



Diaconia; perspectives from the
local church
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Hannes Knoetze
NetACT Kemptonpark

It all starts here



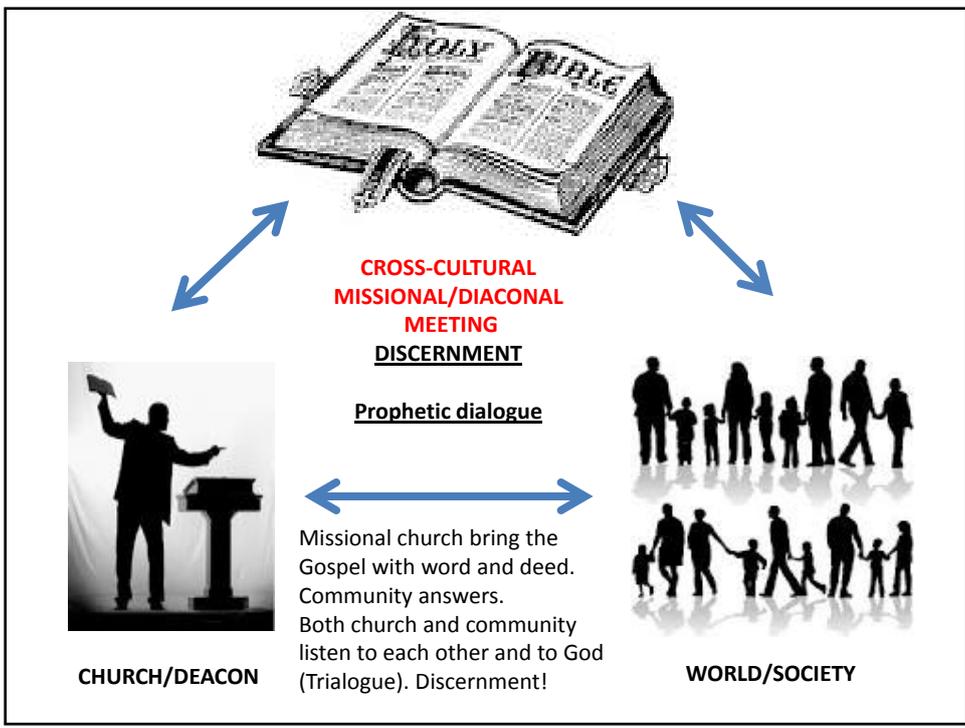
