

The Gospel as Social Revolution¹

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Abstract

History is replete with examples illustrating the impact that evangelicals have had upon society. A recent publication by sociologist Robert Woodberry identifies the work of missionaries as ‘the single largest factor in insuring the health of the nations.’² This article will trace the social impact of the gospel through the efforts of these ‘Conversionary Protestants’. It will also measure the South African social climate 20 years into democracy by detailing the serious issues that exist in our local communities. South African missiologist David Bosch³ wrote, ‘Never before in history has people’s social distress been as extensive as it is in the twentieth century. However, never before have Christians been in a better position than they are today to do something about this need.’ The evangelical church has a clear mandate to bring about needed social revolution. How will this happen? A church-based model for community engagement as a movement of the gospel will be examined to guide discussion.

1. Introduction

The impact of Christianity is often ignored by social scientists as they examine the structures of post-Enlightenment society. Many aspects of traditional modernisation theory—i.e. that liberal democracy and other social constructions usually associated with modern society developed primarily as the result of secular rational processes—ignore the impact of Christianity on economic development, urbanisation, industrialisation, the formation and expansion of government, and the growth of class structures. Secular rational processes are necessary, but they should not overshadow the influence of religion upon Western society, particularly, according to Woodberry (2012:244), regarding ‘what spread, where it spread, how it spread, and how it adapted to new contexts’. The catalysts for this influence were *Conversionary Protestants (CPs)*, defined as such by the way they (1) actively attempted to persuade others of their beliefs, (2) emphasized lay vernacular Bible reading, and (3) believed that grace/faith/choice saves people, not group membership or sacraments.

This article highlights the impact that *CPs* have had upon the formation of modern society, showing them as crucial facilitators ‘initiating the development and spread of religious liberty, mass education, mass printing, newspapers, voluntary organizations, most major colonial reforms and the codification of legal protections for non-whites in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries’ (Woodberry 2012:245). These innovations brought about conditions that made the establishment of stable representative democracy more likely, regardless of whether or not people converted to Protestantism.

2. The Influence of ‘Conversionary Protestants’

CPs were motivated to reach others with the ‘good news’ of Jesus Christ.⁴ Their desire to spread the gospel promoted activities that would help the gospel take root in society. They wanted people to be able to read the Bible in their own language and engage in lay religious activities, which meant that to spread their faith would require mass education, mass printing and a responsive civil society. Thus, wherever *CPs* went they ‘quickly developed written forms of oral languages, created fonts, imported printing technology, and printed Bibles, tracts, and textbooks’ (Woodberry 2008:19). Their success in these endeavours was a significant transfer of social leverage to non-elites that altered the class structure. The results were revolutionary.

CP motivations yielded strategic thinking that manifested in two ways. First, they changed the ideas about who books were for. According to *CPs*, everyone needed access to ‘God’s word,’ not just cultural elites, which meant that each person, including women and the poor, must be able to read. Books had to be inexpensive and written in the language that was accessible to ordinary people. Secondly, they expected each person to make their own choices around decisions of faith. They believed that people are not saved through sacraments or group membership but instead by ‘true faith in God.’ Printed material was a critical tool to

help bring about personal conversion, which then forced other groups to compete in similar ways for the attention of the public. It was this competition which accelerated the need for mass printing. ‘Societies that excluded *CPs* started mass printing later and expanded it more slowly’ (Woodberry 2012:250). Although *CPs* were not necessary to sustain a print revolution, they were the crucial catalysts that helped to bring it about.

But this was not the extent of the influence. *CPs* also moderated colonial abuses, especially when these abuses undermined conversions. They ‘also tried to reform what they considered abuses in other societies (e.g., foot binding, female genital mutilation, widow burning [*sati*], and consummating marriage before age 12’ (Woodberry 2008:20). The overall impact on society was considerable across many contexts. Woodberry (2012:247) explains the extent of these reforms as follows:

Contrary to what many theories of “secular modernity” argue, democracy was not a triumph of secularism over religion. From the seventeenth through the mid-twentieth centuries, activist Protestants instituted and spread many of the reforms that made modern representative democracy more likely... (which) means that the historic prevalence of Protestant missionaries explains the variations in democracy better than either the prevalence of the nonreligious or of generic Protestants. Moreover, Protestant missions predict democracy, whereas Catholic missions do not.

