movement & World Evangelical Fellowship 1982:41; Micah Network 2001:3) and the participation of those involved as people, even those on the margins, who bear the image of God and are endowed with dignity and resources (Paul VI 1967:§27; ACT Alliance 2013:2; Micah Network 2001:2).

A distinction between the three groups is the extent to which God is seen at work outside the Church. The World Council of Churches (2005:29; 2012:8) stresses that "the Spirit of God is constantly at work … in places that to us are least expected" and can be discerned "wherever there is life in its fullness" (World Council of Churches 2012:37) in various cultures (World Council of Churches 2012:12) and even in other faith traditions (World Council of Churches 2012:34). Francis I (2015:§80) sees the Holy Spirit at work

> to loosen the knots of human affairs, including the most complex and inscrutable [and] has filled the universe with possibilities [from which] something new can always emerge.

However, the Consultation on *Evangelism and Social Responsibility* focuses on the kingdom of God and cautions that, while "God is directly at work in his world, apart from the agency of his people", this is not to be viewed as "what Jesus meant by his kingdom" (Lausanne Movement & World Evangelical Fellowship 1982:29-30).

4.   CONCLUSION

Regarding most of the questions considered in this study, there is wide agreement between the three theological streams. The debates of the 1960s and the 1970s may be hardly relevant for contemporary theologians. An indicator of a shared understanding is the document "Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World" (World Council of Churches 2011). Although slightly different terms are used, they agree that, from a Christian perspective, development is understood holistically, including the individual, society and the whole of creation, including spiritual dimensions (an understanding also shared by the author). While there are still nuances of theological differences, it appears that the time of heated debates is over. However, from my perspective as someone coming from the field of Development Studies, it seems that a few issues may require further research and application to the practice of development work.

Since religion was discovered by development experts at the end of the 1990s, a major contribution of religion has been noted in offering identity and providing world views and values (Garling 2013:16). These aspects, the role of local congregations and the collaboration between the Church and other actors of development was an important issue in the documents studied. The same is true for the normative aspect of religion by providing values and encouraging changes of behaviour. Other aspects such as spiritual root causes of problems and eschatological issues are hardly covered in the literature on development. I will now summarise these issues.

4.1   The role of the Church in development work

The three theological traditions view God as working, in particular, through the Church. The Church is expected to be an alternative society, not conforming to the standards of the world and working in anticipation of the kingdom of God. This ideal is backed by Scripture, but this is not generally experienced in praxis. It is a question of both ecclesiology and practical theology as to how congregations can be awakened to their role in God's mission and turn from an internal focus to the needs of the communities in which they are placed. For Christian development agencies, it is a practical

question as to whether church bodies and local congregations share their understanding of development and are willing and able to engage accordingly. In some instances, it may be less demanding to collaborate with non-church partners. If non-governmental organisations apply for public funding, the focus of working with churches or even a particular denomination may be a criterion excluding them from access to funding. The role of churches in development work is thus a theological, practical and political issue.

4.2   Cooperation with other actors

All three traditions recognise that God is also at work outside and independently from the Church. This thought is somewhat controversial and plays a more prominent role in the documents of the World Council of Churches. This question is also related to the understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit. There still seems to be considerable dissent on the question as to how the Spirit of God is at work outside the Church. As a theological issue, this question may need more in-depth study. On the practical side, there are encouraging examples of cooperating with actors from other religions, in particular in programmes for reconciliation.

The three groups of documents share the view of all human beings as created in the image of God. This also applies for its practical implication for the active and responsible participation of all concerned in development projects. While this should be an established principle for all Christian development agencies, it remains to be a continuing challenge for the world view and self-image of Christian development workers (Kröck 2019).

4.3   Values and discipleship

The documents address the normative aspect of religion, with the understanding that the proclamation of the gospel and repentance should have social consequences (Micah Network 2001:1) and that mission spirituality should "transform life-destroying values" (World Council of Churches 2012:13). In particular, the Roman Catholic Church emphasises a change of "convictions, attitudes and forms of life" (Francis I 2015:§202). While many Christian non-governmental organisations try to combine development activities and the proclamation of the gospel (unless this is restricted by state laws or the cultural context), specific programmes to encourage the reflection on, and transformation of values and behaviour seem to be less common. A way to promote such transformations could be discipleship programmes that address values, attitudes and the practice of Christian life, with a focus on the spirituality of contentment, sharing, and sustainability. Examples of tools for such programmes are *Foundations*

for Farming developed in Zimbabwe (Berkelaar 2012) and the *Just People Course* of Micah Challenge Germany and StopArmut Switzerland (Micha Deutschland 2020).

4.4   Spiritual aspects

All three theological traditions agree on the spiritual causes of the current social, economic and ecological crises and speak of evil and injustice systems (World Council of Churches 2005:17; Lausanne Movement 2011:15; Francis I 2013:§59). This is also shown by the common use of the term "idolatry" (World Council of Churches 1982:39; Micah Network 2001:1; Lausanne Movement 2011:28; Francis I 2013:§55ff). Spiritual aspects of religion are perceived as intangible and mysterious and are less often linked to development work. As discussed by Matthews (1999:292), even Christian agencies may promote a secular world view if they are characterised by a dualistic mindset. How can the Church and Christian non-governmental organisations be involved in transforming and overcoming these spiritual structures? Is it mainly through the renewal of individuals as the evangelicals emphasise or by providing values that may inform political activity, as Pope Francis I (2013:§241) proposed? How does the World Council of Churches (2005:14) understand that "the evangelistic witness will also speak to the structures of this world"? How do Christian aid agencies deal with this understanding? Chester (2015:141) proposes prayer as a distinctive aspect of Christian development. This subject poses many questions for theological research as well as for the practice (including funding) of Christian non-governmental organisations.

4.5   Eschatological issues

As mentioned earlier, eschatology is not a purely academic issue, but it can be related to motivation, hope and even the goals of Christian development work. A number of differing views regarding this subject have been found in the documents. In particular, the question of eschatological continuity or discontinuity of creation may be of interest, particularly for those concerned with the ecological crises and care of creation. While a majority of members of churches from the evangelical spectrum subscribe to a view of discontinuity, the documents of the World Council of Churches clearly emphasise continuity.

In this article, I explored theological concepts and their application in the praxis of development work, with the aim to engage both disciplines in a fruitful dialogue. While there are still different positions regarding some issues between the theological traditions, there is an increasing space of common ground, especially in terms of the ecological challenges

of the 21ˢᵗ century. Theologians from the different traditions agree that Christian churches have both a mandate and opportunities to contribute to the care of creation and sustainable development (Francis I 2015:§214; Werner 2019:54ff; Wright 2010:267ff). In this context, theology can provide a "vision of flourishing life" (Volf & Croasmun 2019:149ff) for individuals, society and the entire creation.

It is hoped that this article will foster a conversation between the different theological traditions and the discipline of Development Studies, and encourage Christian development agencies to strengthen their Christian distinctive for holistic service.

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