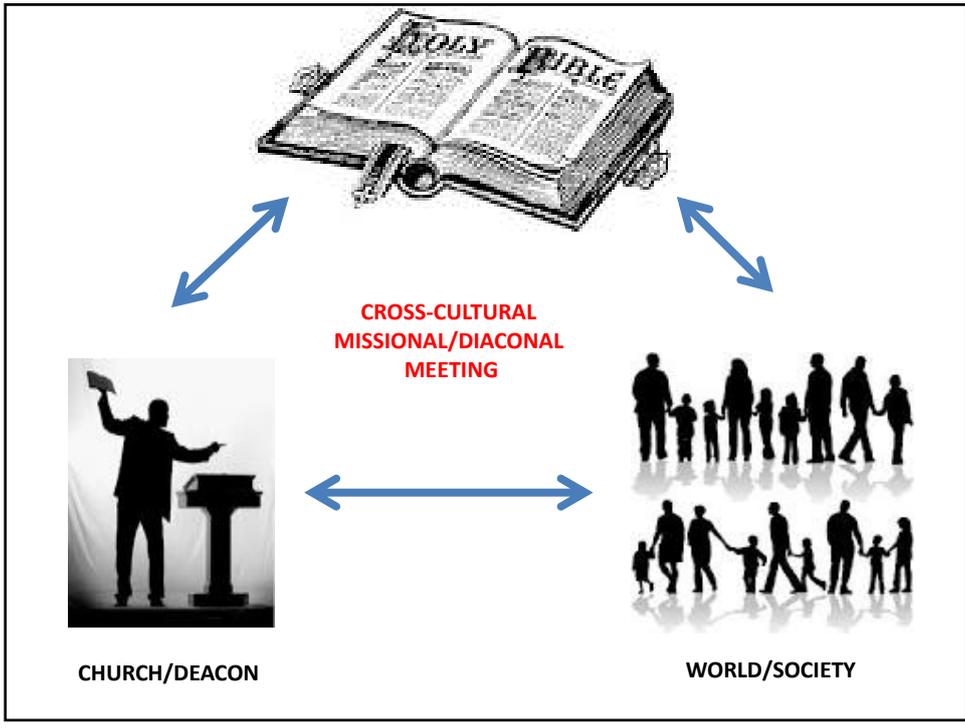
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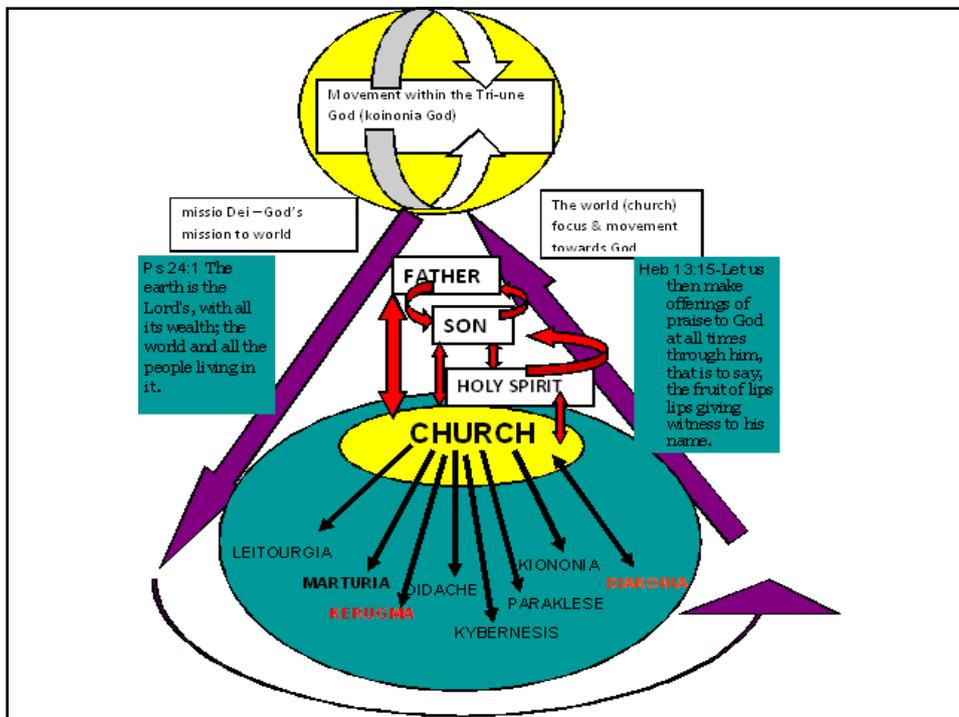
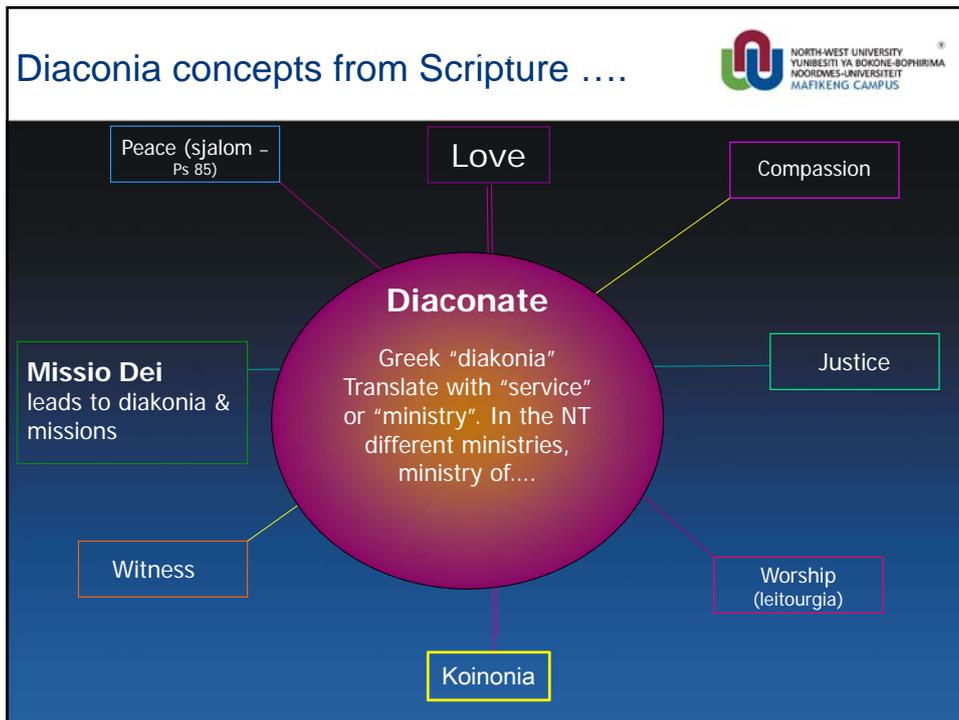
CD goals in NetACT institutions