Although some argue that the influence of missionaries was too weak to nurture democracy, missionaries were the main source of information about life in the colonies prior to the mid-twentieth century. They represented one of the largest and most educated groups of Westerners in the non-Western world—most had college degrees when it was uncommon for this to be the case—and represented mission organisations that were larger than all, but a few commercial banks rated according to their size and financial resources in the United States during the nineteenth century. Although some scholars argue that labour unions, NGOs and financial interests were markers for democratic influence, Woodberry’s (2012:247) detailed research shows Protestant missions as a ‘powerful predictor (of) democracy. . . , amazingly

robust to controls and other methods of mitigating omitted variable bias'. Therefore, what would be considered developed modern society was not the inescapable result of economic expansion or Enlightenment rationalism, but was part of a contingent process moulded and motivated by an activist religion. The gospel was the prime stimulus for social transformation.

This leads to some important conclusions, especially in light of the current South African social context. Crouch (2008:189) writes, 'transformed culture is at the heart of God's mission in the world, and it is the call of God's redeemed people.' *CPs* historically have understood this calling and have worked and sacrificed to make this a reality in many parts of the world. Cultures and societies have been transformed through these movements of the gospel, bringing education, justice and democracy to many places that would not have known these benefits without the active involvement of missionaries intent on evangelising these foreign communities. *CPs* had led the way historically in community development and brought about societal transformation as the secondary consequence of their desire to see the gospel change lives. This means that what is considered 'modernity' was 'not the inevitable result of economic development, industrialisation, secularization or the Enlightenment,' but was a process profoundly shaped by an activist religion (Woodberry 2012:270). *Conversionary Protestants* brought about social revolution through the process of living out a vibrant faith in obedience to Scripture. This ideology, clearly observable in historical context, is not static but fluid: it should be transferable to whatever societies *CPs* convey these same missionally-focused motivations. The balance of this article will apply these results to the current South African social milieu to guide evangelical praxis.

3. Interrogation of the South African Church

These findings provoke a serious interrogation of the South African faith community 20 years into Democracy. Does the Church have a mandate to confront the persistent social challenges

entrenched within South African society? Woodberry (and others) provide the sociological reasoning to insist that it does. If so, what lessons can be learned from the activities of *CPs* as they shaped societies? And do these lessons apply to South African churches? In partial answer to these questions, missiologist Bosch (2011:409) issues a challenge: 'Never before has people's social distress been as extensive as it is in the twentieth century. However, never before have Christians been in a better position to do something about it.' The remainder of this article will detail some of the serious issues threatening democracy in South African society and the responsibility and significant opportunity for the church to play a role in bringing about social revolution. It will also highlight a project in a church-based initiative that is confronting unemployment as a movement of the gospel.

4. Impact of Apartheid

Many of the problems currently facing South Africa as a nation are directly related to its past. Apartheid forced, as argued by de Gruchy et al. (2005:229) 'a profound burden upon people's livelihoods by controlling their access to resources such as land and water, determining where and when they could use their labour, manipulating their health and education, and severely undermining the freedoms that are necessary to live a life that one would choose to live'. The struggle by the church in efforts to end the system of apartheid was defined as a moral struggle shaped by Christian convictions. The goal—the ending of apartheid—fuelled perseverance through incredibly difficult times with the hope that dismantling the structures of apartheid would bring freedom through a changed government, providing new opportunities previously unavailable to the majority of South Africans. This was a time, anticipated by many in the churches, as the arrival of the kingdom of God.

What was not as readily anticipated was that the demise of the unjust system of apartheid would not, by itself, generate the human capital and assortment of skills necessary to build a new society. Although the 'struggle' was over, a new struggle now needed every bit as much

energy and focus as was mustered against apartheid. De Gruchy et al. (2005:231) laments our current condition as a Nation:

The post-apartheid state thus continues to be faced, in an acute sense, by the challenge of the livelihoods of the poor around such issues as unemployment, poverty, disease, poor housing, poor education, food security, access to land, and access to water. Each of these is a major concern, but taken together they represent an 'axis of evil' that terrorizes the lives of many South Africans and that, therefore, constitutes a key element in the ongoing church struggles in this country.

