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GOD'S MISSIONAL PEOPLE: REFLECTING GOD'S LOVE IN THE MIDST OF SUFFERING AND AFFLICTION

ABSTRACT

The title of this article reflects a deep and personal conviction founded on the belief that a major solution to lessen the suffering of people living in poverty and in the midst of pandemics such as AIDS, lies within the body of Christ. The focus therefore is on God's people being called to participate in God's mission in God's world. Reflecting on those people, his church, in which he is incarnating himself through his Holy Spirit in an extraordinary and empowering way in order for them to reflect his love on the highways and byways of life – to transform the lives and circumstances of people in order for him to receive glory and honour. The title of this article clearly indicates a fundamental characteristic of God's people – they are being sent to participate in his mission (*missio Dei*).

1. GIVE THEM FOOD TO EAT – AN INTRODUCTION

A few years ago a friend was sharing a growing challenge and concern in his local church with me: "This situation is becoming a crisis of belief, and it arouses distrust in what we preach." Then he told me about the local church in which he was a pastor. He stated:

You must help me. I need advice. We cannot go on like this. Although we have very prosperous and wealthy people in the congregation, there are also very poor church members. In fact, many are unemployed, cannot find work and some are so poor they lack enough to eat at times. This faith crisis arises because, many times, we have prayed with these people, but apparently

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our prayers are unanswered. We have trusted the Lord to change their circumstances and that he will provide for them, but it really does not happen. People start to doubt if it is really worthwhile to pray. In many cases the physical circumstances are even becoming worse. What complicates this crisis of belief is the fact that, even the people who have enough, are starting to doubt because they also experience that the Lord is not answering our prayers for the needy members. What should we do? What can we do?

Suddenly I realised the apparent absurdity of the situation. We were confronted with the age-old schism between Christian confessions and daily Christian living. In this instance, we have brothers and sisters in Christ, belonging to the same faith community, where some of them have more than enough and others experience suffering and have less than what is needed. I was reminded of the vibrant New Testament church where "there were no needy persons among them" (Acts 4:34). So I remarked to my friend and this sounded blunt at the time: "Give them food to eat".

Disbelief was written over his face. "Is that your solution?", he asked somewhat offended. It was apparent that he expected a much deeper spiritual solution to their problem. I realised that I was listening to a real-life version of the Good Samaritan story – church people praying while they "passed by on the other side" (Lk 10:31).

To drive the point home I was trying to shock him and even myself. "Yes", I said, "it's as easy as that. Stop praying and do something. Give the poor people food. Let those who have too much, share their abundance with the needy".

When I later pondered about this situation, it reminded me of Mark's description of hungry people being gathered around Jesus to receive the Bread of life, but when the day drew to a close, Jesus was also sensitive to their physical need for food.

As a rule, the theme of God's provision is accentuated by the exegesis of this passage, but I believe that Jesus also emphasised a strong element of responsibility when he said: "You give them something to eat" (Mk 6:37).

The story of my troubled pastor friend highlighted some basic Biblical truths for both of us. It emphasised the fact that God's missional people can and should transform the lives of people, communities, countries and the world by reflecting God's love in a very practical, relevant and context-changing manner.

2. THE TITLE OF THIS ARTICLE

2.1 Determining an approach

The title of this article reflects a deep and personal conviction founded on the belief that a major solution to lessen the suffering of people living in poverty and in the midst of pandemics such as Aids lies within the body of Christ. The expression a *major solution* is deliberately used instead of *the complete solution* because it would be naïve and dishonest to ignore and disregard the enormous global impact of non-Christian relief organisations and trusts. In fact, the impression sometimes arises that these groups are much more sincere and earnest about the suffering of a major part of humanity than is demonstrated by the church (ἐκκλησία).

This article focuses on God's people being called to participate in God's mission in God's world. He reflects on those people, his church, in which he is incarnating himself through his Holy Spirit in an extraordinary and empowering way in order for them to reflect his love on the highways and byways of life – to transform the lives and circumstances of people in order for him to receive glory and honour. Put differently, to see a glimmer of the coming kingdom and the glory of the King!

The title of this article clearly indicates a fundamental characteristic of God's people – they are being sent to participate in his mission (*missio Dei*). Probing the meaning and content of mission should therefore be the primary point of departure before embarking on the subject of this article.