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- Writing curricula that is Reformed & value-driven that will lead to character forming and spiritual growth
- Writing curricula that will enhance a missional mindset = answer the question: “What is on God’s agenda?”
- Contextualizing of curricula to address the issues we are struggling with in Africa
- Writing curricula according to the needs of congregations
- High academic standards
- Developing missional leadership for church & society





Characteristic of the Triune God



- **LOVE: Covenant relationship** – to bless (cf. Wright 2010)
- The **ultimate goal** of God's promise to Abraham is **missional**, it is that blessing will prevail over curse. It does so when the seed of Abraham, the singled-out descendant of Abraham, the Messiah, becomes "curse for us ... so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come tot the Gentiles" (Gal. 3:13-14).
- **בָּרַךְ BARAG** – **to bend the knees, to kneel down**. The primary notion lies in breaking, breaking down.
- *to bless*, as God, men and other created things, Gen. 1:22; 9:1; and very often used of the result of the divine favour, *to cause to prosper*, Gen. 12:2, **וְאֶבְרַכְךָ וְאֶגְדְּלָה שְׁמֶךָ** "I will bless thee and make thy name great;" verse 3; 17:16; 22:17; 24:1; 30:27. Gen. 24:1; Ps. 29:11. When men invoke a blessing on any one, the phrase used is, "בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה לַיהוָה blessed be thou of Jehovah,"

Characteristic of the Triune God



Compassion.

- *chesed* – God's covenant love Ex 34:6 (Verhoef 1982:231)
- "goodnes, kindness of men towards men, in doing favours and benefits" (Brown, Driver & Biggs 1968:338)
- *Rahum/rehem* – mother's womb is protecting and feeding the baby to prepare it for birth to take his/her place in society, "loving feeling, compassion" (Oosthuizen 1995:201). The concept of preparing and protecting and loving someone into new life.
- To stand in the other persons shoes
- To be involved
- Solidarity with the other
- To "took pity on him" (Luke 10:33) – The Good Samarathan

Characteristic of the Triune God



- **Justice**
- Justice and compassion belongs together (Van Bustelaar)
- Compassion is not a cold juridical term, but function within a relationship (Koinonia/covenant)
- First a covenant and then justice. Justice is determined by a relationship.
- Justice = God's will, see Micah 6:6-8, Psalm 146:7-9
- Proclamation of Jesus Luke 4:18-19.
- **DIACONIA IS NOT (ONLY) ABOUT CHARITY, IT IS ABOUT PARTICIPATION INTO NEW LIFE POSSIBILITIES WITHIN A RELATIONSHIP.**