These significant issues listed by de Gruchy indicate why South Africa is one of the most 'unequal countries in the world'⁵. South Africa, as a nation, ranked 121st globally out of 187 countries and territories identified by scale in terms of Human Development Indicators.⁶ A recent World Bank study by Narayan & Mahajan (2013:1) titled 'Inequality in Focus' notes the ease with which one can reach consensus on the need to promote 'equality of opportunity—the principle that predetermined circumstances such as gender, ethnicity, and location of birth or family origins should not play a role in determining an individual's chance of success in life.' What has proven difficult is to bring about a levelling of the playing field so that everyone has equal access to equal opportunity. Access alone does not determine the quality of the opportunity.

This is illustrated in the South African education structure. South Africa has two different schooling systems: a dysfunctional schooling system (75% of total government schools) and a functional schooling system (25% of total government schools), which are far apart in their respective performances despite the high spending and numerous interventions which have been made by government over the past twenty years. The government spends 20% of its total expenditure on education, 78% of which goes to teacher salaries. The education system continues to promulgate, rather than alleviate, inequality. The reality remains that if you are born into a family that is poor, your prospects for social mobility are almost non-existent. Education is one of the main drivers of social mobility, meaning that inequality will continue

to exist as long as there are few good schools that are geographically and financially accessible to the poor. South Africa's education system is in crisis (Unisa Online 2014). Moreover, this is only one indication of the immensity of the need across all sectors of society.

5. The Role of the Church

Is this a 'new struggle' in which the church can be a major role player? How does a new movement of the gospel bring social revolution to South African society? Woodberry's detailed research shows that *CPs* in mission transformed society in their desire to bring the gospel to those who were 'unreached'. There appears to be as indicated by Bosch (2011:11), a 'new' opportunity in the South African context for the church, still in mission, to transform the structures of society through a new movement of the gospel. Evangelism is an essential dimension of mission, proclaiming 'salvation in Christ to those who do not believe in him, calling them to repentance and conversion, announcing forgiveness of sin, and inviting them to become living members of Christ's earthly community and to begin a life of service to others in the power of the Holy Spirit', but for Bosch (2011:11), mission does not end there. It is also,

the church's missionary engagement in respect (to) the realities of injustice, oppression, poverty, discrimination, and violence. We (the church) increasingly find ourselves in a truly apocalyptic situation where the rich gets richer and the poor poorer and where violence and oppression . . . are escalating. The church-in-mission cannot possibly close its eyes to these realities....

Those who hold a narrower view of mission, defined essentially as the reaching of the unreached, may see South Africa as removed from the list of what would traditionally be defined as a 'mission field.' Kritzinger (2000:96) would dispute this, indicating a 'tremendous unfinished missionary task of the church'. Using three dimensions to indicate the task—

kerygma (evangelising), *diakonia* (socio-economic service), and *koinonia* (the building up of the church in fellowship and liturgy), his findings reveal the following:

Not only was an unfinished task of evangelisation indicated (there were people, groups and geographical areas discovered with quite a low percentage of Christian affiliation), but also 're-evangelisation' of groups where affiliation was high. The degree of nominality was worrying. The seventy-five percent affiliation of the government census could easily be cut with a third to reach the nominal figure on the church rolls (some fifty percent). Of these not far from two thirds are not really active members. This may bring the number of 'Christians' down to the order of twenty percent of the population! Moreover, are all of these really committed?

The supposed saturation of the gospel in South African society in actuality falls far short of what is indicated in government indices. Theologically, the church must respond to the reality of this challenging paradigm, not with fear but with an explicit gospel mandate to not only transform society but to transform itself. Dames (2010:1) highlights the challenge: 'The majority of churches remain stuck in their structuralist (maintenance) paradigms and have capitulated into pathological systems and praxes.' The vision of the church transforming society with the gospel through the power of God's Spirit has instead become a powerless fight for survival in the midst of monumental challenges. The need for 'contextual practical theology for social transformation is yet again of paramount importance' for the church (Cochrane in Dames 2010:3).