2.2 Applying missional understanding

David Bosch (1979:248) defines mission “as the Church in the form of a servant reaching out over boundaries”. He builds on the definition of John Stott and concludes that:

Mission is the total task of the Church with the salvation of the world as goal. Executing this task, the Church steps out of its limited existence and crosses geographical, social, political, ethnic, cultural, religious and ideological barriers. To all these different spheres of life, the Church-on-mission carries the Good News of salvation (Bosch 1987:11).

If the Biblical concept of mission is comprehended and verbalised according to the insight and understanding of theologians such as Bosch and Stott, it becomes clear that for them the missional attribute of the church frequently points towards the crossing of boundaries or barriers.

This *crossing* always includes some degree of discomfort – being and functioning out of the comfort zone.

Although implied by these definitions, the missional church should explicitly expect to be confronted by boundaries dividing people on the basis of economic affluence. The HIV/AIDS pandemic also vividly accentuates that the barrier created by the stigma and medical prognoses of this condition labels those who suffer from it as *untouchable*.

The Bosch/Stott perspective of mission therefore helps us to expect God's people to cross boundaries and barriers in the process of being his missional people and that this calls for a sacrificial orientation. This is what it really implies to be the missional church.

2.3 The missional church

Accepting this understanding, it is essential to venture somewhat deeper into the phenomenon that is generally known as the missional church.

I am of the opinion that there is unprecedented emphasis on Jesus' words: "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (Jn 20:21). It is doubtful whether, in recent times, any missiological subject created so much discussion, so much debate, so many fierce differences, so much misuse, but also so much enthusiasm, as the so-called missional church. Apart from traditional ways of publishing, the internet abounds with websites, blogs, YouTube video streams and countless electronic publications about this subject.

Some time ago I had a speaking engagement at a Missions Conference in Potchefstroom, organised and attended by Church leaders, missionaries and ordinary church members from a variety of denominations from all over South Africa. The undertone of most presentations was rooted in the concept of the missional church. If we consider what researchers such as Barna (2008), as well as Barrett and Johnson (2001) write about so-called new-apostolic fellowships and missional communities, it is very relevant to take note of this emerging paradigm and its possible influence on missional paradigms and practice – having a marked influence on how God's people cross barriers to poor and suffering people.

I will approach the subject of this article by using the phenomenon of poverty as an illustrative example of suffering and affliction. Developing a better understanding of poverty and a responsible Biblical approach towards it will ultimately help establish a true missional approach towards suffering and affliction in general. This will be followed by an evaluation of the potential effect of changing missional paradigms, and a reflection on

the merging of orthodoxy and orthopraxy. In conclusion, I will table some challenging thoughts which, in some instances, can stir the calm waters of complacency.

3. UNDERSTANDING POVERTY AS AN ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLE OF SUFFERING AND AFFLICTION

3.1 Understanding poverty – some Scriptural perspectives

How can we develop a true missional approach towards suffering and affliction founded on responsible Biblical exegesis? Viewed holistically, it could probably be called a Theology of Suffering and Affliction. Although an incalculable number of books, articles and discussions have, and always will, try to probe the mysterious causes, reasons and nature of suffering and affliction, this article will not contribute fundamentally towards human efforts to fathom that mystery. This article aims to contribute towards understanding if and how Scripture helps God's people to understand and react to some of the major grounds for suffering, such as poverty and pandemics.

A more in-depth examination of the phenomenon of poverty help us develop a better understanding of how God's people can reflect his love and care in the midst of such trying realities.

We should depart from the firm foundation that it is not first about our understanding of poverty, but rather about God's orientation towards poverty. Wright (2006:280) helps us understand that perspective:

This spiritualizing way of interpreting the Bible, and the missiological implications that go with it, requires us to imagine that for generation after generation, century after century, the God of the Bible was passionately concerned about social issues - political arrogance and abuse, economic exploitation, judicial corruption, the suffering of the poor and oppressed, the evils of brutality and bloodshed. So passionate, indeed, that the laws he gave and the prophets he sent give more space to these matters than any other issue except idolatry, while the psalmists cry out in protest to the God they know cares deeply about such things.

Kerby Anderson, president of Probe Ministries International, writes that questions concerning the biblical perspective on wealth and poverty are important to Christians if we are to fulfil our responsibilities to the poor (Anderson n.d.).

3.2 Understanding poverty - reasons and causes

As point of departure it is necessary to affirm that wealth is not *per se* a sign of God's blessing – contrary to what popular Prosperity Theology teaches. Wright (2006:216) warns that the realities of injustice and oppression, which reduce some people to poverty and make other people very wealthy, “undercut any simplistic correlation between wealth (or lack thereof) and God's blessing (or absence thereof)”.

