THE ESSENCE OF THE CHURCH AND ITS PRESENCE FOR SOCIETAL TRANSFORMATION

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Abstrak: Penelitian ini menelusuri peran penting gereja sebagai agen transformasi sosial, dengan menekankan kontribusi signifikan dalam mendorong perubahan holistik dan berkelanjutan dalam masyarakat. Dengan pendekatan kualitatif, penelitian ini melakukan eksplorasi dan analisis mendalam tentang peran gereja melalui tinjauan literatur yang luas. Melalui analisis konten yang teliti, penelitian ini mengungkap pola yang berulang dalam literatur relevan, menjelaskan bagaimana gereja menghasilkan pengaruhnya pada perubahan sosial melalui partisipasi aktif, inisiatif pemberdayaan, dan pembinaan hubungan komunitas yang berarti. Selain itu, penelitian ini menekankan pentingnya mengaitkan pelayanan gereja dengan budaya lokal dan mengadvokasi nilai-nilai spiritual yang relevan. Dengan fokus pada dampak gereja pada transformasi sosial, penelitian ini menawarkan wawasan mendalam tentang peran gereja sebagai katalisator perubahan komprehensif, menekankan tanggung jawab inheren gereja dalam meningkatkan kesejahteraan komunitas.

Kata Kunci: Gereja, Hakikat, Transformasi Sosial, Kontribusi, Keterlibatan Aktif

Abstract: This study delves into the pivotal role of the church as an agent of social transformation, emphasizing its significant contributions to fostering holistic and sustainable changes within society. Employing a qualitative approach, the research undertakes an in-depth exploration and analysis of the church's role through an extensive literature review. Through meticulous content analysis, the study uncovers recurring patterns in relevant literature, elucidating how the church exerts its influence on social change through active participation, empowerment initiatives, and the cultivation of meaningful community relationships. Moreover, the study underscores the paramount importance of contextualizing church ministry within the local culture and advocating for pertinent spiritual values. By centering on the church's impact on societal transformation, this research offers profound insights into its role as a comprehensive catalyst for change, emphasizing the church's inherent responsibility in fostering enhanced community well-being.

Keywords: Church, Essence, Societal Transformation, Contribution, Active Engagement

INTRODUCTION

In general, discussions on community development initiatives often overlook the spiritual dimension and are frequently regarded with indifference, merely as endeavors tied to worldly concerns and focused solely on material aspects by certain quarters. Despite the church's considerable potential as a religious institution to contribute to socio-economic progress, it is often perceived as marginally engaged in active discourse or offering solutions to arising issues within this realm. However, this article posits that the church indeed wields a substantial influence on socio-economic development, aligning with the objective of

fostering community well-being. The discourse on development commences with a comprehensive understanding of its evolution and significance throughout history. Fundamentally, development represents a trajectory of advancement, as articulated by Budiman (1995). Initially, in 1951, the United Nations (UN) defined development primarily in terms of measurable economic growth, gauged through a country's Gross National Product (GNP). However, this definition gradually evolved over time, particularly during the 1960s, to encompass social change or transformation as integral to development outcomes. By the 1970s, the focus of development shifted towards human development aspects, as elucidated by Nohlen (1994). Development, within a broad framework and interconnected with various disciplines, can be defined as a series of efforts aimed at enhancing the overall quality of human life, taking into account various aspects ranging from sustainable economic growth to equitable access to basic services such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure. This definition aligns with the vision of sustainable development advocated by the United Nations, which emphasizes the importance of meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. While in the economic domain, development encompasses increasing per capita income, job creation, and poverty reduction, Amartya Sen (1999) adds a humanitarian dimension by viewing development as "freedom to live," highlighting equitable access to basic services as a key element. In the social context, development promotes equal access to education, healthcare, and housing, while in the environmental context, sustainable development considers the environmental impacts of human activities. As a complex and ongoing series of actions, development involves cross-sector collaboration and active participation from communities, governments, and international organizations to achieve inclusive and sustainable development goals.

As cited by Arthanto (1996), Maria Hartiningsih (1996), a journalist and observer of the human rights movement, asserts that the inaugural "Human Development Report" in 1990 emphasizes the primary objective of development: establishing an environment conducive to long, healthy, and creative human lives. Furthermore, Aruef Budiman (1995), a senior lecturer at Universitas Kristen Satya Wacana, Indonesia, and Melbourne University, Australia, emphasizes that development addresses material concerns while recognizing the pivotal role of humans as the primary agents of progress. Thus, development essentially encompasses human development itself. Within this conceptual framework, community development emerges as crucial in facilitating sustainable and inclusive development, where active community engagement in development processes, while considering humanitarian aspects, becomes imperative.