At the centre of transformation is the gospel—especially the event at the centre of the gospel which is the cross of Jesus Christ. Newbigin (in Sheridan & Hendriks 2013: 1) sees the cross as the 'clue' that he must follow if he is to make sense of his life and the world. Goheen (in Sheridan & Hendriks 2013:2) stresses two ways in which the gospel was foundational to the church: First, the gospel as public truth and universal history. The biblical narrative locates truth in the story of God's redemptive words and deeds in history. This narrative culminates in Jesus Christ. The end and the meaning of cosmic history are revealed and accomplished in Jesus. Second, the gospel reveals the 'logic of mission'. If the gospel is true and reveals where

history is going, then mission must follow. ‘Jesus did not write a book, but rather he gathered, nurtured, and left behind a community that would make known the good news of the kingdom of God by embodying it in its life, expressing it in its deeds, and announcing it in its words. Mission flows out of the gospel. The gospel as revolution for the church is central to its effective mission to the world.

Once the church is revolutionised by its focus on the gospel, it flows into mission out of a sense of love and obedience. This is a two-fold motivation to bring about revolution, both in individual lives and society. In Matthew 22:35-40, Jesus is asked a question, in a way, that was intended as a test. The lawyer asks, ‘Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?’ Jesus’ reply is stunning, particularly when serious consideration is given to its full ramifications:

And he said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets’ (Mt 22: 37-40 ESV).

It is no surprise to this first century hearer that Jesus would tell him to love God—every Jew knows that this is necessary and useful. What brings revolution is what happens to this man and to us if we follow this commandment. Obedience becomes costly. The gospel requires love for one’s neighbour *in the same manner* and *to the same extent* as one loves oneself. What this means, in South African society with our multiple social challenges, is this: As I desire a proper house with electricity and running water in a safe neighbourhood for myself and my family, I should want the same for my neighbour—**with the same intensity I would apply to satisfying my own need**. As I desire a quality education for myself and my children, I should want the same for my neighbour—**with the same intensity I would apply to satisfying my own need**. As I want affordable, quality healthcare that treats me and my family when we are ill, I should want the same for my neighbour—**with the same intensity I**

would apply to satisfying my own need. Very quickly the gospel motivates us, out of love for our neighbour, to bring revolution to our local communities through simple obedience. This is a call for justice through a movement of the gospel.

The massive inequalities that we face as a Nation would change if churches, transformed by the gospel, began to engage with society. In fact, churches may be the only role player in society that can make a substantive, lasting difference. Hendriks, in his excellent article titled ‘Missional Theology and Social Development’ (2007:1000), identifies the church as a ‘key role player’ in its ability to make a difference. ‘It reaches more people on a weekly basis than any other organisation. It has a stronger infrastructure than even the government in connecting, serving and influencing people.’ Furthermore, an article in *Die Burger*, 16 September 2005, referred to a Gallup/BBC poll which reported that in the 68 countries where the poll was conducted the average level of trust in politicians was 13%, while spiritual leaders received 33% level of trust. In Africa, the trust in spiritual leaders is 74%.

The church has a strategic role to play, although it has seemed in many ways to lose its prophetic voice. 13.8% of the population is living below the income poverty line of \$ 1.25 per person per day (R 12.50 /p/d) while an additional 2.4% live in severe poverty, and 22.2% are vulnerable to poverty.⁷ This poverty is structurally linked to high rates of unemployment (among other factors), currently listed at 24.1 percent from the fourth quarter of 2013. The expanded definition of unemployment that includes people who have stopped looking for work was recorded at 34 percent.⁸ This inequality is demonstrated across society in a number of critical ways often related to opportunity.

Religious organisations were once the voices of poor people. ‘However, since 1994, with a few notable exceptions, they have lapsed into their comfort zones and are preoccupied exclusively with the after-life’ (Dinokeng from Schoeman 2012:4). This is tragic. Botes and Abrahams (in Schoeman 2012:14) argue ‘faith-based organisations, churches and

congregations have a comparative advantage over other institutions in that they have considerable levels of trust invested in them and in the manner in which they inspire activities of voluntary outreach.’ This gives them a critical role to play in community partnership building. ‘Participation, co-operation, sharing and community development through networks, then, become(s) a key challenge for the true community church’ is observed by Swart 2004:337 in Schoeman 2012:14).