Understanding the basic causes of poverty also helps the missional church to react to this phenomenon. Anderson's view is that the Old Testament indicates at least four different categories of causes resulting in poverty (Anderson n.d.).

According to Anderson, the first cause of poverty is oppression and fraud. In the Old Testament (Pr 14:31; 22:7; 28:15) we find that many people were poor because they were oppressed by individuals or governments. On many occasions, governments established unjust laws or debased the currency, measures that resulted in the exploitation of individuals.

Anderson describes the second major cause of poverty as misfortune, persecution or judgement. He refers to the book of Job where God allowed Satan to test Job by bringing misfortune upon him (1:12-19). Elsewhere in the Old Testament (Ps 109:16; Is 47:9; Lm 5:3) we read of misfortune or of God's judgment on a disobedient people.

The third suggested cause of poverty is laziness, neglect, or gluttony. Proverbs teaches that some people are poor because of improper habits and apathy (10:4; 13:4; 19:15; 20:13; 23:21).

Anderson defines the final cause of poverty as the culture of poverty. Proverbs 10:15: “The ruin of the poor is their poverty.” Poverty breeds poverty, and the cycle is not easily broken. People who grow up in an impoverished culture usually lack the nutrition and the education that would enable them to be successful in the future (Anderson n.d.).

Chris van Wyk (2010) also refers to the reasons and causes of poverty. He refers to a statement by Dom Helda Camara in his article with the theme: *Why do the poor have no food?* Illustrating the importance of understanding the causes of poverty and the general apathy towards such understanding, Camara writes:

When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why the poor have no food, they call me a communist.

Van Wyk asks the question whether the church is doing enough despite positive reports about involvement with the poor. He refers to the conclusion of Mills in his publication *Why Africa is poor*, that poor decision-making is the major reason for on-going poverty in Africa. He then touches on the heart of the matter – personal financial gain and wealth is generally still being valued above all – resulting in the suffering of millions of poverty-stricken people.

Fernando Gros also asks the fundamental question: “Why are the poor, poor?” This leads to a further question: “If the church does take up its responsibility, will people still remain poor?” Gros (2007) concludes:

I am not talking about some misguided doctrine of prosperity, but a simpler economic reality. If we take poverty seriously, then we take dismantling it seriously. Addressing poverty means going beyond the hand-out, the soup kitchen and the extra blanket and journeying with people as they build (or rebuild) their lives.

From these suggested causes for poverty the missional church can and should develop a preventative and remedial orientation towards poverty. The views and insight conveyed by Scripture are just as valid, relevant and applicable in the 21st century as they were in Biblical times.

3.3 Understanding poverty – experiencing the poor

Peter Grove, an associate of *Ekklesia* at the University of Stellenbosch, gives further insight into the Biblical perspectives of poverty. Grove bases his Biblical views of poverty on the classic narrative of Mark 12:41-44. The poor widow at the temple treasury confirms, what he calls, a universal experience. Based on that, he points out that the poor are often those people who are most vulnerable, such as women, widows and the elderly. Strangely enough, it is often those people who expose a willingness to give in an unreserved manner (Grove 2010).

In general, communities, including faith communities, perceive poor people as a burden on society. Grove refers to James 1:27 to support his perspective that the poor are not supposed to be a burden to Christian society, but that they are rather co-participants of God’s grace (Grove 2010). God our Father accepts the following as pure and faultless religion: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world (Ja 1:27).

This view would probably create some uneasiness, but it is accentuated and supported by the demonstrated passion of Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu

(Mother Teresa) for poor and suffering people. By translating Biblical teaching into a way of living, she became a global icon for Christian caring – not experiencing the poor as a burden but rather that

our life of poverty is as necessary as the work itself. Only in heaven will we see how much we owe to the poor for helping us to love God better because of them (Brainy Quotes n.d.).

In December 1989, in an interview with Edward Desmond, this acclaimed servant of the poor and afflicted said: “The dying, the crippled, the mentally ill, the unwanted, and the unloved – they are Jesus in disguise.” And when asked what is God’s greatest gift to her, she remarked: “The poor people” (Desmond 1989).

Bosch (1991:547) emphasised how the way the poor are experienced has changed over time. A shift has taken place from the traditional view that the poor need the church towards an understanding that it is rather the church that needs the poor “if it wishes to stay close to its poor Lord”.

Perception about the poor also changed as they were no longer perceived as objects of mission by fellow believers, but rather as the agents and bearers of mission (Bosch 1991:547).