The definition of development within Christianity is subject to diverse theological interpretations and ecclesiastical approaches. Generally, from a Christian perspective, development is conceived as a multifaceted endeavor aimed at enhancing well-being and fostering social justice, addressing physical, emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions of human existence. The primary reference point for understanding development in Christianity is typically the Holy Scriptures, notably the Bible, which contains moral and ethical teachings emphasizing love, justice, and compassion for others. Numerous biblical passages underscore the importance of caring for the disadvantaged, serving them, and advocating for a fair and prosperous society. For instance, Luke 4:18-19 portrays Jesus' mission to proclaim good news to the poor, bind up the brokenhearted, liberate the oppressed, and proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. Beyond the Bible, theological writings and social teachings from various Christian traditions, including Catholic and Protestant denominations, contribute significantly to the understanding of development. Works such as "Christianity and the Social Crisis" by Walter Rauschenbusch (1907) underscore themes of social justice, communal well-being, and environmental stewardship. Thus, the Christian conception of development integrates material and spiritual dimensions, emphasizing love, justice, service, and compassion, rooted in biblical teachings and the social doctrines of the Church. Similarly

to Amartya Sen's perspective, Gustavo Gutiérrez, a prominent Latin American theologian renowned for his contributions to Liberation Theology, offers a distinct viewpoint within Christian discourse. Gutiérrez defines development as liberation, asserting that genuine development necessitates emancipation from all forms of oppression, inequality, and poverty. He contends that economic growth alone, devoid of concern for the welfare and liberation of the poor, is inadequate. Gutiérrez's seminal work, "A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation 50th Anniversary Edition" (2023), encapsulates his stance, emphasizing the imperative of understanding religion within the context of impoverished suffering and advocating for tangible actions towards liberation.

The discourse surrounding development encompasses a multitude of perspectives and ideologies, each offering unique insights into its nature and purpose. One such viewpoint is presented by Robert Moffitt, who conceptualizes development as a multifaceted pursuit deeply rooted in biblical principles. Moffitt emphasizes the holistic reconciliation among individuals, God, fellow humans, and the environment, viewing the church as a symbol of the Body of Christ and a catalyst for reconciliation across these relational dimensions (Elliston, 1989). Conversely, Tito Paredes presents development as a movement advocating for freedom, integrity, and the establishment of a just society, ultimately leading to the realization of God's Kingdom and individual happiness (Elliston, 1989). Influenced by Latin American insights, Paredes underscores the values of freedom, integrity, and justice intertwined with divine guidance. Further enriching the discourse, Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden articulate development as an empowerment process enabling individuals to assert control over themselves, their environment, and their future, aligning with divine intention (Samuel and Sugden, 1989, 1991). Their perspective emphasizes the intrinsic link between development and spirituality, advocating for strategies beyond mere philanthropy and rooted in sacred principles (See also in Sider, 1982).

These diverse perspectives provide a robust framework for holistic and sustainable development paradigms, emphasizing the nuanced and continual progression of human development within specific socio-cultural contexts. This article delves into the essence of the church and its potential to catalyze societal transformation within its contextual framework. The research aims to illuminate the church's capacity to foster socio-economic development rooted in sacred principles, transcending secular paradigms. It endeavors to delineate the roles the church can assume in effecting societal change, aspiring to enhance prosperity and social equity. However, it's important to note that this research does not delve deeply into the minutiae of development theory or serve as an exegesis of the Bible. Rather, it seeks to offer insights into the significant role of the church in promoting socio-economic development within the paradigm of the Kingdom of God. Consistent with its nature and existence, the church can facilitate social transformation by promoting the intrinsic relationship between human development and spirituality. Through various perspectives and holistic development concepts, this study underscores the church's potential to actively contribute to transforming communities with the timeless values of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In conclusion, by highlighting the importance of human participation and recognizing the identity and dignity inherent in humanity, particularly within the church, this research aims to shed light on how the church can realize genuine, impactful, and sustainable development goals. It emphasizes the need for the church to function as an organism rather than an organization, actively engaging with communities and embodying the transformative power of the Gospel.

RESEARCH METHOD

This journal article delves into the essence of the church and its pivotal role in societal transformation, employing a qualitative approach as its primary methodology. This method facilitates a nuanced exploration of the multifaceted nature and functions of the

church within society. The researchers undertake data collection through an extensive review of literature, encompassing relevant books and scholarly journals that offer theoretical insights into the subject matter. By leveraging diverse sources, the researchers aim to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the various perspectives and approaches concerning the essence and impact of the church on social transformation.

Furthermore, data analysis entails systematic and thorough content analysis of the gathered materials. This approach enables the researchers to discern patterns, themes, and underlying meanings within the literature, particularly regarding the church's role in societal transformation. Through content analysis, the researchers aim to elucidate the narratives surrounding the church's contributions to holistic and sustainable community development. Additionally, emphasis is placed on interpreting qualitative data within the social, cultural, and spiritual contexts that shape the church's role and its influence on societal transformation. As a result, the qualitative approach, coupled with a thorough literature review and content analysis, establishes a robust framework for exploring the essence of the church and its significant contributions to driving social change.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A Brief Review on the Relationship Between Religion and Development
The nexus between religion and societal transformation has been thoroughly examined within both classical and contemporary sociology of religion research. Ever since Max Weber presented his thesis in 1905 regarding the Protestant ethic's correlation with economic development in Western Europe, there has been a notable surge in interest towards investigating the connection between religion and development (Weber, 1971;Mawikere, Daud, Hura, Birahim and Tulung, 2023). Weber's findings revealed a noteworthy association between the rise of Protestantism in Western Europe, particularly Calvinism and Puritanism, and the concurrent development of capitalism. An illustrative instance of this correlation can be observed in Baden in 1895, where the Protestant community contributed significantly higher tax revenues compared to Catholics, alongside a dominance of Protestant individuals in business leadership, capital ownership, and technical and commercial roles (Weber, 1971).