Jesus initiated transformation in and through the lives of people, forming them into a missional community of people called to love God and love their neighbour. A missional theology that flows from this transformation confronts society with the gospel of Christ motivated by love and obedience. As such, this is participation in God’s ongoing involvement in moving toward an anticipated future reality, expressed theologically in the life and witness of the church. ‘Aspects of (an) eschatological future are now realized, creating joy and hope’ (Hendriks 2007:1013).

This theological paradigm should be expressed in the following way:

On a personal level, we are called to discern our vocation and become involved as followers or disciples of Jesus Christ. On an ecclesial level we are the body of Christ: a missional church that acts in worship, witness and service. On the level of society, the church has an important role to play (Hauerwas & Willimon in Hendriks 2007:1013). It must display the gospel of Jesus Christ and proclaim prophetically that justice be done to all, a vocation that requires dedicated involvement.

6. A Gospel-focused Initiative

Phambili ngeThemba (Xhosa for ‘moving forward with hope’) was established in 2000 by the Pinelands Methodist Church as an emergency relief effort in response to a devastating shack fire in the Joe Slovo community of Langa, Cape Town. Its vision is a gospel-focused

movement to develop ‘vibrant communities, economically, educationally and spiritually enriched, contributing to the future with dignity and respect,’⁹ by promoting human values and dignity through community upliftment programmes that engage some of the root causes of poverty. The work grew, taking on a formal structure in 2007 as a registered NPO/PBO.

Phambili currently focuses upon two major areas of need: **employment** through a Job Readiness Programme called *Zanokhanyo* (Xhosa for ‘bringing light’) and **education** through a project called *Umthombo* (Xhosa for ‘deep springs of water’). The employment intervention will be highlighted.

The *Zanokhanyo Job Readiness* model was derived from a research partnership with Learn to Earn, a non-profit organisation involved in the holistic development of the unemployed. The goal of the research was to develop a specific community intervention for the unemployed and disadvantaged residents of Langa through a thorough community study. The geographical parameters of the study included the community of Langa and the surrounding business communities of Pinelands, Epping Industrial Areas 1 and 2, Ndabeni and the Klipfontein Road corridor of Athlone.

There were six aims identified for the research:

- Mapping of the institutional landscape of the geographical areas specified.
- Identification of employment, market and product opportunities and the presence of businesses in and surrounding the Langa area.
- Verification of the desired qualities sought by business for prospective employees.
- Evaluation of the availability and strengths of resources within the community of Langa.
- Determination of the significant challenges, constraints and needs facing the Langa community, as indicated by community members participating in the Focus Groups.
- Quantification and qualification of each of these aims. (Delpont & van Wyk 2008)

The research methodology was interactive and cyclical, with each phase being continuously evaluated and revised if necessary. The methodology was structured to engage the residents of Langa in all aspects of the research process in the hope of fostering community ownership of the project from its inception. Thus, the research itself served as the beginning of the community intervention by introducing *Phambili ngeThemba* as a capacity-building agent for the Langa community. It also worked as a marketing tool promoting *Phambili ngeThemba* as an employee resource for the targeted business communities. This was a multi-disciplinary research approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection with social science tools and techniques to provide results in line with the research objectives.

The research was useful.¹⁰ It helped to identify a prioritised list of social development needs within the Langa community while indicating places of social and economic significance, the nature of these activities and the availability of employment opportunities within the local business communities. The results assisted in identifying existing job vacancies and the skills or training needed to fill these available positions. It also identified the desired employee qualities and values sought by business owners and managers for members of their workforce.

The results are categorised in three ways:

1. The first category is personal values. The majority of the business respondents (73.5%) indicated that a high ethical standard (including, for example, integrity, honesty, trustworthiness, etc.) was the most desirable quality in an employee (Delpont & van Wyk 2008:10).
2. The second category illustrates organisational values, sometimes referred to as 'Business IQ.' This identifies qualities that are generic in nature, such as reliability, capability, attitude to business, etc.