The Conventional Theory about the Origin of Diaconia



- John N. Collins and Anni Hentschel, who pointed out that the Greek *diakon* words have been greatly misunderstood. These words do not specifically refer to the caritative acts in the early church but describe much more generally authorised roles and persons which are only arbitrarily linked with care and charity.
- The importance of the Reformation and the role of Jean Calvin in both the reinterpretation process and the creation of the modern diaconia concept. Care of the poor was one of the cornerstones of early Christianity but it was not articulated with *diakon* words

Biblical texts



- The major texts in the New Testament are: Acts 6:1–6, Phil. 1:1 and 1 Tim. 3:8–13. What is Barnett's conclusion based on these texts?
- The seven men in Acts 6 “were not deacons”
- Phil. 1:1 is the first reference to the deacons in the New Testament, but “we cannot know the exact nature of their offices at this date, c. 60.” What is less clear is whether the 'and' between episkopoi and diakonoi is 'epexegetical' or not. If it is then Paul is referring here to a single group - 'bishops who are also deacons'; 'overseers who act as deacons'; or, as Georgi would argue, a single phrase to refer to the role of being a 'proclaimer'.

Biblical texts



- The passage in 1 Tim. 3, a text from “the later strata of the New Testament,” already presupposes the office of deacon without question.
- Philippians 1:1 as a crucial text in support of his argument that the diakonos always stands in relationship with someone else, normally the episkopos.
- Support for this can be found in the different use of episkopos and diakonos in 1 Timothy 3, where two distinct roles can be discerned: one as someone who cares for God's church (3:5) and the other as holding 'the mystery of the faith' (3:9).
- Georgi's theory that deacons, and indeed bishops here, had the primary role of being 'proclaimers' marks an important stage in the history of the understanding of the word diakonos.

Early Patristic period



- Shepherd of Hermas speaks about the care of the poor as a basic calling for every believer without any link with deacons .
- Actually we have to ask whether the Greek term “diakonia” in the meaning of caritative function is appropriate at all since it does not appear in the texts as a fixed concept referring to the church’s social-caritative responsibility for the poor, the sick and others in a vulnerable position.

Early Patristic period



- The tasks mentioned in Didascalia Apostolorum as those done by the deacons included the duties in the liturgy, helping the bishop in baptisms, assisting the bishop in all possible ways in administration, almsgiving, and visiting. “The deacons should be like the bishops in their actions, working yet harder than he”
- Ignatius' Epistle attribute no specific role to either the bishop or the council of elders here, though a very clear role is given to the deacon as being 'of the mysteries of Jesus Christ' and 'assistants of the Church of God'.

Role of the Reformation...



- Luther played a role...
- Calvin's commentary on Acts 6 was fundamental in determining diaconate as the ministry of the deacons.
- This is exegetical not sound.
- Looking for example at John 12:26 it is clear that every believer is a deacon, "Whoever wants to serve me must follow me, so that my servant will be with me where I am. And my Father will honour anyone who serves me."
- 1Co 12:4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of **service**, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone.

Conclusions



- Diaconate work is the work of every believer
- Acts 6, the elected persons are also responsible for the ministry of the word in crossing "borders".
- Within the Greek world (Paul) the deacon acts as apostle/disciple – focus is not on a position of power, but of empowerment.
- Jesus teachings to the disciples about their responsibilities includes ministry of compassion (diaconate).
- The Gospels (service) use "diakonia" different from Paul (word ministry).
- Diaconate is a holistic (Word, deed, relationship), missional ministry with as goal the Kingdom of God and focus on the society/world.

Curriculum: EDUCATIONAL PROBLEM



- Many students arrive at theological schools without the ability to think analytically. They were exposed to a parrot type of teaching – just repeating facts. Our duty is to help them to think critically and analytically. Our duty is to help them to reflect intelligently and to be able to solve problems – something so necessary later in their ministries.