3.4 Understanding poverty – an unnoticed reality

If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? (1 Jn 3:17). Peter Grove (2010) refers to this question as an enlightening view of the relationship between those who have and those who are suffering. He stresses the fact that the needs of people are many times unnoticed by those who have sufficient means – even by the church.

Grove’s statement is an uncomfortable reminder of the history of the Old Testament church where under their noses and feet “the poor were uncared for at best and trampled on at worst. Spiritual religion flourished amidst social rottenness” (Is 1:13-15) (Wright 2006:288).

3.5 Understanding poverty – a broader perspective

In *When I needed a neighbour*, Hennie Lötter addresses the reality of poverty. Although 56% of the world population is exposed to poverty, we must differentiate between, what he calls, absolute poverty – related to a lack of economic capacity and relative poverty – and poverty according to human standards (Van Wyk 2009).

If this distinction is not applied, people with sufficient basic financial capacity could be labelled as poor if perceived from the viewpoint of an affluent community. It is obvious that the church is not called to empower the financial middle class, but to reach out to those in desperate need of the means of survival.

4. TOWARDS A TRUE MISSIONAL APPROACH TO POVERTY

How then should God's missional people approach their calling to reach out to those in need? What should the deepest motive be?

The classical statement by Jesus (Jn 3:16) that the motive behind his mission is God's love should help the church to review its own motive. Driven, motivated and propelled by the love of Christ (2 Cor 5:14), God's people should unconditionally fulfil their calling to demonstrate love, care and compassion while they trust, pray and believe that the One who sovereignly build his own Kingdom will bring people to faith in him.

The physical needs of poor and afflicted people are often overemphasised by those who are ready to react to that. It is true that physical needs should be addressed but, in many instances, well-meaning supporters overlook a much deeper and more fundamental need. Some of Mother Teresa's recorded statements are very relevant in this regard:

- The hunger for love is much more difficult to remove than the hunger for bread.
- The most terrible poverty is loneliness and the feeling of being unloved.
- Being unwanted, unloved, uncared for, forgotten by everybody, I think that is a much greater hunger, a much greater poverty than the person who has nothing to eat.
- I try to give to the poor people for love what the rich could get for money. No, I wouldn't touch a leper for a thousand pounds; yet I willingly cure him for the love of God.
- Loneliness and the feeling of being unwanted is the most terrible poverty (Brainy Quotes n.d.).

In *When I needed a neighbour*, Hennie Lötter (Van Wyk 2009) identifies several characteristics or consequences of poverty which underscore the dire need for God's people to cross the barrier of economic depravity and

which can help us move towards a true missional approach to suffering and affliction. Lötter emphasises that:

- Poverty is a matter of life and death;
- Poverty undermines the dignity of people;
- Poverty implies public humiliation for poor people;
- Poverty leads to or aggravates broken relationships;
- Poverty leads to wasted human potential;
- Poverty brings about a greater burden and lessens quality of life for many people;
- Poverty illuminates the lack of humane feeling between people;
- Poverty confronts us with the broad responsibility for circumstances of injustice, and
- Poverty in many instances leads to wasted human and natural resources.

4.1 The missional approach – reacting to poverty

Hannes van der Merwe is leading a ministry in the Cape Metropolitan area (Ophelp-projekte; Straatwerk). This ministry is probably one of the most successful initiatives to help homeless and unemployed poor people to find hope and new dignity while supplying sustainable solutions to change people's lives. Speaking at a recent conference on job creation and the homeless, he argued that the answer to poverty is not free distribution but the wise handling and management of problem situations.

This unpublished view of Van der Merwe is to a large extent supported by Peter Grove when he affirms his viewpoint that poverty is not merely a material problem. He is convinced that in South Africa the problem is one of management and involvement rather than one of shortage (Grove 2010).

4.2 The missional approach – involvement as fundamental Biblical calling

In his publication *When I needed a neighbour: Christians and the challenge of poverty*, Hennie Lötter (Van Wyk 2009) describes involvement with the poor as a fundamental Christian issue. He focuses primarily on ethical values from a Scriptural viewpoint. His contribution also helps us develop

a Biblically sound approach towards God's people in the midst of poverty and affliction.

In the section where Lötter writes about Poverty and Riches in the Old Testament, he identifies a number of dominant themes on poverty:

- From the prophets Amos, Isaiah, Zechariah and Micah he determines that God must be the first priority.
- From Deuteronomy 16:18-20 he affirms that the poor must be treated with human dignity.
- He confirms that all non-poor believers must help poor believers with generosity and without any selfishness (Ex 22:22-24; Dt 14:22-29; 15:7-11; 16:9-17; 24:17; Lv 25:36-7).
- From the book of Ruth he differentiates between emergency poverty and empowering poverty relief.

