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Proposing a Social Justice Approach to Diaconia for a South African Context

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Abstract: South Africa, although a "young" democracy, has quickly become one of the most economically uneven nations due to its history of segregation and discrimination as contributing factors. South Africans have seen an increase in the number of protests over the past several years because of the frustration that has been caused by unbearable living circumstances, a lack of service delivery, and empty promises made by the government. Poverty, unemployment, and social injustice are seen by the South African government as the most important obstacles that need to be overcome to construct a prosperous nation. Despite the government's commitment to a "*better life for all*" since 1994, the post-apartheid South African government has predominantly prioritised civil and political rights in its efforts to address social injustices, while the socio-economic needs of the country's impoverished and marginalised populations have remained largely unfulfilled. The degradation of human dignity that results from conditions such as poverty and unemployment is significant. A violation of one's dignity can also occur when one is excluded from efforts to combat issues such as poverty and unemployment, which should be considered. Amidst all of this, the church is criticised for remaining silent and doing little to address the situation. This article proposes social justice as an ideal approach to diaconia and development. Therefore, it seeks to understand and include social justice principles as a means of empowering people to ensure effective development. The objective of long-term poverty reduction cannot be accomplished unless there is an emphasis placed on social justice. This article conducts an in-depth analysis of a variety of social justice theories to rationalise a social justice approach to diaconia.

Keywords: social justice; diaconia; South Africa; John Rawl's theory; Sen's capability approach; Nancy Fraser's Social Justice theory; redistribution; recognition; representation

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1. Introduction

Kgatla (2016, p. 1) holds a firm belief that the church's efforts to convert black individuals in Africa to Christianity through missionary work have had unintended negative consequences on social interactions and justice in the region. He proceeds to assert that certain regions have experienced a distortion of holy Scripture pertaining to fundamental human relations and social justice as a result of the Christian Crusades, civilization, and colonisation of African people (Kgatla 2016, p. 1). The colonial perspective of the entitlement to conquer and appropriate land from individuals of African descent resulted in a deviation from the fundamental principles of Christianity, which emphasise the importance of adhering to Christ's teachings of love and fostering positive relationships with one's neighbours. Kgatla's argument is founded upon the work of Johnson (1994, p. 2), who posited that the perception of Africa as the pinnacle of human development in South Africa was due to the prevalence of white racial supremacy and control over black individuals. Consequently, the pursuit of social justice in this context resulted in more negative outcomes than positive ones. The prevailing understanding and maintenance of Christianity among the white population in South Africa during the apartheid period did not align with

the principles of social justice and coexistence. The individual's religious beliefs involved abstaining from involvement in political matters and deferring to the governing party, with a focus on spiritual pursuits that would lead to salvation (Kgatla 2016, p. 1). A variant of Christian theology centred on escapism was formulated, with the backing of white piety and global Pentecostalism, which pledged redemption devoid of concerns for social equity.

However, in our attempt to assist the church in her missional task of holistic diaconia, we have found that the colonial irony is still predominant in various congregations (cf. Van der Westhuizen and Swart 2015, pp. 731–59; Bowers Du Toit 2012, pp. 257–68; Beukes 2017, pp. 231–49; Beukes and Plaatjies van Huffel 2016, pp. 224–40). The colonial mentality was, '*we do to you and we do for you because we know what is best for you*'; however, we believe that a colonial indoctrination happened within the mindset of many ministers. Hence the irony, although we are today very critical of colonialism, many of our colleagues in the church ministry and in their understanding of diaconia (especially) within the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA), are still doing diaconia in a charity mode and with the '*colonial irony*' (mentality) of, '*we do to the poor and we do for the poor because we know what is good for the poor*' (cf. Beukes 2017; cf. Beukes and Plaatjies van Huffel 2016; Bowers Du Toit 2012, pp. 257–68). This colonial irony limits us to move beyond a charity mode of diaconia as we are stuck in short-term projects and handouts such as soup kitchens, food parcels, and clothes banks. Although these charity mode services remain important to address the immediate need, in order to move to a more sophisticated mode of development, we propose in this article that perhaps we should redefine our understanding of diaconia through the lens of a social justice approach.

Hence, it is our perspective that the historical impact of the apartheid regime is a crucial element to consider when examining contemporary social inequities in South Africa. The South African government has identified unemployment, poverty, and social injustice as the primary challenges that must be addressed to foster a robust nation. However, thus far, government efforts to tackle social injustices in post-apartheid South Africa have primarily centred on political and civil rights, while the socio-economic needs of a significant portion of the country's impoverished and marginalised population have remained unfulfilled. This article highlights the correlation between social injustice and poverty, emphasising the profound impact that poverty and unemployment have on human dignity. Simultaneously, it is imperative to acknowledge that the act of excluding individuals from poverty and unemployment alleviation practises is a transgression of dignity. Thus, the goal of sustained poverty reduction and sustainable development cannot be achieved unless social justice is emphasised. Of course, we can hold the government accountable for this situation but we should also renew our understanding because the authority is often fragmented and involves non-governmental role players such as faith leaders, which is an important lesson to learn from development praxis according to Gaventa and Oswald (2019, pp. 8, 17). The church, being closer to the reality of people and communities, is called within this context to be true to her missional calling of doing diaconia. But how do we move beyond mere 'hand-outs' (short-term) 'project mode' to transformational differences as a church? How can we consciously strive towards strengthening the agency role of people from poor communities as a church with a diaconal task? We propose that the social justice theories should be used as a lens to assist us in making this shift within our understanding of diaconia in South Africa.