The teachings of Calvinism, championed by the French reformer John Calvin, who operated in Geneva, Switzerland, are believed to have wielded influence over attitudes and behaviors that contributed to the emergence of capitalism. Central to Calvinist doctrine is the concept of predestination, which posits that an individual's destiny is predetermined by God, determining whether they will attain eternal life or eternal death. This notion delineates the elect, those chosen by God, as inherently deserving of eternal life. To affirm their chosen status, adherents of Calvinism engage in worldly pursuits as manifestations of God's favor in their lives.

The notion that work also serves as a means to glorify God served as a catalyst for the rise of the capitalist ethos. Weber observed that Calvinist teachings metamorphosed the traditional ascetic mindset into rational asceticism, wherein work is viewed as a form of worship and glorification of God. Previously, traditional asceticism emerged as a response to the moral decay accompanying the state adoption of Christianity. However, with the advent of Calvinist thought, being a Christian became associated with worldly advantages, leading to the emergence of ascetic movements that emphasized withdrawal from societal engagement to pursue a life of devotion (Mawikere and Hura, 2022a).

Moreover, rational asceticism embodies a self-disciplined approach to daily life within society, underscoring the significance of living frugally, responsibly, and with discipline, all without renouncing social engagement (Mawikere and Hura, 2022a). Consequently, Calvinists endeavor to harmonize spirituality with worldly pursuits, regarding their labor as an integral part of their spiritual vocation to glorify God. Weber's insights into the

relationship between Calvinist doctrine and the rise of capitalism offer profound insights into how religion can shape the societal and economic fabric of a community. Nonetheless, critiques of his theory underscore the multifaceted and diverse array of factors at play in the economic development process, extending beyond religious influence alone.

An examination of the interplay between religion and development, as delineated above, underscores the importance of comprehending the impact of religion on the social and economic dynamics of a society. Through Max Weber's exploration of Protestant ethics, it becomes evident that religious teachings, particularly those of Calvinism, exert a substantial influence on the evolution of capitalism in Western Europe. Notions such as predestination and the glorification of God within Calvinist teachings serve to motivate adherents towards material success as evidence of their divine election. This underscores the notion that religious teachings not only shape individual spiritual inclinations but also mold moral principles and economic conduct within society. Furthermore, the concept of rational asceticism embraced by Calvinists underscores the importance of integrating worldly pursuits with spiritual objectives, portraying work and economic endeavors as acts of devotion to God, thereby enabling Calvinist adherents to pursue material success while maintaining their spiritual integrity (Weber, 1971).

In light of this analysis, it becomes apparent that religion transcends its role as a mere instrument for fulfilling individual spiritual needs, exerting a significant influence over the social and economic structure of a society. Consequently, Weber's thesis regarding the contribution of religion, particularly Calvinism, to economic development furnishes a profound comprehension of the relationship between religious values and the developmental process. Within this context, the church, as a religious institution, assumes a pivotal role in shaping the social and economic order of society. The tenets of predestination and the glorification of God within Calvinist doctrine impel adherents towards material success as a testament to their divine selection. Spiritual values integrated into daily life, such as diligence, discipline, and responsibility, not only shape individual character but also engender economic behavioral patterns that impact societal development at large (Mawikere and Hura, 2022a;Mawikere and Hura, 2023). Thus, ontologically, the church's contribution to development ought not to be confined solely to spiritual dimensions but should also wield a considerable influence over the social and economic metamorphosis of a society.

The general description of the Nature of the Church as the Reality of the Kingdom of God

The Kingdom of God, precisely termed "the reign of God," stood as the focal point of Jesus' ministry during His earthly sojourn. Through His teachings and actions, Jesus introduced a novel and profound understanding of the Kingdom of God, distinct from the conventional perceptions held by the Jewish populace. While they eagerly anticipated the advent of a Messiah (מָשִׁיחַ or *Māšîaḥ*) who would establish physical dominion, Jesus proclaimed that the crux of the Kingdom of God lies in God's spiritual sovereignty within the hearts of all believers. This fundamental tenet reverberates throughout Jesus' teachings, wherein He accentuates the importance of truth, justice, felicity, liberation from sin, and the restoration of communion with God. The Church, as the inheritor of Jesus' teachings, bears the responsibility of disseminating the message of the Kingdom of God to the world, imbued with the same comprehension of its significance in relation to eternal life and salvation.

The term "Kingdom of God" (βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ), employed by Jesus, finds its roots in the Greek word βασιλεία/*basileia* or *malkuth* (מלכות) in Hebrew, as evident in the Old Testament. This designation underscores the supreme sovereignty of God and the abundant blessings He bestows as the King (מלך or *melekh*). Although the notion of the impending arrival of the Kingdom of God was not novel to the Jewish community, Jesus actualized the promises enshrined in the Old Testament through His ministry. The advent of the Kingdom of God is intricately linked to the genesis of the Church. Serving as the embodiment of the

Kingdom of God on earth, the Church assumes a pivotal role in proclaiming the blessings of the Kingdom to humanity and disseminating the message of forgiveness of sins and salvation to the lost. Consequently, every facet of the Church's ministry can be construed as a concerted endeavor towards the realization of the Kingdom of God in the earthly realm. Thus, the Church bears the weighty responsibility of epitomizing the Kingdom of God tangibly, heralding the tidings of redemption, and facilitating reconciliation between individuals and God as well as among fellow humans. This sacred duty bestowed upon the Church entails perpetuating the mission initiated by Jesus to expand the Kingdom of God globally.