3. The third category is 'Social IQ and EQ' and depicts values that are more general in focus, but quite essential in a work environment, such as sociability, good work ethic, good communication skills, attitude, etc.

Research findings in these three categories provided a structure for training that directly matched the employers' desired employee 'qualities.' Upon completion of training, successful participants can be put forward to employers as prospective job candidates specifically trained to the business respondent's specifications (Black 2010:158).

The *Zanokhanyo* training course began in July 2008 at Langa Methodist Church. The curriculum for the training course contained the following essentials: human dignity, forgiveness, character and integrity, self-awareness/discovery, HIV/AIDS awareness, health and hygiene, employee rights and responsibilities, constructing a CV, communication, personal finance, participating in a job interview and performing a job search. Although the training course initially lasted for two weeks, basic computer training element was added for the third week to enable the graduates to learn basic computing skills so that they can establish an email account, update a CV and attach a file to an email. They can also perform online job searches and apply to posted adverts. The course fee of R 150 does not come close to covering the costs of the training, but it gives perceived value to the course without placing an excessive financial burden on the participant.

The course simulates a workplace environment and is limited to 14 people. Participants are expected to be present and on time every day in order to graduate. Enforcement of this strict attendance policy by carefully monitoring punctuality and attendance facilitates the 'vetting' of *Zanokhanyo* training graduates for future employers. The participants are also observed throughout the course to note class participation and how well they relate with others.

The gospel is clearly presented to participants, and each day begins with a devotion focused around a passage of Scripture that relates to the topic of the day. One day of the course is also

used as an opportunity to explore faith and ask questions around faith issues. Participants realise that they are valuable, not because of the colour of their skin nor their cultural heritage, but because they have been created in the image of God. Normally up to half of the participants each year commit their lives to Christ during the course of the training and are encouraged to meet in Employment Support Groups (ESGs). These groups are focused around discipleship and building employment networks for graduates who may be unemployed.

This mission has yielded excellent results that one believes can be replicated, particularly through the local church seeking to engage with unemployed members of its community. The reasons for this are as follows. First, the training is practical. It empowers unemployed people through the impartation of life skills that will help them move forward. The foundation for this is a more comprehensive understanding of one's identity in the bigger picture—we are created by a God, who loves us and has a purpose for us. This concept should flow easily out of a church ministry that desires to share God's love with people in crisis.

Second, in being practical it meets felt needs. Unemployment, as previously mentioned, is a major contributor to the intense poverty in South African communities. As the church successfully engages with this issue, or any other important issue impacting communities, it is seen as a significant role player in society. It makes a difference in people's lives by caring for the needs of its neighbours. Jesus is lifted up as his followers share God's love with those in desperate need by providing them with the tools to provide for themselves.

Third, one trusts that the many will become followers of Jesus and engage in discipleship through ESGs. Prayer is the engine of this work. Lives are changed through a movement of God's Spirit in response to the cries of his people. At this time, there are 8 ESGs functioning in various communities around Cape Town, providing discipleship and empowerment for those who attend.

The overall impact of the programme has been remarkable. In the last two years (2012-2013), 65% of those who have completed the *Zanokhanyo* training have either found employment or have returned to finish schooling or tertiary education. Additionally, nearly half have made decisions to follow Christ, acknowledging that they now have hope to move forward. The resulting economic impact on families and their communities are important to note. Additionally, follow-up research undertaken by the UCT Sociology Department¹¹ has indicated that the training is having a positive benefit on the businesses in which *Zanokhanyo* graduates work. Employers indicated they preferred hiring *Zanokhanyo* graduates because they have ‘better CVs, they are better prepared for the interview process and tend to be more honest, dedicated and willing to learn. . . than other workers without similar training’¹²