The purpose of this article is to explore specific justice theories, feeding and leading to a social justice approach in development. The objective of this article is to analyse various aspects, including: (1) A concise overview of the socio-economic and socio-political context of South Africa; (2) a call for action in the form of diaconia and social justice; (3) A justification for adopting a social justice approach; (4) An evaluation of selected social justice theories; (5) A proposed approach for implementing social justice in practise. Finally, the article concludes with deductions drawn from the proposed praxis for social justice. The present argument posits that by adopting the aforementioned identification, the social justice approach will strive to ensure equitable treatment of individuals and

collectives, alongside equal access to services, their availability, and opportunities for growth and progress.

2. A ('Very Brief') Socio-Economic and Socio-Political South African Context

In present-day South Africa, analysts are directing focus towards the resurgence of outrage among impoverished black communities, reminiscent of the apartheid era, as they engage in increasingly aggressive demonstrations against their substandard living conditions and apparent lack of municipal service provision (cf. Swart 2013, p. 1). In a manner comparable to the era of apartheid, there is a resurgence of nationwide unrest that prompts significant inquiries regarding the condition of democratic governance in present-day South Africa. Protests are being carried out by impoverished communities due to their discontentment (cf. CSR 2009; Managa 2012; Swart 2013). Instead of positing a singular cause, a nexus of interconnected causes can be discerned to account for this collective fury, specifically elucidating why a significant number of the nation's most impoverished communities are agitated and thus engaging in protests that have escalated to violence. While the notion remains disputed in the discourse surrounding service delivery, it has been claimed that the community's discontent may have stemmed from a feeling of 'relative deprivation' among its constituents (cf. Alexander 2010, p. 32; Hall 2012; Holden 2012, pp. 337–39). This unequal service delivery and unequal access to other services in poor communities created anger as there existed a disparity in the provision of infrastructure and services between the impoverished areas and other regions of the city, with the former receiving subpar amenities.

Moreover, in contemporary South Africa, a total of 26 million of the nation's 55 million inhabitants are presently residing below the poverty threshold of USD 2 per day. Harold (2018, p. 25) asserts that the majority of black South Africans, and Africans in general, experience significant disadvantages in comparison to their white South African counterparts. The proportion of African adults holding a tertiary qualification is 4%, while the corresponding figure for white South Africans is 25%. In the South African economy, the proportion of white individuals occupying top managerial positions is 70%, while 59% of senior managers are also white. The unemployment rate for individuals of African descent stands at 28.8%, while for those of white ethnicity, it is 5.9%. The data indicate that a significantly higher proportion of white South Africans, approximately 61%, reside in households that have a monthly expenditure exceeding ZAR 10,000, whereas only a mere 8% of Africans have the financial capacity to spend the same amount. According to statistical data, a significant proportion of the African population, approximately 16%, experience extreme poverty and frequent hunger. In contrast, a vast majority of white South Africans, approximately 99.9%, enjoy a higher standard of living (Harold 2018, p. 25). The aspiration for peaceful coexistence among South Africans is being challenged by the lingering effects of apartheid, resulting in animosity and an escalation of demonstrations in recent years and months (Harold 2018, p. 25). These protests might not be ideal but it obliges us to broaden our understanding of agency and how it contributes to empowerment and accountability, which is an important lesson to learn from development praxis (cf. Gaventa and Oswald 2019).

The church's response must be situated within this particular context. Rather than leading an ascetic lifestyle and disengaging from the world, the church should actively involve itself in the struggles of the majority in post-apartheid South Africa. This can be achieved by aligning its words and actions with those of the marginalised and voiceless, thereby serving as a prophetic conscience to both the government and the community at large. In the context of post-apartheid South Africa, the church can serve as an alternative community that fosters the growth and development of individuals. To achieve this, it is imperative for the church to acknowledge and reinforce the shared humanity that binds people together (Harold 2018, p. 25). This necessitates proactive attention to justice and the welfare of society, arising from a sense of solidarity with the rights and needs of fellow

individuals. Thus, solidarity is considered a virtue that motivates the church to take action, rather than a fixed state of being or objective (Cochran 2007, p. 5).

3. A Call for Action: Diaconia and Social Justice

In the past two decades, a significant change in paradigms has occurred, resulting from both political and social advancements. The United Nations (2009) "Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities" has resulted in the adoption of an inclusion paradigm in both theoretical and practical contexts. The concept of inclusion pertains to a societal structure that does not involve the marginalisation of individuals. It envisions a scenario where individuals with varying abilities are visibly and tangibly integrated into the wider society, actively participating and connected to the overarching goals and objectives. The trend towards inclusivity entails a dual emphasis, namely, a focus on the individual as well as on the community. To enhance the involvement and self-governance of individuals, it is imperative to take the dynamics of a community into account. This entails exploring ways in which individuals can mutually empower and enhance each other, as well as how various entities and actors can provide distinct forms of support to enable individuals to lead self-sufficient and self-directed lives (Hofmann 2017, pp. 139–40).

Swart (2016) argues that the practical and applied discipline of diaconia is currently facing a significant challenge to its identity. This challenge is being shaped by the concept of a '*new paradigm of diaconia*', which represents a distinct shift in the way that theorists of diaconia approach their work. Specifically, there is a growing awareness of the need to move away from traditional conceptualisations of diaconia as a form of humble service or paternalistic charity. Instead, there is a renewed emphasis on relating to those in need of assistance in a way that fully respects their humanity and agency as independent subjects. Thus, with regard to the objective of formulating the concept of diaconal practice, this implies that...

> those who are providing help or offering diaconal service should do so in a way of respecting the autonomy and integrity of the other, and avoid creating relationships shaped by uneven dependencies. This principle is relevant both at an interpersonal level, for instance, when providing financial support to individuals, and at a more structural level, as in international aid, where longstanding relationships of dependency should be avoided. Thus, diaconal service should focus on reducing dependencies, supporting independence, and activating the other person's own resources to cope on their own in the long run. Autonomy and interdependence are not opposites but are related to each other dialectically and complementarily. (Swart 2016, p. 4; cf. Dietrich 2014, p. 16).