In the sphere of theological discourse within the Church, the pervasive influence of dualistic understanding, rooted in the philosophical tenets of Gnostic thought, has profoundly shaped perspectives concerning the interplay between the spiritual and material realms, heavenly and earthly dimensions, and faith and worldly pursuits. This dualistic paradigm often engenders conflicts between spiritual ideals and material realities, aspirations for heavenly realms and engagement in worldly affairs, as well as the dichotomy between spirituality and pragmatic actions. Robert MacAffe Brown (Wardaya, 1995) even characterizes such perspectives as "the great fallacy." Nevertheless, the teachings of Jesus assert that the values embodied in the Kingdom of God ought to permeate the fabric of earthly existence, manifesting in all facets of human life. The imperative to integrate the principles of the kingdom into everyday life is vividly exemplified in Jesus' embrace of individuals from diverse social and moral backgrounds.

The concept of the "Kingdom of God in the present age" accentuates the broadening of the kingdom's reach, extending beyond the confines of the community acknowledging Christ to encompass activities transcending the boundaries of the church. God's presence is not confined solely within the confines of the church but manifests in interactions within society, nations, and states, employing diverse methods to prepare individuals and communities to embark on the journey towards His Kingdom (Samuel and Sugden, 1981). The parables depicting the Kingdom of Heaven in the Gospel of Matthew exemplify the manifold and profound ways in which God operates, ranging from individual influence to widespread impact within society. This understanding underscores the intricate interplay between the Kingdom of God and the human realm, underscoring the imperative for the active engagement of the church in fostering the realization of kingdom values within society (Ladd, 1990).

In the context of its role as the embodiment or manifestation of the Kingdom of God, the church, defined as a congregation of believers in Jesus Christ rather than a mere physical structure or organization, inevitably encounters significant disparities in the execution of community development endeavors. These disparities stem from variations in motivation, values, and objectives underlying church ministry, which are inherently diverse. At the core of Christian motivation lies the divine calling received by believers (Mawikere and Hura, 2022b). Each believer is beckoned to love God wholeheartedly and extend that love to fellow human beings. The spiritual metamorphosis experienced upon surrendering one's life to God transmutes selfish inclinations into hearts brimming with love for others. Vinay Samuel's perspective underscores the expansive nature of Christian mission, encompassing economic development, environmental conservation, and engagement with social and political issues in the public sphere (Sugden, 1997). As an integral component of Christian mission, believers engage in humanitarian and developmental initiatives as a manifestation of their calling in the world, influenced by the Gospel of the Kingdom and its inherent values. The Bible serves as a normative guide, shaping Christians' perspectives on the underlying causes of socio-economic issues in society, the strategies to be employed in addressing them, and the desired outcomes to pursue.

All ministry activities organized by development agencies or institutions within the community must authentically embody the values of the Kingdom of God and subsequently

exemplify them in everyday life. This constitutes a unique privilege bestowed upon the church as a redeemed organism by the sole Savior, Jesus Christ, who also seeks the restoration of all creation by engaging the church as a catalyst for transformation. Hence, recipients of these services can witness examples of Christ's life through these servants. Principles of the Kingdom of God such as love, honesty, peace, justice, and hope should be manifested in their conduct. The development process should yield the fruits of the Spirit, including love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control. In essence, development objectives should not neglect moral and ethical principles but rather serve as an opportunity to bear witness to the presence of the Kingdom of God.

As previously underscored, the objective of community development must transcend mere social and economic dimensions. Hence, secular scholars and researchers like Budiman (1995) and Hartiningsih (1996) stress that development encompasses not only the production and distribution of material goods but also human transformation itself. Consequently, the moral-spiritual dimension of humanity must be an integral component of community development endeavors. Interventions in the spiritual dimension are imperative to restore the relationship between humans and God (Arthanto, 1996). Thus, the primary aim of development, which entails comprehensive transformation involving all aspects of human life, can be realized