WORLD/SOCIETY



RELATIONSHIPS

• Economy

• Politics

Bussiness, Agriculture, Transport, Tourism

Governments, local governments, organizations

Conservation, agriculture, tourism

Social work, faith communities, interest groups, schools

• Ecology

• Social

Social changes



- Differences between urban and rural areas
- Economic and social gaps between the rich and the poor, eg. HIV and TB treatment.
- Lack of social cohesion in communities – worldviews, sub cultures, education, etc.
- Perverse forms of social cohesion – gangs, Satanism, etc.
- New forms of global cohesion – unsatisfied with local community
- Lack of traditional social structures, lead to lack of leadership?
- Ignorance of the youth – powerless in new structures, no jobs etc.
- **The poor is to suffer from illbeing! / Wellbeing???**
 - Material lack and want
 - Physical ill-being
 - Bad social relations
 - Insecurity, vulnerability, worry and fear
 - Powerlessness, helplessness, frustration and anger

Assets



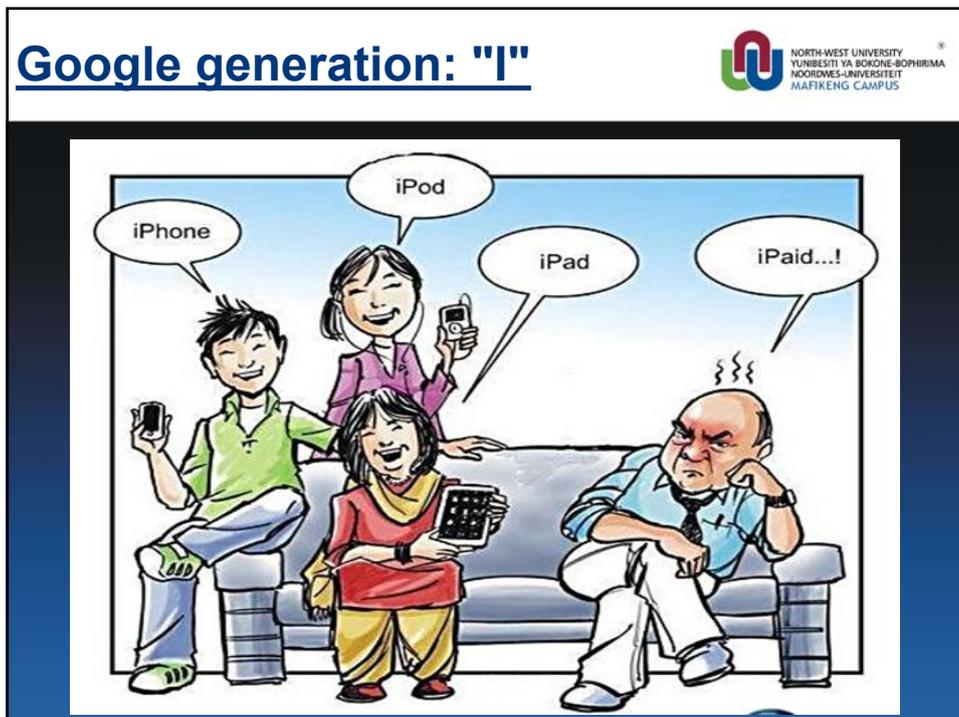
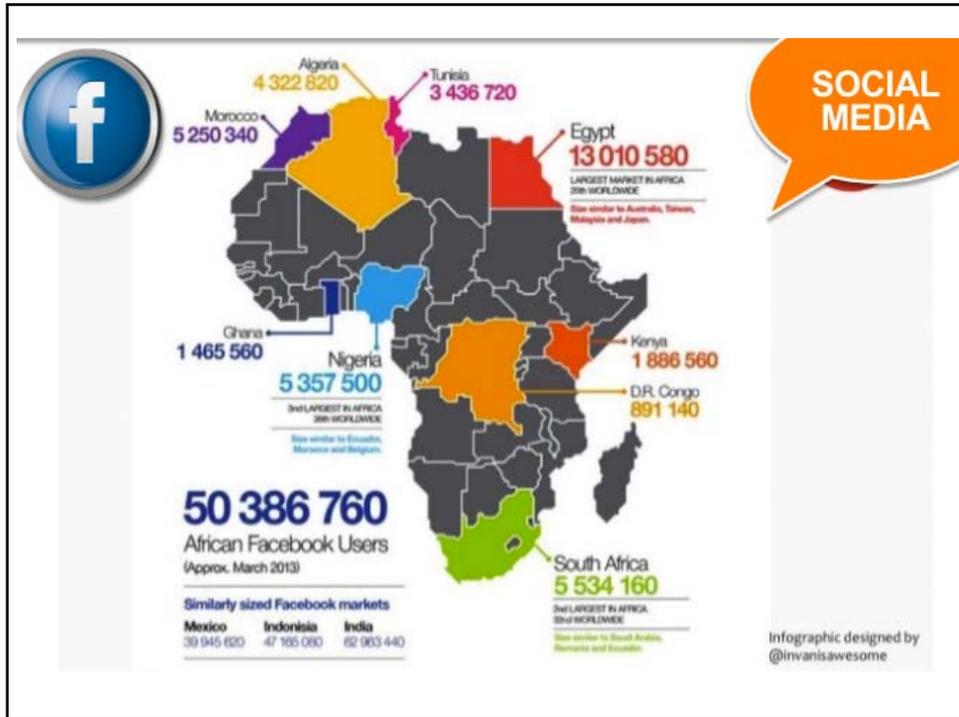
- Dynamic social society – "can do attitude"
- Democracy and political rights
- Development potential of Africa – tourism, agriculture, industries
- Education – Universities and schools
- The presence of the church in every community
- Improvement of infrastructure
- Globalisation creates new possibilities
- Diversity