This encouragement for a paradigm shift by both Swart (2016) and Dietrich (2014) reassures us that social justice values should be taken seriously in this endeavour of understanding diaconia in a holistic sense rather than mere charity and humble service. Poverty is widely recognised as a tangible illustration of the potential infringement of dignity within social contexts. The concept of human dignity pertains to the right of an individual to be recognised as an autonomous being who possesses the freedom to pursue their own beliefs and values, thereby leading a life characterised by self-esteem.

The reliance of impoverished individuals on external sources for sustenance and support undermines their capacity to assert themselves and engage with others as autonomous agents, thereby impeding their ability to pursue self-determined lives. This dynamic transgresses their inherent sense of self-worth and, by extension, their dignity. The resolution of such instances of transgression can solely be achieved through the provision of alternatives to individuals residing in impoverished conditions, and when their subsistence is not entirely subject to the discretion of external agents. This would imply that individuals not only possess the material resources required but also possess the necessary abilities or capabilities to facilitate the actualization of various options.

Fundamentally, diaconal labour involves addressing the concept of "otherness", which pertains to individuals who are distinguished as distinct within societies due to factors such

as gender, ethnicity, social and economic standing, physical and mental capabilities, age, and other similar characteristics. The concept of "*New Diaconal Professionalism*" pertains to the management of otherness in the realm of professional social work and theology, in response to emerging challenges, particularly those related to inclusivity (Hofmann 2017, p. 138). Hence, we will turn our focus on the social justice approach as a manner to reshape diaconia in our South African context.

4. A Rationale for a Social Justice Approach

This article acknowledges that there is a close correlation between social justice, diaconia, and human rights. The purpose of this article is not to duplicate the extensive scholarly discussions pertaining to the concept of social justice. The emphasis lies on the application and practical implementation of the concept as a framework for diaconia and community development. Social justice is multifaceted and therefore there is a need to identify key concepts underpinning social justice which is required for critical engagement in the implementation of diaconia as well as community development.

The theme of social justice is present throughout the entirety of the Bible, spanning from the book of Genesis to the book of Revelation. According to Crossway (2001, p. 1), there are 69 scriptural portions in the 69 books of the Bible that contain a direct appeal to social justice. This concept underscores the shared ancestry and ultimate fate of the human race (Ogbonnaya 1994, p. 3). The Bible's primary message is underpinned by God's summons for social justice, grounded in the shared origin of humanity and the divine intention for their existence. It has been ordained that certain responsibilities are attributed to the human race. The original divine plan was for humanity to coexist in concordance with the laws and purposes of God (Kane 1978, p. 97). Humans were appointed as representatives of God on earth to carry out his justice. Moreover, from a biblical or theological standpoint, comprehending justice within the framework of the covenant, wherein each covenant member is bound to demonstrate love towards God and their fellow human beings, proves to be a valuable perspective. Moreover, justice is an ethical concept that pertains to individuals who exhibit generosity within their community with the aim of fostering, maintaining, and augmenting the community's welfare. The term '*who*' refers to an individual who is recognised for actively engaging in community investment, and displaying exceptional care and attention towards individuals who are impoverished, vulnerable, or in need. The prophets have provided a comprehensive outline of a communitarian ethic (Brueggemann 2002, p. 177).

Regrettably, the Israelites, who were selected as a model by God, misconstrued their election through Abraham and their departure from Egypt, along with the accompanying benefits and entitlements, as their individual prerogative that ought to be exclusively exercised by the Jewish people. According to Leviticus 19:18, the term "neighbour" was interpreted by the people of that time to refer to their "associate". As a result, the Jewish community defined a neighbour as an individual who belonged to their collective group. It was incumbent upon the Israelites to treat individuals of this nature with equity and benevolence, refraining from engaging in any form of deceit or theft. However, the Jewish community's treatment of individuals who were not of Jewish descent was such that they did not regard them as being of the same status as Jewish individuals. Jesus arrived with the intention of altering this viewpoint. Among the four authors of the Gospel, namely Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, Luke's account is particularly lucid in its portrayal of Jesus' aim to rectify erroneous Jewish notions regarding the concept of neighbour. In contrast to the Jewish belief that social justice should only be extended to their own community, Jesus challenged this notion and advocated for the inclusion of both kin and non-kin as deserving recipients of social justice. He emphasised the importance of treating strangers with the same level of care and consideration as one's own family members (Lanier 2013, p. 1).

In general, human beings are inherently social creatures, and their lives are significantly shaped and influenced by their social interactions and relationships. On an individ-

ual basis, people have the ability to either positively or negatively impact the development and dismantling of their respective organisations. The coexistence of human beings is a collective experience, wherein interdependence on fellow individuals is a crucial aspect of survival (Frazier 1975, p. 131). Therefore, social relationships and institutions serve as the fundamental basis upon which human existence is established and maintained. Within any given society or organization, there exists a power dynamic that serves to either limit or facilitate the actions of individuals. The presence of checks and balances within an organisation can facilitate the equitable distribution of opportunities for all members to contribute to its overall welfare, provided that corrective measures are implemented in a just and impartial manner. The institution of the church is founded upon the fundamental principles of social relations (Kgatla 2016, p. 3).

The promotion of human rights for all members of society is a fundamental principle of community work, which is underpinned by the concept of social justice. The attainment of social justice entails the recognition and endeavour to mitigate systemic hindrances, prejudicial treatment, and disparity. According to Fraser's (2009) analysis, there exist two primary methods of addressing social justice. The initial perspective centres on the equitable allocation of resources and commodities, whereas the latter perspective centres on the politics of acknowledgement. According to Fraser's (2009) argument, instead of separating the two aspects of justice, it is imperative to consider and tackle both of them. Lister (2008) argues for the integration of redistribution and recognition, contending that this approach enables policy demands that lead to equitable representation and adequate social security to support a dignified standard of living.