In the section where Lötter views Poverty and Riches in the New Testament, he focuses primarily on the perspectives of the Gospels. From Luke 21 he emphasises the fact that God looks at the heart of people and that he expects from his people that something special should be done for the poor (Lk 14). He interprets James 5:1-6 to imply that "the condemned rich are those who live alongside the poor but do not care for them at all." He concludes that God's people must share in the compassion of Christ because that is the deepest motivation to make a difference in the lives of people who experience suffering and affliction (Van Wyk 2009).

Even if an in-depth Scriptural perspective of the responsibility of God's people towards poverty or suffering, in general, cannot be accomplished in an article such as this, it is clear that commentators agree that a deep urge of compassion should propel the church towards impacting the lives of suffering people by reflecting the love of Christ. Nowhere are God's people allowed to "pass by on the other side" of suffering and afflicted people, as was demonstrated by the priest and the Levite in the narrative of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10).

4.3 The missional approach – no strings attached...

Whenever God's people are reaching out to people in need – the poor, the sick, the afflicted – the question of fundamental motive is asked and debated. Are we only reaching out to people because they are in need and God's people have to respond to that – no strings attached? Or, does the church respond in this way but with a much deeper, spiritual motive

at the core? Do Christians use (misuse) the devastating consequences of poverty and affliction to “lead” vulnerable people “to accept Christ as their personal Lord and Saviour”?, thus fulfilling their mission of evangelistic calling?

If the motive is singular, in other words merely addressing the physical needs of people, a strong objection rises from a large part of global Christianity who interprets such actions as merely philanthropic or humanistic initiatives. If people do not experience God, receive an invitation and have the opportunity to become a Christian, many evangelical believers will doubt the motive behind such outreach activities. The popular saying in such circles is that people “need Christ as well as bread”.

The other viewpoint would stress that an element of dishonesty is present where a dual motive exists to evangelise poor and afflicted people.

No strings attached? Taking cognisance of the fact that God's people should reach out with the singular motive of love, but with prayerful expectancy that he will call unbelievers unto himself. At the same time the church should remember constantly that apart from the dire needs that result from poverty and affliction, people in general have a deep-seated need for love and affection. Without such a holistic approach the church becomes either a loveless evangelistic institution or, alternately, a humanistic relief organisation.

5. POTENTIAL EFFECT OF CHANGING MISSIONAL PARADIGMS

I am convinced that changing missional paradigms can, with God's grace and the obedience of his people, have the singular most significant impact on the context of suffering and affliction. The growing awareness of the global church, namely that it is sent (Jn 20:21) and empowered by God as his transformational agent in the world, already has an astounding effect on many communities worldwide.

This view is reflected and substantiated in an article by Dr Arnau van Wyngaard (2006) entitled “*On becoming the hands and feet of Christ in an AIDS-ridden community in Swaziland – A story of hope*”. In this article Van Wyngaard (2006: 1099) quotes a statement by the World Council of Churches:

Churches have strengths, they have credibility, and they are grounded in communities. This offers them the opportunity to make a real difference in combatting HIV/AIDS. To respond to this challenge,

the churches must be transformed in the face of the HIV/AIDS crisis, in order that they may become a force for transformation – bringing healing, hope, and accompaniment to all affected by HIV/AIDS.

Van Wyngaard (2006) writes how, after meeting with Pastor Robert Calvert and hearing how his church had put their vision into practice in Rotterdam, he returned to Swaziland with:

the desire to see the congregation at Dwaleni transformed to become bearers of God's compassion within their community. The vision we had for the church was formulated in these words: Becoming the hands and feet of Christ in this community.

Van Wyngaard (2006:1106) refers to their home-based caring project in:

a community that was devastated by poverty, sickness, broken families and death. They wanted to bring back true Christian hope, not only through their words, but also – following the perfect example of our Lord, Jesus Christ – by reaching out in love to those in need, comforting and supporting them by all means available.

According to Steve Camp (2006), the missional church embraces:

the dignity of all men as created in the image of God by caring for the poor, the widow, the orphan, and all hurting, sick and disadvantaged under this banner: His holiness not compromised; yet His mercy not restrained. The missional church can make a vast difference because the missional church does not hide within the structures and confinement of the institution. Missional people take personal responsibility.