What are the issues in African society?

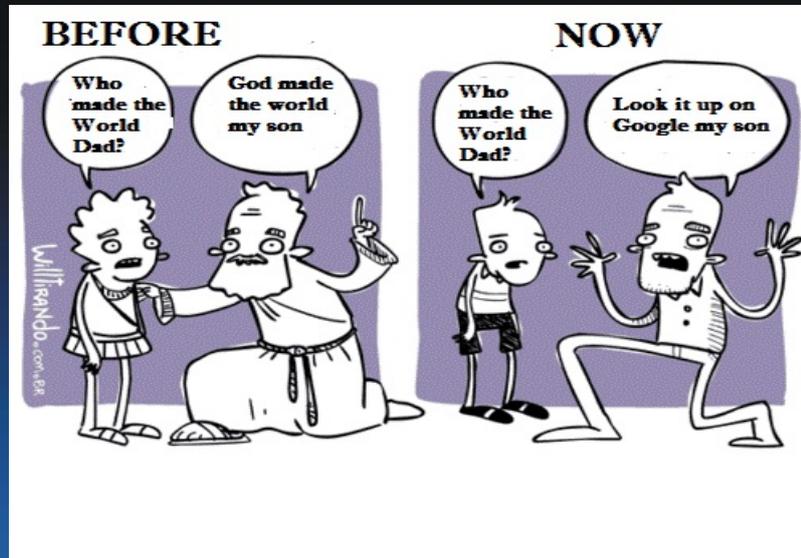


- Social cohesion – tribalism, racism, class
- Urbanization
- Ecology and land issues
- **Youth** – Google generation
- Jobs and poverty
- Corruption
- Insufficient Governments – power struggles
- Lack of economic policies, militant unions (RSA)
- Different worldviews – Traditional African, Christian, Muslim





We are the best informed society that die of ignorance



The Millennials: The challenge



- “Narcissistic personality disorder”: “Me, Me, Me generation”
- Possessed with fame; their own "brand"
- See themselves as a “reality TV show” – eg. **Izikhothane**
- Always interacting - BUT through social media, electronics
- “FOMO” – Fear of missing out
- Because of narcissism not much empathy with other people
- Lazy and uninvolved? (certain issues)
- “Instant gratification” important
- High expectations of their own future, but extend important life decisions (up to 40's)
- Great variety of choices – jobs, relations – choose an identity (strong peer groups)
- New deviations, eg: physically-anorexia, spiritually–Satanism.