The pursuit of recognition is an everyday occurrence in various strata of society and can be demonstrated across multiple tiers. Unequal access to resources such as income, job opportunities, schooling, and medical services can result in a dearth of political and policy recognition. The recognition of voice and identity is imperative, encompassing the acknowledgement of diverse identities and the re-evaluation of undervalued, marginalised, or overlooked identities. The act of recognition should not be superficial or symbolic, but rather should actively facilitate opportunities for expression, participation, and authentic incorporation. The absence of acknowledgement is frequently linked and intensified in instances of economic disadvantage. According to Taylor's (1997) proposal, the formation of identity and expectations of individuals and groups is influenced by recognition, and the lack of it can result in significant adverse consequences.

Authentic Christian justice based on biblical principles is firmly rooted in the compassionate nature of God. The individual maintains that the deity possesses a distinct concern for the well-being of individuals situated at the lowest rungs of the societal hierarchy, such as orphans, widows, and other legal immigrants, residents of impoverished neighbourhoods, and other marginalised or alienated groups. If the church acknowledges this matter, it ought to take the lead globally in pursuing social justice by (1) establishing a clear definition of social justice, (2) identifying fundamental biblical principles of social justice, and (3) formulating a robust stance on any measures taken to address current social issues (cf. Wheaton 2009 in Kgatla 2016, p. 3).

Social justice in the South African context can only be fully comprehended when approached from a holistic perspective, taking into account the country's complex historical and colonial legacy. The correlation between unemployment and the quality of school education for historically marginalised individuals, substandard and restrictive infrastructure, and subsequent occurrences of corruption, favouritism, familial biases (such as nepotism), and a sense of entitlement should be comprehended. Chipkin (2013) posits that social justice is achieved through the establishment of justifiable relationships between social classes and groups, which are based on a fair distribution of public and private goods and benefits associated with national and economic growth.

Altmann (2013, p. 1) provides a definition of social justice in his speech to the tenth assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) (2013), characterising it as a shared journey towards a collective fate. The WCC (2013, p. 4) has articulated its definition

of social justice in a public statement, which involves the pursuit of the common good through the identification and confrontation of privilege, economic injustices, political and ecological exploitations, and oppressive forces that exploit marginalised individuals and communities. Social justice refers to the ability to collaborate with others and achieve goals that are advantageous to the entire community (Novak 2009, p. np). The concept of social justice pertains to the equitable preservation of access to rights and opportunities, as well as the provision of care for the most vulnerable members of a given society (Robinson 2014, p. 2). Rawls (2001, pp. 19, 28) posits that the determination of justice or injustice is contingent upon its ability to facilitate or impede equal access to civil liberties, human rights, opportunities for health and fulfilling lives, as well as the equitable distribution of benefits to the most disadvantaged members of society.

The notion of social justice employed in this context of diaconal and community development endeavours to tackle and emphasise the comprehensive and inclusive rights of communities and their members, while simultaneously acknowledging that the rights each person has should not be invalidated or disregarded by the collective. Fraser's (2009) conceptualisation of social justice posits that in order to achieve justice, it is necessary for collectives to attain both recognition-based justice and economic distribution-based justice. The practical question that arises from this two-fold understanding of social justice is how to effectively engage groups in this pursuit.

5. Theories of Social Justice

In relation to the aforementioned section, the pursuit of social justice is rooted in the fundamental premise that all individuals are created in the image of God and, as such, possess inherent worth. With regard to the biblical foundation of social justice, it can be argued that individuals possess a moral obligation to assist those who are marginalised within their community. The principle of love, as prescribed by Christian doctrine, mandates the provision of care to individuals in need, irrespective of their nationality or relational proximity. The aim of social justice is to rectify instances of inequity and promote parity in the distribution of resources and assets. On 26 November 2007, the United Nations (UN) acknowledged the necessity of advancing endeavours to address concerns such as destitution, marginalisation, and unemployment. Consequently, the UN resolved to commemorate February 20th every year, commencing in 2009, as the World Day of Social Justice (n.d.) (cf. Kgatla 2016, p. 4).[1]

The Italian Catholic cleric and scholar Luigi Taparelli coined the phrase social justice in the 1840s. He used it to define the fundamental principles of a just society as well as how advantages and responsibilities are shared in a community (Behr 2005, p. 3). Numerous theories and methodologies have evolved over the course of the 20th century, each of which has its own meanings, principles, and consequences for the idea of social justice. Each of these uses a distinct data basis of reasoning to make decisions about the suitability and fairness of various social circumstances by including and excluding pertinent information (Sen 2000, pp. 55–58). Therefore, it is crucial to weigh the benefits and drawbacks of the informational foundations of some of the key theories of social justice, including the Utilitarian perspective, John Rawls' Theory of Justice, Sen's Capability Approach, and Nancy Fraser's Theory of Social Justice, in order to comprehend the complexity of social justice and incorporate its principles in development.

5.1. The Utilitarian Perspective

The Utilitarian viewpoint, which held sway as the preeminent doctrine of justice for more than a century, prioritised the aggregate 'utility' of an individual. The concept of "utility" pertains to the quantification or evaluation of an individual's happiness or pleasure. This viewpoint posits that the sole desirable entity is happiness (Taherzadeh 2012, p. 3). The state of happiness is considered a self-sufficient objective, whereas all other things are regarded as instruments or pathways towards achieving that objective (Taherzadeh 2012, p. 3). This perspective emphasises the need to judge the consequences of

all choices. Choices are right if they promote happiness and wrong if they do not promote happiness. Therefore, it is imperative to evaluate every institution, law, or action based on the level of happiness it produces (Taherzadeh 2012, p. 3). Ultimately, happiness is good as in the final analysis, the state of being happy is considered to be beneficial. Thus, this viewpoint advocates for the advancement of the common good that benefits a larger population. However, this is not only for a greater number of people but ideally inclusive of all people as indicated by Bentham's view on utilitarianism (Morrow 2019, p. 45).