In Biblical texts, particularly in the thematic elements of New Testament theology, the nature and existence of the "Church" (Εκκλησία/*ekklesia*) denote a distinct community separate from the world, comprising individuals called to follow Christ. This Church is not merely a conventional assembly of believers but an entity with distinctive characteristics delineated in the Bible. Firstly, the Church is portrayed as the "Body of Christ" (*sōma tou Christou*/σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ), a living organism where Christ serves as the Head and each member assumes a specific role. In this context, every believer receives gifts from God to serve one another for mutual edification. Secondly, the Church is depicted as a "Family," where members share an intimate relationship with God as the Father and with one another as siblings, marked by love, support, and mutual encouragement. Thirdly, the Church is referred to as the "Temple of God" (ναὸς τοῦ θεοῦ/*naos tou theou* or οἶκος πνευματικὸς/*oikos pneumatikos*), emphasizing the holiness inherent in every believer and the communal fellowship. This serves as a reminder that the Holy Spirit of God dwells within both individuals and the Church community. Additionally, the Church is identified as the "New Jerusalem" (Ἰερουσαλὴμ καινὴν/*Ierousalēm kainēn*) or "New Israel" (Ἰσραὴλ καινός/*Israēl kainos*), portraying its role as the successor to ancient Israel in God's salvation plan, thereby emphasizing its international and universal dimension. The Church is also likened to the "Pillar and Foundation of Truth" (στῦλος καὶ ἑδραίωμα τῆς ἀληθείας/*stulos kai hedraíōma tēs alētheías*), underlining its responsibility to uphold and defend the truth of God's Word. Finally, the Church is allegorically referred to as the "Bride of Christ," symbolizing the intimate and sanctified relationship between Christ and His Church, thereby highlighting the hope for the consummation of salvation upon Christ's return. Thus, the Church in the New Testament perspective transcends mere organization or assembly; it is a living entity intimately connected to Christ and one another, tasked with fulfilling God's will and truth in the world.

Fundamentally, the church as a community not only coexists within society but also constitutes an integral component of the societal fabric, actively engaging with its surroundings. Upon scrutinizing its existence, two seemingly contradictory yet complementary concepts emerge. Firstly, there's the notion of the church called to separate from the world. The term "church" in Greek originates from the word "Εκκλησία/*ekklesia*," signifying Εκ (out) and Καλέω (called). This signifies individuals called to disengage from the world or the sinful worldly system, transitioning towards the "new world" as children of God. This entails forsaking past lifestyles associated with darkness and sin, and embracing a new lifestyle characterized by light. This process underscores repentance as humanity's obligation

to forsake sin, with the Holy Spirit effecting a rebirth, transforming one into a child of God. Vinay Samuel and Christopher Sugden (1991) shed light on Christianity's intriguing facet: providing a new identity and dignity to every individual who embraces Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior. Identity addresses the query "Who am I?", while dignity responds to "Am I worthy?". In the New Testament, we witness how the Pharisees and teachers of the law branded tax collectors, prostitutes, and drunkards as sinful, whereas Jesus perceived them differently, recognizing them as the lost in need of redemption, not avoidance. This underscores the notion that the assessment of one's identity and dignity often hinges on material possessions like wealth, social standing, and education. Nonetheless, the Bible asserts that anyone who accepts Jesus as Lord and Savior receives a new identity and dignity as children of God (τέκνα τοῦ Θεοῦ/*tekna tou Theou*).

The Bible elucidates the concept of human identity and dignity from God's perspective. The Scriptures reveal that worldly judgments often hinge on human standards like rank, education, and social status. This is evident in the criteria applied to those considered "wise," "esteemed," and "influential." However, the Bible asserts that Christian identity and dignity are not contingent on these human metrics but are solely determined by God's election. God's choice is predicated on His love and faithfulness to His promises. Christian identity and dignity stem from existential transformation concurrent with spiritual renewal. Formerly sinners, individuals are now sanctified; once not God's people, they are now His children and citizens of the Kingdom of God. Vinay Samuel (1989), a missionary serving among the impoverished in India, underscores that this identity is a divine gift fostered within the familial bonds of God's community. Thus, this identity is not only personal but also reinforced by relationships within the new family of God. The Gospel of Jesus Christ not only bridges the gap between God and humanity but also fosters unity among individuals, transcending barriers like India's caste system or social hierarchies. Consequently, Christian testimony extends beyond the personal realm to encompass testimony for the community and society at large. God's covenant for the new community, the Kingdom of God, forms the basis of personal identity. Obedience and loyalty to God and fellow human beings serve as expressions of this identity. Rooted in sound Biblical doctrine, this dignity and identity are grounded in the notion that humans bear the image and likeness of God, underscoring humanity's role as stewards of creation. Acknowledgment of the ruptured relationship between humans and God, fellow humans, and nature since Adam's fall necessitates restoration through Christ's sacrificial act on the cross. Consequently, this restoration encompasses all facets of human existence and its connection with God, fellow humans, and nature

According to Jesus' teachings, the Church is not of the "world" but is sent into the world with a distinct mission. Jesus did not petition the Father to remove His disciples from the world but instead commissioned them into the world with a new identity and dignity as children of God. Two metaphors employed by Jesus to delineate the attributes of the church sent into the world are as follows: Firstly, the church is likened to the "salt of the earth" (Matthew 5:13). Just as salt imparts flavor to food and preserves it, the church is tasked with enriching society with Christian values. Amidst a world rife with hatred, corruption, and deceit, the church embodies love, honesty, and righteous living, thereby arresting moral decay and steering society away from destruction. In its interaction with the world, the church serves as an illuminating force, compelling the world to yearn for Christian values. Secondly, the church is likened to the "light of the world" (Matthew 5:14-16). Despite its modest size, light cannot be extinguished by darkness. Similarly, the church, as light, inspires and influences the world with its manifested virtue and truth. Through its testimony, the church radiates God's truth, challenging and glorifying Him. These two understandings— that the church is the salt and light of the world—complement each other (Mawikere, 2019). The church cannot be a blessing and a witness, effecting social transformation without first undergoing spiritual transformation into children of God. Conversely, if the church has

experienced spiritual transformation, then the natural outcome is to function as the salt and light of the world, effecting social transformation, and blessing society at large.