7. Implications for Social Revolution

This is one of many opportunities perfectly crafted for the church. The church enjoys significant credibility around South Africa, meaning that interventions connected to churches have an inherent level of credibility that can serve to open doors in local communities. In addition, many of the soft skills being trained through the *Zanokhanyo* curriculum are related to issues around developing good character, traits that should be foundational to regular church teaching and practice. However, finally, Scripture is clear that followers of Jesus have responsibility for those in need. The *Zanokhanyo* training specifically engages poverty as it confronts unemployment. The church has an important role to play in the continuing process of transformation necessary for the building of a just society. Much of what is required is, in fact, spiritual, far more than simply rearranging the economy. Ramphele (2008:17) defines this work as ‘transcendence . . . which is usually associated with the spiritual realm . . . [requiring] openness to a radically different frame of reference; it takes one beyond the known to the unknown, demanding courage and a willingness to take risks.’ She further observes that mankind is ‘framed in significant ways by spiritual and psychological impulses

that go beyond material needs'. This means much more than just earning an income. 'Material freedom disengaged from inner spiritual freedom puts us at risk of losing the focus on the larger purpose of freedom—freedom to be fully who we can be in our democracy'.

8. Conclusion

The way forward is challenging. The factors that create persistent poverty are often intractable, without an easily defined solution. But the church, above any institution, should be involved in making a difference. This means that the paradigms of church leaders and congregations must be challenged, examined in light of the clear directives of Scripture. Activities should then be focused upon specific ways that the gospel can engage with the community in light of the needs of society. Jesus had a particular mission and purpose, which he clearly identified: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour (Lk 4:18-19). Jesus inaugurated a movement that has shared the 'good news' with those in need by speaking words of life and living lives of obedience. Love for neighbours brought the social revolution. Each gathering of believers has a role to play in developing sustainable interventions that address poverty and other poverty-related issues. No church, if it seeks to live in obedience to Scripture, is exempt from this task.

Strategies must be developed that will begin to implement community transformation. Developmental initiatives can be designed that will enable those in poverty to become equipped to succeed, although the church will likely need to prepare for the long term commitment necessary to bring about needed change. Strategic partnerships can be developed among churches to combine resources toward a common purpose, thereby strengthening community and focusing larger groups for greater impact.

The evangelical community has a rich heritage of social engagement. ‘*Conversionary Protestants*,’ as indicated earlier by Woodberry, were successful in transforming society in tangible ways, motivated largely by the desire to see the gospel presented to the world. The church, although still largely dormant, can usher in a social revolution. The proclamation of the gospel must arise from the church within the context of authenticity. Until this happens, South Africans wait, desperate for the spiritual and social revolution that the gospel, through the power of God’s Spirit, can provide.

9. Endnotes

¹ Social revolution, for the purposes of this article, is a movement of the gospel that transforms people and society. It happens through the proclamation of the ‘good news’ of salvation in Jesus Christ while working for justice by truly loving God and loving one’s neighbour. This was how Jesus defined his mission and it is the mission of all who truly claim to follow him (Luke 4:16-21).

² Woodberry R 2012. The missionary roots of liberal democracy. In: *American Political Science Review*, Vol 106, No. 2. May 2012.

³ Bosch D 2011. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

⁴ An excellent and detailed discussion of the Gospel can be found in Gilbert G 2010. *What is the Gospel?* Wheaton, IL: Crossway, and in Piper J 2005. *God is the Gospel: Meditations on God’s Love as the Gift of Himself*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway.

⁵ In 2008, the top decile of the South African population accounted for 58% of the country’s income while the bottom half accounted for less than 8%. (Leibbrandt et al, 2010).

⁶ <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/ZAF>; accessed 23 March 2014.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Trading Economics. [Online]. <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/south-africa/unemployment-rate>, accessed 29 March 2014.

⁹ Vision Statement, Phambili ngeThemba 2007.

¹⁰ For a detailed description of the research, see Black T 2010. A Biblical Approach to Poverty Alleviation: A Case Study of Pinelands Methodist Church, Phambili ngeThemba’s Community Building Efforts Through Job Creation in Langa Township. [MA Thesis]. University of Pretoria.

¹¹ Hangala & Mutesha (2013). Evaluation of competency in soft skills of the graduates of Zanokhanyo’s job readiness course: research report. Cape Town: University of Cape Town Sociology Department.

¹² Ibid.

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