5.2. John Rawls's Theory of Justice

The Theory of Justice by John Rawls is widely regarded as an influential concept of justice in the 20th century. Rawls's theory of justice is primarily grounded in the notion of fairness (Rawls 1958, p. 164). The concept of justice as fairness posits that the principles of justice that are most rational are those that would be mutually agreed upon by individuals under equitable circumstances, with the aim of achieving fairness. Fairness can be defined as the antithesis of unfairness, pertaining to connections that facilitate, transform, and empower simultaneously. Therefore, the implementation of social justice necessitates sound decision-making skills from individuals in positions of power and authority.

The very first principle posits that there should be an equitable distribution of all social primary goods among all individuals (Raphael 2001, p. 198). The second principle pertains to the equitable allocation of social primary goods, wherein any departure from parity ought to be advantageous to those who are least privileged (Brighouse 2004, pp. 46–52). While the Utilitarian school of thought prioritised utilities, Rawls argued for the significance of social primary goods. The author posited that primary goods are the necessary means that an individual is presumed to desire in order to advance their objectives. These primary goods encompass elements such as income and wealth, basic liberties, freedom of movement, and self-respect (Rawls 1988, p. 257). Moreover, it is suggested that rather than concentrating on a single principle, such as utility, the prioritisation of social goods should be arranged in a lexical sequence of equivalent importance, namely, liberty, necessity, and utility (Raphael 2001, p. 202).

5.3. Sen's Capability Approach

Sen's scholarly work introduces the concept of the 'capability approach', which centres on the correlation between individuals' resources and their capacity to utilise said resources (Sen 2000, p. 74). The objective of the capability approach to social justice is not limited to the identification of individuals' functioning. Instead, it aims to consider the degree of freedom that individuals possess to achieve this functioning and to establish circumstances that enable all individuals to enhance their freedoms and experience comparable capabilities. For instance, this approach would consider the capabilities of a fasting man and a destitute person (Alexander 2004, p. 453; cf. Taherzadeh 2012, p. 7). Sen expresses hesitancy towards endorsing a universal set of capabilities that would serve as a baseline standard for all societies. However, he does outline five political freedoms that he deems instrumental in contributing to people's overall freedom to live their lives as they desire. These freedoms include civil and political rights, economic facilities that provide opportunities for the production or exchange of economic resources, social opportunities that encompass both public services and private facilities, transparency guarantees to prevent corruption and financial irresponsibility, and protective security measures that ensure social security (Sen 2000, pp. 38–40; cf. Taherzadeh 2012, p. 8). Sen has made significant contributions to the field of social justice by establishing connections between the public and private spheres of society. In the past, scholars in the field of social justice overlooked the significance of private inequalities, specifically those related to gender, in the attainment of social justice (Hassim 2008, p. 106).

5.4. Nancy Fraser's Social Justice Theory

The application of social justice in the realm of community development endeavours to tackle and prioritise the comprehensive entitlements of groups and communities, while concurrently acknowledging that the interests of individual members should not be disregarded by the collective. Nancy Fraser is a renowned contemporary American political philosopher whose fundamental principle of justice is centred on the concept of participation equality. Fraser (2010) argues that collectives must strive to achieve both recognition justice and economic distribution justice. Thus, the concept of justice necessitates the establishment of societal structures that facilitate equitable peer interaction among all constituents and an even allocation of tangible assets (Fraser and Honneth 2003, p. 36). Fraser's framework for justice comprises three dimensions, namely, redistribution, recognition, and representation. The concept of redistribution entails the notion of equitable allocation of resources, a principle that bears resemblance to the ideas espoused by scholars such as John Rawls (Fraser 1997, p. 14). The objective of recognition is to emancipate individuals or collectives from the inferior position in social culture and to guarantee equivalent cultural status and identity for every member of society. Regarding the political aspect of justice, the concepts of redistribution and recognition extend beyond nation-states within the framework of globalisation. Hence, the political facet of representation can solely furnish mechanisms for resolving issues by determining the eligibility of individuals to partake in communal existence as a constituent. Political representation encompasses both symbolic framing and political voice (Fraser 2010, p. 146). Achieving equality of participation necessitates the equitable allocation of material resources, irrespective of the varying characteristics of participants such as gender, race, and other attributes.

Fraser contributes to the theory of justice by speaking to the struggle for equitable distribution, but this view has been challenged. Robeyns contends that Fraser fails to acknowledge the distinctions among various theories of distributive justice. The individual posits that the assessment of Rawls' theory appears to be overly simplistic and is not applicable to Sen's capability approach (Robeyns 2003, p. 538). Therefore, redistribution must be redefined to include the main ideas of theorists like Rawls and Sen.

The principle underlying justice ought to be that of equal participation with the inclusion of the dimensions of redistribution, recognition, and representation. Fraser formulates a theory of global justice by incorporating the element of representation. This dimension prioritises the inclusion of the general populace over political elites, thereby offering fresh insights and avenues for research aimed at addressing the challenges inherent in contemporary global justice systems (Fraser 2010, pp. 15–21).

Fraser posits that her theory of justice should be grounded on the principle of participation equality, whereas Forst (2007) suggests that addressing issues of domination and unjustifiable arbitrary decisions can be achieved through redistribution, recognition, and justification because the distribution of certain goods is not mandated by the fundamental principles of justice. In addition, Gaventa (2006, p. 23) warns that although there are increasing prospects for civic participation in policy-making procedures, it is evident that the mere establishment of novel institutional frameworks may not inevitably lead to amplified incorporation or policy modifications that are favourable to the impoverished. Rather, the efficacy of these new, conceivably more democratic domains is heavily contingent upon the character of the power dynamics that envelop them. However, Fraser continues to make equal participation more applicable through practical methods to recognize the uniqueness of participants, diversity, common humanity, and complexity of the forms of wrong recognition (Forst 2007, pp. 295–96). Having mentioned that, we agree with Fraser's normative foundation of equal participation and concur with Parfitt (2004, p. 538) that depending on how participation is implemented, it may be perceived as a method of pursuing conventional development objectives in a hierarchical manner (top-down) while creating a deceptive impression of executing more comprehensive initiatives that aim to empower marginalised communities and individuals, but despite these risks, most

definitions of participation share the view that involving and informing individuals in projects that impact them can lead to an improvement in development outcomes.