Drawing from the preceding narrative, it can be inferred that the church's role as the embodiment of the Kingdom of God exerts a profound influence on societal transformation and development. This notion manifests through two pivotal dimensions: firstly, as the "salt of the earth," the church exemplifies Christian values that enhance social cohesion and vitality. By embodying love, honesty, and integrity amidst moral ambiguity, the church serves as a moral compass, thwarting ethical decay and steering society towards advancement. Secondly, as the "light of the world," the church serves as a beacon of inspiration and moral enlightenment. Through its testimonies, the church illuminates God's truth, challenging and glorifying Him. Engaging with the world, the church cultivates an environment that kindles a yearning for Christian values, fostering sustainable social transformation.

Furthermore, the church's substantive role as a conduit of the Kingdom of God in community development is underscored by its concrete actions (Mawikere and Hura, 2022b). By prioritizing Kingdom values, the church not only imparts moral guidance but also actively engages in effecting social change. Through diverse initiatives such as social welfare programs, educational endeavors, and advocacy for justice, the church plays an active role in shaping a more equitable and just societal framework. Thus, the essence of the church as the embodiment of the Kingdom of God extends beyond mere proclamation; it resonates in the tangible steps it takes to foster positive societal change.

C.H. Dodd, a 20th-century English theologian, is renowned for his contributions to Christian eschatological thought. His views on eschatological realism and its relationship with the Kingdom of God, as well as the existence of the church as an organism in the present, have profoundly influenced modern theological thought. Dodd presents his perspective in his famous work, "The Parables of the Kingdom" (1961), where he portrays eschatological realism as the concept that the Kingdom of God is not exclusively situated in the future but also exists in the present. According to Dodd, Jesus, in His teachings, employs metaphorical language and parables to elucidate the principles of the Kingdom of God that applied to His time, as well as its tangible influence in the world then. Dodd regards the Kingdom of God as a spiritual reality present in the person of Jesus and in His teachings, as well as in the life and ministry of the church. He emphasizes that the Kingdom of God begins with the arrival of Jesus Christ and continues through the ministry of the church, affirming His presence in this world. This is an eschatological realism that views the Kingdom of God not only as a future reality but also as a presence existing in the history and life of the church today. Dodd also states that the church is an organism living within the reality of the Kingdom of God's presence. He sees the church as a vessel through which the Kingdom of God can be realized through service, worship, and witness. As a living organism, the church is called to embody the values of the Kingdom of God, such as love, justice, and forgiveness, in this broken world. In Dodd's thought, eschatological realism connects the Kingdom of God with the present existence of the church, affirming that the church has a responsibility to be a representation of the Kingdom of God in this world. Thus, Dodd's understanding of eschatological realism provides a theological foundation for the church's engagement in social mission, justice, and transformation in the contemporary world. Based on Dodd's perspective, the church plays a substantial role as the realization of the Kingdom of God in community development. The church is not merely a religious institution, but also a vessel through which the Kingdom of God is manifested through service, worship, and testimony. As conveyed by Dodd, the church is an organism living in the presence of the Kingdom of God. The church is called to reflect the values of the Kingdom of God, such as love, justice, and forgiveness, in this fractured world. In Dodd's thought, eschatological realism connects the Kingdom of God with the current existence of the church, affirming that the church has a responsibility to be a representation of the Kingdom of God in this world. Therefore,

Dodd's understanding of eschatological realism provides a theological foundation for the church's engagement in social missions, justice, and transformation in the contemporary world. Thus, the essence of the church as a catalyst for societal transformation becomes clearer, as the church plays a vital role in bringing the values of the Kingdom of God into tangible practices, shaping a more just and equitable society.

A General Description of the Construction Regarding the Church's Contribution in Societal Transformation

The preceding discourse has comprehensively and lucidly expounded upon the robust theological underpinning emphasizing the pivotal role of the church as a manifestation of the Kingdom of God in fostering social transformation and community development. Consequently, the discourse renders the topic of the church's contribution to socio-economic transformation highly pertinent. Within the framework of a holistic understanding of poverty, which encompasses material, social, and spiritual dimensions, the church, alongside other religious institutions, assumes a crucial role in shaping societal values, including spiritual beliefs and principles. The church actively participates in shaping society's perceptions of what holds value and who or what constitutes the focal point of their ministry. Within a more inclusive paradigm for comprehending and addressing poverty, the church's role in Transformational Development assumes ever-increasing significance. Nevertheless, it is imperative to acknowledge that in numerous impoverished communities, the local church serves as the primary pillar of support, offering both hope and aid. The manifestation of the Kingdom of God often finds tangible expression in the everyday endeavors of local churches. The endeavors of churches and individual Christians striving to extend assistance to the underprivileged merit recognition and esteem from development agencies and local administrations.