In his web discussion *The conversations of our times*, Bill Easum (n.d.) believes that “the day has come when the church needs to focus more on how to go to the world in need, than on how to get people to come to the church”.

In an article entitled *Die regte medisyne vir kwynende kerke* (The right medicine for the languishing church) (*Rapport*, 6 February 2011), Stefan Joubert refers to an over-accentuation of dogma (orthodoxy) at the cost of living faith (orthopraxy) and a sterile theology that has forced the church and the kingdom of God on the back foot. However, he mentions that

fresh and exciting winds of change are sweeping through the church. It is especially the “missional church movement” that has a worldwide impact. This movement helps us understand that the church is a grassroots-level movement of ordinary people. They make their theology audible and intelligible in ordinary daily living through serving other people. Therefore the missional church measures their efficiency in terms of being there in the name of Jesus (Joubert 2011).

This is the reason why the Faith Presbyterian Church (n.d.) in the US can formulate their mission as seeking “to reflect the love we have received through acts of service and times of fellowship. Through our fellowship and service, we are growing into a living demonstration of Christ’s love.”

Being part of God’s mission, the missional church grasps the fact that God’s mission transforms, heals, reaches out, takes initiative, crosses boundaries, touches, is willing to suffer for those who suffer, and is willing to give up what we have for those who have not.

Reflecting God’s love always has an outcome or effect. It is always transformational. Reflecting God’s love will never allow a *status quo* of suffering and affliction. That is God’s missional people: Reflecting God’s love in the midst of suffering and affliction.

6. WHERE ORTHODOXY AND ORTHOPRAXY MERGE

A few years ago we developed material that was, with the help and input from other theologians, published as an interactive Bible study. The goal was for believers to discover from Scripture that God intended his church to be his transformational agent in the world – to take part in God’s mission of restoration and to be a sign of the coming Kingdom.

After introducing the material to a local church, some of the Bible study groups started to use the material. Two years later the leader of one of these groups who was overwhelmed with joy contacted me and told me how none of the group members was previously involved in any action to reach out to suffering people in the community. But, as they discovered from Scripture what God intends his church to be, people changed and slowly but surely everyone got involved in outreach activities to the needy and the poor.

For me this was as if orthodoxy and orthopraxy merged in this little faith community. As if fusion between practical and theoretical theology eventually took place. I experienced an example where statements of faith become real life, become context-changing truth for the suffering and

afflicted. Again I was convinced of the immeasurable potential of God's missional people bringing hope in seemingly hopeless situations.

7. CONCLUSIONS

It does catch one's attention that, as part of the ministry of Jesus and his disciples, there was a ministry to the poor – a purse which also addressed the physical needs of the suffering (Jn 12 and 13).

In Jesus' organisation there is not much about structures and practices that reminds us of the average modern local church. Although there is a vast difference in context, we do see how teaching (orthodoxy) and reaching out to people in need (orthopraxy) are continuously demonstrated through the ministry of the Lord himself.

This inevitably leads to the question: To what extent have Biblical principles such as sharing and caring become theological statements with little or no effect on the transforming lifestyles of God's people? The example of the crisis of belief experienced by my pastor friend in the opening paragraph of this article emphasises this question.

We have cupboards filled with clothes, while people die from cold. We suffer from the effects of obesity, while people die without food. We spend money on medicinal attempts to hide the effects of overindulgence and aging, while millions lack the basic medical support to stay alive. If we do not experience a revival in our understanding of God's mission, a revival in our ability to reconcile the teaching of the Bible and our lifestyles, nothing will change.

A fresh discovery of the vibrant Biblical truths of being God's transformational people in the world can have a determining effect on how the church will be perceived and experienced by people exposed to suffering and affliction. Even more fundamental, the global credibility and authenticity of Christianity will be strengthened by following the example of our Lord. Then orthodoxy and orthopraxy merge in such a way that the church really becomes a living sacrament in the world – the church "becoming Jesus" for those in need.

The motive behind God's mission is love. Therefore, as participants in God's mission, the church cannot and should not act out of any other motive. God's people should not foremost be driven by the need of people, but by the love of Christ because it is only from this inner source that sustainable transformation can be born and nourished. Such understanding is illustrated by Mother Teresa's statement: "Many people mistake our work for our vocation. Our vocation is the love of Jesus" (Brainy Quotes n.d.).

When God's people discover the missional *privilege* to reflect God's love in the midst of suffering and affliction, then the church will truly become a living sacrament of His love for a world in desperate need.

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