6. A Proposed Praxis for Social Justice

The utilisation of social justice by Ginwright and Cammarota (2002, p. 87) has the potential to cultivate critical consciousness of the social context. Our argument is that the aforementioned approach should be combined with social action, which Freire (1996) refers to as "praxis". Social justice, as a facet of community development, entails promoting group introspection, analysing available alternatives, and subsequently implementing actions based on these reflections. Social justice pertains to addressing social and economic disparities while upholding human rights and enabling individuals to take action towards rectifying these inequalities. Thus, it necessitates a heightened awareness and capacity for action (Ginwright and Cammarota 2002, p. 87).

How do we as a church utilise, embody, or praxis our rich sources such as the Accra[2], Kairos[3], and Belhar[4] confessions to enable transformation in our communities? The WARC has made efforts to implement practical applications of the confessions within its framework (Botha and Maruping 2013, p. 6). A robust theoretical framework has been established on the basis of Accra and Belhar. What is currently required is a form of practical application or implementation. In essence, the task at hand involves establishing a structured system that can enable groups and associations to comprehend, discern, and contemplate the significance of acknowledgement, allocation, and portrayal. This system must also offer the necessary assistance to devise remedies and avenues for improved relationships, with the ultimate goal of remedying perceived inequities. Concepts that will assist us in our understanding and application to move beyond a charity mode/services/once-off projects to social justice are recognition, redistribution, representation, including key concepts like fairness, empowerment, compassion, equal participation, building of relationships, and holistic well-being. We will continue this article by first unpacking these concepts to enhance a praxis for social justice.

6.1. Redistribution

The living conditions of many South Africans reveal that poverty serves as the initial point of attack on the image of God. In South Africa, it is a prevailing fact that the demographic group most affected by poverty is the black population. The enduring economic impact of centuries of colonisation and oppression, which included limitations on mobility and social interactions, has had a significant and ongoing impact on the majority of black individuals in South Africa. Therefore, the church is tasked with a ministry that entails maintaining a delicate equilibrium between providing assistance and fostering growth. Development ministries aim to empower individuals who are unable to support themselves financially. When the church recognises its authentic identity as God's children, it rediscovers its genuine purpose by viewing itself as responsible and efficient caretakers of God, working towards the betterment of all (Myers 1999, p. 14).

Essentially, development is about people and how to improve their quality of life. The level of satisfaction with fundamental human needs is a crucial determinant of an individual's quality of life (Max-Neef 1991, pp. 15–16). Therefore, Max-Neef proposes the "Human Scale Development" as a needs theory for development. He identifies a total of nine essential human needs which encompass subsistence, affection, protection, understanding, participation, identity, creation, leisure, and freedom. There exists no hierarchy of needs and none of the aforementioned needs is more important than the other. Unsatisfied needs are viewed as poverties and therefore he extends the concept of poverty to more than a lack of income which means that development is the reduction of different poverties. Furthermore, the means to satisfy these needs are by satisfiers including "*being*", "*having*", "*doing*", and "*interacting*", which in turn can result in different economic goods. These satisfiers are merely suggestions which are not conclusive but can vary depending on diverse cultures and historical moments (Max-Neef 1991, pp. 29–33).

Due to the diverse nature of needs, transdisciplinary approaches should be adopted to operationalise development (Max-Neef 1991, p. 15).

In support of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), South Africa has aligned its vision to the SDGs and allocated a budget accordingly[5]. These goals are: (1) no poverty; (2) zero hunger; (3) good health and wellbeing; (4) quality education; (5) gender equality; (6) clean water and sanitation; (7) affordable and clean energy; (8) decent work and economic growth; (9) industry, innovation, and infrastructure; (10) reduced inequalities; (11) sustainable cities and communities; (12) responsible consumption and production; (13) climate action; (14) life below water; (15) life on land; (16) peace, justice and strong institutions; and (17) partnership for the goals. However, based on various research works (cf. Beukes and Van der Westhuizen 2018, p. 1; Department of Higher Education and Training 2017; Republic of South Africa 2015, pp. 10–15), it seems that South Africa is not successful in addressing the needs and reaching these goals of South Africans. Within these mentioned research works, it is evident that African people and specifically youths are viewed as a vulnerable and marginalised group within present-day society (Beukes and Van der Westhuizen 2018, p. 1). Of a variety of contributing factors which cause marginalisation, the three main contributing factors identified are poverty, unemployment, and exclusion. This view is supported by various research findings and statistics related to young people being excluded from education, employment, and/or training opportunities (NEET) (cf. Department of Higher Education and Training 2017; Beukes and Van der Westhuizen 2018, p. 1). Other social issues that marginalise South African youths are reported to include a high drop-out rate in educational settings, inadequate skills development, inadequate youth work services, poor health, high HIV and AIDS prevalence, high rates of substance abuse, crime, and violence, a lack of access to sporting and cultural development opportunities, a lack of social cohesion and volunteerism, and disability and exclusion (Republic of South Africa 2015, pp. 10–15). In addition, based on our argument hitherto, we would like to use the Land Reform initiative as another example. Nancy Fraser's concept of redistribution can potentially serve as a means to prompt the government to accelerate its Land Reform initiative. Additionally, the 1913 Land Act in South Africa has been identified as having unfairly advantaged specific racial groups, and as a result, restorative measures are necessary to address the injustices inflicted upon those who were negatively impacted by this oppressive system. The act of redistribution or restitution is a crucial aspect of the process of reconciliation, as it entails relinquishing something that leads to a deeper comprehension of the affliction inflicted upon the majority by apartheid. It is arguable that this facet of the process is the most humane. When the church, as the collective body of individuals who belong to God, takes charge of this procedure, it does so from a standpoint of empathy.