The Millennials: The positive challenges



- Inclusive – race, class, sexual orientation, sub-cultures
- “The wary generation” – think before they act
- Pragmatic – things must work
- Comfortable with their parents – from parenting to “peer-enting”
- Seeking new experiences
- “They’re not into going to church, even though they believe in God, because they don’t identify with big institutions. One third of adults under 30, the biggest percentage ever, are religiously unaffiliated”



DEVELOPMENT

IS THE ANSWER NOT VERY SIMPLE?

DEVELOPMENT

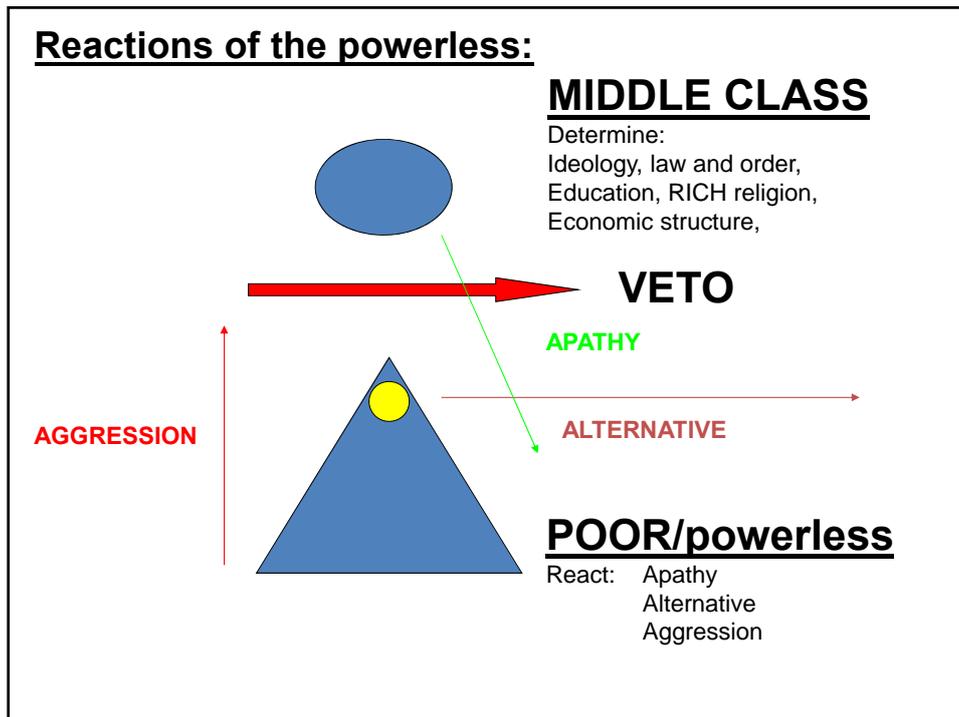


- The concept is tied up with Western culture
- Non-western cultures were seen as *underdeveloped, inferior, worthless, poor*.
- Luke 14:7-14 calls for a new protocol, determined by relationships and not a set programmed or blueprint.
- Ecclesiastes 9:15, 16
- Development usually takes place to the disadvantage of the poorest of the poor
- Julius Nyerere: a person “is not being developed when he is herded like an animal into a new venture”
- As long as the initiative, power and management remains with the developer, the risk increases that those being developed will lose their own identity and be made mere objects.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT



- Community action is a helpful tool to get those organised who are already on the move, but the poorest of the poor are finally left behind
- Community action based on community participation can also lead to community suicide
- A frustration of community development is dealing with the so-called community representatives
- “Community is an elusive concept and can hardly be utilized for community development”.