However, it is also crucial to bear in mind that determinations regarding the church's involvement in development and its attendant obligations fall within the purview of the local church and should not be externally imposed. Consequently, inquiries into the pivotal role of the church within the framework of Transformational Development are multifaceted and necessitate a profound comprehension of the local milieu and the spiritual tenets espoused by the church community. Fundamentally, the church assumes the role of a servant to society, eschewing the mantle of judge or superior leader. Its primary mandate is to extend love and service to the community with compassion, thereby reaffirming God's purposes and presence in the world. The church possesses the capacity to serve its community through diverse avenues, ranging from the adept utilization of technology to the addressing of social disparities. Every individual who professes faith in Jesus Christ as the Savior and congregates within the church as an organic entity should pledge to serve the world as a hospitable and amicable church (Adiprasetya, 2023). One such avenue entails the provision of community service imbued with the grace of love, mirroring the love exemplified by Christ, who came not to be served but to serve.

If indeed the church feels compelled to lead, the approach it must adopt is one rooted in service, inspired by the love of Christ. This entails harnessing the creative power bestowed by Christ to serve creation and rectify social structures marred by sin, ultimately aligning with the true purpose of God. Thus, the role of the church in society is envisaged as that of a transformative agent, bringing love, service, and restoration to the marginalized, in accordance with the teachings and example set by Christ (Mawikere and Hura, 2022c). Transformational development transcends mere individual change or the enhancement of social relationships; it encompasses the transformation of entire existence and the forging of renewed relationships, emerging as the primary objective for Christians endeavoring to live out their faith in Christ Jesus. The fullest realization of transformation can only be attained through an intimate relationship with God. Therefore, the church's mandate extends beyond

facilitating individual change; it also involves creating societal conditions that engender inquiries leading to the Gospel, thereby inviting individuals to embrace faith in Christ. In an ideal scenario, the church serves not only as a conduit for value formation but also as an exemplar in cultivating a harmonious and flourishing life, in accordance with the concept of "Shalom". Its role is to epitomize the teachings of the Gospel in everyday life, equipping and commissioning holistic disciples to serve the community in pursuit of shared prosperity (Myers, 1996). Although the journey of transformational development is fraught with obstacles, the church assumes a pivotal role by providing accompaniment and patience, particularly for the marginalized, oppressed, and those ensnared in sin, as well as those actively engaged in social transformation. It bears a moral imperative to advocate for social justice and well-being for all.

Regarding the discourse on poverty, there exists a prevailing tendency to adopt a framework that predominantly emphasizes the material dimension. However, the stark dichotomy between the realms of the church and government reflects a dualistic mindset in Western philosophy, overlooking the multifaceted nature of poverty that extends beyond material destitution. A biblical examination of poverty and its underlying causes underscores the inadequacy of material solutions in achieving societal well-being (Myers, 1999). The church possesses considerable potential to cultivate a more comprehensive understanding of poverty, transcending mere material perspectives. The proposed framework underscores the significance of integrating spiritual commitment and social action within the church, ensuring that soul care and social service complement each other in fulfilling the imperative to love God and neighbor. The holistic framework emphasizes that all facets of human existence, encompassing social, economic, and political systems, are integral to God's salvific plan. Both the church and development institutions ought to perceive entities such as financial institutions, profit-driven enterprises, political factions, policy advocates, and international multilateral organizations as interconnected components of God's redemptive work, necessitating the dissemination of the Gospel message. When other entities assume quasi-divine roles in the lives of the impoverished, the church must stand firm in upholding truth and justice.

The church should embrace the notion that, for impoverished communities, it serves as a vital social institution bridging connections to financial and political entities that have overlooked the plight of the less fortunate. However, fostering cooperation among churches often proves challenging. The holistic transformation framework introduces complexities in engaging with secular and non-Christian institutions. It underscores the imperative that no segment of society should be surrendered to malevolent forces, urging the church to engage fearlessly in all spheres of social life, guided by the precepts of the Bible (Mawikere and Hura, 2022c). The narratives within the Bible offer authentic portrayals of the dynamic between humanity and the divine. With unwavering faith in God's sustaining power, the church can become a stalwart advocate for social justice and comprehensive transformation, in alignment with the divine will.

In effectively advancing community development, several crucial steps merit consideration. Firstly, establishing a profound understanding of the community's cultural milieu serves as an indispensable cornerstone. Culture encompasses not only tangible elements such as attire and cuisine but also encompasses mindset and worldview. Approaching local culture with reverence and humility, mirroring the example set by Jesus in His incarnation, constitutes a vital initial stride. Eradicating egocentric and ethnocentric attitudes proves pivotal in mitigating conflicts and fostering robust relationships. Secondly, community participation, empowerment, and ownership of the development process emerge as pivotal in fostering enduring change. Involving the community from the outset in planning endeavors and providing space for their initiatives and involvement represents an efficacious strategy for ensuring continuity and enhancing development outcomes. Lastly, cultivating strong rapport with the community serves as the bedrock for developmental

triumph. Strong relationships facilitate the exchange of ideas and values, catalyzing individual and communal transformation organically. Throughout the developmental journey, churches and Christian service organizations have the opportunity to embody the ethos of incarnation, akin to the example set by Jesus, by respectfully and actively engaging with the community. Appreciating the significance of these facets, community development transcends mere material alleviation, evolving into a process that reveres and responds to the distinctiveness of culture and community exigencies. It necessitates humility, active participation, and close collaboration among the church, Christian service entities, and the communities they serve, serving as an expression of gratitude for God's redemptive intervention in rectifying humanity's fallen state and restoring a broken world.