This kind of praxis will lead to empowerment as indicated by Chambers (1993) in (Bartlett 2004, p. 55).

> Empowerment means that people, especially poorer people, are enabled to take more control over their lives and secure a better livelihood with ownership and control of productive assets as one key element.

Christens (2019) in Gaventa (2021, p. 111) clarifies community power even further, arguing that empowerment refers to any positive development amongst group members or as the process by which groups attain increased authority over their situation. Linking themes of power and empowerment can be done by bringing together several prepositions which frequently accompany the word power such as power "*over*", "*with*", "*to*", "*within*", and "*for*" (Gaventa 2021). In this analogy, "*power over*" denotes the ability of individuals or groups to exert influence and authority over others and "*power to*" refers to the ability to act and therefore suggests empowerment. These are frequently perceived as being in conflict with one another or as competing definitions but could be seen and used as being interrelated and unified whereby social action is a dynamic process in which marginalised groups cultivate a sense of agency and collective empowerment to contest external forces that exert control over their lives, thereby enabling them to attain greater autonomy and self-

determination. The prevalence of power changes and therefore it is of utmost importance for a development practitioner to re-evaluate power relations continuously (Gaventa 2021, pp. 113, 124–26).

6.2. Recognition

The church is therefore tasked with the responsibility of manifesting the attributes of God as evidenced by its demonstrations of benevolence and affection. Hence, it is imperative to delve into the definition of compassion and its application in the context of South Africa. The South African church has the potential to embody the ideals of a benevolent, empathetic, and affectionate community, which serves as a model for other communities to emulate. According to Davies (2001, p. 17), the virtue of compassion necessitates a profound shift away from self-centredness and entails a willingness to jeopardise one's own comfort in order to empathetically experience the plight of those who are marginalised and in pain. The concept of compassion is rooted in acknowledging the inherent divinity of others as they are created in the likeness of the divine. The self undertakes the responsibility of the other due to this comprehension. According to Davies (2001, p. 17), the recognition of God's image in others, albeit veiled, leads to a better understanding of our own identity. According to Nouwen et al. (1982, pp. 3–4), the term compassion denotes the act of "*suffering with*". Compassion, therefore, requires one to enter spaces where one identifies with the weak, vulnerable, and powerless. Compassion entails complete engagement with the state of humanity. Compassion is a complex emotion that transcends mere pity and is considered to be the most authentic manifestation of divinity in human form. The compassion of God is transferred onto us. The concept of self-denying or "*kenotic love*" as described by Davies (2001, p. 21) has implications for various aspects of human existence and endeavours to facilitate the achievement of social cohesion. This extreme expression advocates for the recognition of one's own identity reflected in another individual. The church, as an alternative community, endeavours to recognise the divine image in all individuals within the society.

What does it mean to be made in God's likeness (*Imagio Dei*), and how does that bring this deed of mercy into focus? This "image" is provided by God and is essential to human dignity because the forgiving, caring God is the fundamental religious problem in human dignity. As an alternative community, the church is compelled by this knowledge to voice out against the social, political, and fiscal obstacles that keep people apart. The church takes on the role of the prophetic voice that condemns poverty as a condition that compels people to live in a state of inadequacy and servitude in relation to those who must continue to be their dependencies and masters. The church allows us to engage with and inquire about the One who grounds the purpose and structure of our existence as being human but also calls the church to live and minister as the "authentic possibility of our existence" because the church comprehends the profound truth that human beings share in the character of God, even in a limited and derivative sense (Stone 1996, p. 19).

The church is accountable to the underprivileged and downtrodden. God's society is obligated to stand up for the rights of the underprivileged, the helpless, and those who lack social or fiscal influence. The church provides for the material and social requirements of its members as a sign of a restored sacred and different society, not as if these were the only needs or the only thing that needed to be done. When the church is compassionate, it reflects the character of God and displays its care for spreading his love through both words and actions. It develops into a welcoming society where "*the other*" or "*all*" are acknowledged for their agency and power.

Gaventa (2006), (see also Gaventa and Pettit 2010, pp. 513–22) developed the power cube framework that helps us understand the complexity of power interactions including the different forms of power (hidden, visible, and invisible), different spaces (invited, close, and claimed) and levels (local, household, national, and global). These places, forms, and levels of authority and power interplay constantly, consequently affecting possibilities and strategies for change. These different dimensions of power can make it difficult to facilitate

inclusive dialogue and decision-making. The understanding of these multiple forms of power is equally important as an increase in citizen participation because due to power, certain people are marginalised, while amplifying the voice, recognition, and influence of other people. One important task of leaders is to identify surfacing power dynamics and strategies to shift power in favour of marginalised groups (Gaventa and Pettit 2010).

6.3. Representation

Personal relationships are rooted in social justice. Justice is impossible where there are unequal power ties and where there are no human connections. God created his beings with a strong sense of intimacy, and he actively cultivated this "betweenness" to the point where he willingly died on the cross for them. He left his people with this example of fairness and compassion to live by. Being in partnership and united in affection with one another is what it means to be human.

By building a religious community where these disparities do not stand in the way of friendship and affection for one another, the church as an alternative community must voice out against these problems that distort the picture of God in people. When led by this vision, the church will possess doctrinal tools sufficient to help it fight the urge to support race and socioeconomic division (Volf 1999, p. 19). The church becomes a force for healing where human thriving occurs, as a result of its compassionate deeds.