Answer to the powerless



- We need to bridge the gap of “the veto”. The only way to do so is to become a surprise, a partner showing **compassion** and drawing near to help.
- The real meaning of love is to seek **justice** for the least in a **relationship**.
- ***KINGDOM VISION***

DEVELOPMENT NEEDS TO BE EXPLAINED



- Under-development, or even poverty, is a state of mind.
- Development moves into the world of creation, and the center of creation is humanity. Raise ecological questions?
- The person of the developer is of prime importance
- The importance of choice: Beggars can be choosers

Sustainable development

(Elliott 1994:3)



- Help the very poor – they are left with no option other than to destroy the environment.
- Self-reliant development, within natural resource constraints.
- Cost-effective development – should not degrade environmental quality, nor reduce productivity.
- Attend to the great issues – (infra structure).
- People – centered initiatives are needed – they are the resources.

BEGGARS CAN BE CHOOSERS



- Development without the element of choice is highly questionable.
- In Christian benevolence there is no place for beggarism, dependency and passive acceptance, but only for a life through choice and the acceptance of responsibility, an act of will. The basic appeal of the gospel is an appeal to the will: stand up and walk! Follow me!

Curriculum: REFLECTIVE THINKING



- Educational Experts realise that we need and should train leaders with the ability to:
- Do problem solving:
- Do critical thinking,
- Do reflective thinking,
- Do functional thinking,
- Do scientific thinking,

Concepts/perspectives of diaconia from the local church



Deacon

Diaconate

Charity service

Social work

Missional Diaconate

Poverty alleviation

Development

What is our understanding of these words?
What is the relationship between these words?

Compassion

Different expressions of church



- The household, - compassion
- Worship service, - compassion, charity
- Congregation, - diaconate, poverty alleviation, HBC
- Denomination, - social work, missional diaconate
- Ecumenical church, - social work, development
- Individuals Christians in everyday life,
- Individual Christians in voluntary organisations (NGO's)

Congregation



Hirsch:

Hellenistic (Greek) approach:
“to think your way into a new way of acting”

Hebraistic (Jewish) approach:
“to act your way into a new way of thinking”

*WE THINK WHILE WE ACT AND WE ACT
 WHILE WE THINK .*

Understanding



- Diaconia as *missio Dei* flows from the being of the triune God and is the work of the triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- In this mission God has the salvation (*shalom*) of the world in mind and wants to achieve it through the realization of His kingdom. Diaconate expresses God's love and compassion to bring salvation to the whole world in all its dimensions.
- Therefore the Father had sent the Son into the world to gather his church from all the nations and to send us –as diakonos - into the world in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Understanding



- As the body of Christ our Lord and Savior **the church in essence lives as partaker in God's mission in this world (*missio ecclesiae*)**. The church as a whole and its members are under the commission of God. Dependent on and in obedience to the Spirit we are called to:
 - the ministry of prayer for the world,
 - minister the Gospel of God's salvation to all people through word and deed,
 - conserve and cultivate creation in the name of God and for the sake of all who live in it.
- **The salvation which Christ achieved is all-encompassing**. It includes the forgiveness of our sins, **our liberation on all levels of life as well as the liberation of creation**. Diakonia occurs where we as the church, in obedience and in following Christ, have compassion **diakonia** for and serve all the needs of people and the world.

Understanding



- **God's salvation of the world is realized in that He builds His kingdom here and now**. This kingdom will, however, only come to full realization with Christ's second coming, when all nations and people will glorify God.
- As the legitimate bearer of this Good News (Gospel) the church of Christ is to be one and to live and work in the likeness of the one triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit (John 17:11, 17, 21).

Curriculum development for diaconia



- Reflective thinking implies not only the solving of problems but also includes,
- Listening to God – discernment
- We are faced with many problems and challenges in Africa
- We must be able to ask: what is God's revelation to us to address these problems
This is the discipline of thinking critically as a believer in Christ

Curriculum development



- Our challenge is to train pastors, elders, women's guild, youth leaders & members to:
 - Live in relationship with God, to know and understand the Bible and...
 - To see and understand the problems of our church and society
 - To be able to discern how to deal in a biblical way to address and solve the problems.
 - Participate in missio Dei



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