A distinguished academic and sociologist, Rodney Stark, renowned for his expertise in studying religious movements and societies, although not a theologian or biblical scholar, offers insights into the church's role in societal transformation. Stark (1996) elucidates in his research how the advent of the Christian religion precipitated profound social changes, marking one of the most significant events in Western history over the past two millennia. Employing theories and methodologies of social science, Stark analyzes extant reports and data to illustrate his points. He examines how a small group, initially comprising only 120 individuals, faced with oppression and rejection, managed to catalyze the transformation of Rome, a city entrenched in paganism. Furthermore, Stark (1996) underscores that this small group introduced a novel humanitarian vision hitherto unseen in Greco-Roman culture, evident in extraordinary social care practices embedded in daily life. Stark's analysis underscores the church's pivotal role as an agent of societal transformation. The church not only heralds Jesus Christ as the Redeemer and Savior but also as the King of the Kingdom of God, encompassing all nations and facets of life. Hence, the church's contribution to social change assumes paramount importance, given its role in promulgating a vision of the Kingdom of God that permeates and shapes society comprehensively.

At the core of this scholarly discourse lies the profound potential of the church to effect societal transformation. This potential is maximized when the church integrates seamlessly into its community, adeptly communicates its evangelical messages, and assumes the mantle of a moral compass by translating its spiritual principles and doctrinal beliefs into tangible actions. Achieving this ambitious goal requires concerted efforts to bolster social welfare initiatives spearheaded by devout congregations. In instances where such groups are nascent, proactive measures involve nurturing their emergence within the church's ambit or extending support to established social welfare organizations beyond its confines. These initiatives may entail inter-denominational collaborations or Christian consortia committed to a systematic, meticulously planned, and efficient approach to social welfare, firmly grounded in Biblical principles.

However, it is imperative to acknowledge that the sole responsibility for direct intervention does not lie solely on the church's shoulders. Addressing societal challenges necessitates specialized expertise and dedicated resources often beyond the church's core mandates. Hence, extensive involvement in social welfare endeavors may divert attention from indispensable duties. Nevertheless, the church can effectively fulfill its mission by disseminating its vision, objectives, and resources to allied organizations dedicated to advancing social welfare causes. Through synergistic action, the broader Christian community, embodying diverse expressions of the "Body of Christ," can faithfully heed God's call to extend compassionate aid, thus exemplifying the benevolent pathway delineated in Scripture.

CONCLUSION

Synthesizing a multitude of perspectives on the church's role in societal transformation reveals its pivotal position as a driver of comprehensive societal change.

Scholars and theologians offer insights into the church's adoption of a holistic developmental paradigm, spanning spiritual, social, and economic dimensions, surpassing its traditional religious mandate.

Adiprasetya underscores the church as a welcoming community, echoing the biblical mandate for it to be the salt and light of the world (Matthew 5:13-16), emphasizing its responsibility to positively influence and illuminate society. Moffitt portrays the church as Christ's embodiment, entrusted with fostering reconciliation and discipleship (Matthew 28:19-20), tasked with spreading Christ's message of love and forgiveness to catalyze societal transformation. Paredes emphasizes the values of freedom and justice inherent in the Kingdom of God, reflected in the church's efforts towards societal transformation (Micah 6:8), advocating for societal justice and equity. Samuel and Sugden's developmental framework emphasizes individual empowerment guided by spiritual principles (Romans 12:2), positioning the church as a sanctuary offering guidance amidst socio-economic challenges (Acts 2:44-45), highlighting the role of spiritual principles in guiding societal change.

Furthermore, Rauschenbusch and Gutiérrez advocate for addressing social injustices and systemic poverty integral to the church's mission, aligning with biblical calls to care for the marginalized (Isaiah 58:6-7) and proclaim liberation to the oppressed (Luke 4:18-19). Weber's analysis of Calvinism's impact on capitalism underscores how religious beliefs shape economic systems, resonating with biblical teachings on stewardship and diligence (Proverbs 10:4, Colossians 3:23), emphasizing diligent work as if working for the Lord.

In essence, the church emerges as a potent agent for societal transformation, rooted in biblical principles and a commitment to the values of the Kingdom. It serves as a beacon of reconciliation, empowerment, and justice within marginalized communities, embodying the transformative power of the Gospel. Recognizing the essence of the church and its contribution to societal change lays the foundation for devising inclusive and sustainable development paradigms.

Moreover, Rodney Stark's analysis sheds light on the social and cultural factors that played a role in the early propagation of Christianity, focusing on networks and the persuasive impact of Christianity's message in catalyzing societal change within the Roman Empire. Stark's research implies ongoing and prospective transformations orchestrated by the Triune God through the Εκκλησία/*ekklesia* as an expression of the Kingdom of God, transcending institutional structures and showcasing God's transformative influence beyond institutional management or organizational frameworks, as well as physical edifices, which have long been mistakenly equated with the term "church."

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