The church cannot look on as obvious persecution occurs and stay quiet. Being quiet entails accepting the status quo and taking responsibility for our inaction. Mass devotional gatherings should be held to address this wicked system that undermines humanity's ability to reflect God, but social action should also be prioritised. The alternative community's true religion is manifested in its deeds and actions that show one's affection for God and other individuals. Those who are aware of God must rise and act.

Participation should be implemented as both a means of reaching development goals and an end by empowering people to follow their own growth initiatives, projects, and development activities. Therefore, instead of mobilising people behind the predetermined objectives of development agencies, empower people to pursue their own development activities and projects. Development practitioners should adopt participatory behaviour which includes tolerance, mutual respect, openness to differing views, adaptability, and the ability to learn from mistakes to find the synergy between specialist knowledge and the people's knowledge or social capital. Self-critical awareness and reflection are paramount to the process of participation (Parfitt 2004, pp. 539, 549, 552, 554).

6.4. Deductions for a Proposed Praxis for Social Justice

As a proposed praxis for Social Justice, we can deduct the following crucial elements of our argument as follows and say that in South Africa, diaconal project goals with a social justice approach should:

- Be equitable in attempting to rectify unfair disadvantages caused by our history of segregation, discrimination, apartheid, and oppression.
- Establish concepts of holistic well-being and improvement of quality of life within the specific context.
- Determine who is happy within the current application of diaconia. When having to choose between the needs of different groups, the needs of the most vulnerable or vulnerable groups should be prioritised.
- Encourage equal participation by consciously addressing power forms, spaces, places, and levels. Everybody should have the opportunity to influence, decide, and determine fundamental human needs. In addressing these needs, everybody, including marginalised groups, can partake and have access to resources as an element of empowerment. Due to the diversity of needs, a transdisciplinary approach should be adopted to operationalise development.
- Build re(a)lationship by being honest, real, transparent, fair, and compassionate.
- Remain self-critical and reflective, and re-evaluate goals and the process continuously.

- Prioritise redistribution. Distribute tasks, information, and resources equally, keeping in mind that individuals have different capabilities. Therefore, vulnerable groups should possibly be skilled, educated, developed, and favoured to enhance the collective goal. In other words, establish equity.
- Prioritise recognition. Consider cultural and positional differences and adapt development goals accordingly. Recognise resources, recognise power dynamics, recognise talents, recognise social capital, recognise possible dependence, recognise a need for advocacy, recognise a need for voice and identity, and recognise the rights of individuals.
- Prioritise representation. Be critical of whose voices are being heard. Implement participatory behaviour which includes mutual respect, tolerance, openness to differing views, ability to learn from mistakes and adaptability, and find the synergy between specialist knowledge and people's knowledge.

7. Conclusions

Throughout our article, a comprehensive understanding can be gained of the characteristics and value orientation of a social justice approach for diaconia. Undoubtedly, when using only one theory for social justice, although it might make some valuable (biased) contributions on the one hand, the limitations on the other hand will not do justice to a social justice approach. We have also argued that many theorists made some functional contributions and therefore we are of the opinion that a social justice approach should also include concepts such as empowerment, fundamental human needs, social capital, power relations, and equal participation. Our discussion of social justice has shifted away from a focus on specific initiatives or services, almsgiving, charity, and handouts towards human dignity, equality, and self-realisation, which not only reflects a shift in political philosophy's ethical outlook but also the most recent development in critical social theory. With this identity in mind, the social justice strategy will work to ensure that all individuals and groups are treated with dignity and that all individuals and groups have equitable access to services, provision of services, and growth opportunities. By no means do we put forward that these are the only social justice theories, but we have made a cautious selection of theorists in order to assist us in the purpose of this article, namely, that this approach should assist, first and foremost, the church and also other role players in understanding the new paradigm shift of diaconia as more than just mere paternalistic charities and services towards the establishment of sustainable and empowered communities. As a result of this article, the authors were left with the realisation that additional research and possible publications are needed for further explorations.

8. Patents

This section is not mandatory but may be added if there are patents resulting from the work reported in this manuscript.

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Notes

[1] cf. Available online: https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/international-days/world-day-of-social-justice.html (accessed on 10 April 2023).

[2] The Accra Confession presents a critique of prevailing economic doctrines by drawing upon the conventional Reformed denunciation of idols such as Mammon, consumerism, and financial and speculative markets. These idols are deemed to obstruct God's life-giving sovereignty and contravene God's covenant by marginalising the destitute, the susceptible, and the entirety of Creation from experiencing a complete life. The Accra Confession (2005) can be understood as a form of response and resistance to empire. According to the confession, the term 'empire' encompasses the amalgamation of various imperial interests, systems, and networks, including economic, political, cultural, geographic, and military aspects, with the aim of accumulating political power and economic wealth. (cf. Pillay 2018, p. 3).

[3] A group of mostly black South African theologians located mostly in the slums of Soweto, South Africa, published The Kairos Document in 1985. The document questioned the churches' response to what its authors perceived as the ruthless policies of the apartheid regime during the state of emergency declared on 21 July 1985. The document is organised into five condensed parts, namely: (1) The Moment of Truth; (2) Critique of "State Theology;" (3) Critique of "Church Theology;" (4) Towards a Prophetic Theology; (5) Challenge to Action; and a brief conclusion. (cf. Botha and Maruping 2013).

[4] The Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) in Synod at Belhar endorsed the Belhar Confession on 26 September 1986, as a public confession against the theological justification of 'apartheid'. The first Article of the confession reaffirms the triune God who founded the Church. The following three articles (also regarded as the three pillars of the confession) namely, Unity, Reconciliation, and Justice, describe the church's mission in the world. The fifth and final Article requires the church to do what is confessed even if it means persecution. (cf. Beukes and Plaatjies van Huffel 2016, p. 1).

[5] cf. Available online: https://southafrica.un.org/en/sdgs (accessed on 10 April 2023).

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