Called to Transformation: Reflections about the Future of *Diakonia*

Jerry Pillay

Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay has been general secretary of the World Council of Churches since January 2023. Previously, he was dean of the Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria

Abstract

Against the background of the document *Called to Transformation – Ecumenical Diakonia*, published in June 2022 by the World Council of Churches and ACT Alliance, this article argues for a comprehensive approach to *diakonia* in which community projects and programmes, education, and training should emphasize social justice, people's participation, and the role of people's movements and the need for networking between them. This approach also stresses that *diakonia* must go beyond mere service, charity, and relief and engage in radical transformation.

Keywords: ecumenical movement, diakonia, transformation, World Council of Churches, ACT Alliance

It is a pleasure to be in Oslo for this conference organized by ReDi – the International Society for the Research and Study of Diakonia and Christian Society Practice.[1] I thank the organizers and VID Specialized University, an internationally respected centre for diaconal teaching and research, for inviting me to give this address. I bring greetings from the World Council of Churches (WCC).

I am very pleased that the WCC is a corporate member of ReDi. This partnership is important in advancing academic research into ecumenical *diakonia*. St Anselm's definition of theology as "faith seeking understanding" remains relevant. For all of us here, advancing our theological understanding of *diakonia* is central to our mission of better caring for people in Christ's name. As new challenges emerge – such as the impact of technological advancement, the existential crisis of climate change, and the consequences of conflict in places as diverse as Sudan and Ukraine – we Christians cannot sit idly by and claim to be unaffected. Just as in Acts 6 we read of the call of the first deacons, so we also are called to love and serve in Christ's name. To be effective, such service requires commitment, expertise, and proper knowledge of the context.

Called to Transformation

The theme of this year's ReDi conference is "Contested spaces of *diakonia*: Seeking justice, safety, and wellbeing." Last year, the WCC and ACT Alliance jointly published the study document *Called to Transformation – Ecumenical Diakonia*.[2] Justice, safety, and well-being are key themes found throughout the book. It aims to outline theological insights and practical service for *diakonia*. It is not intended to be in any way prescriptive; it is offered as a resource to facilitate learning and encourage good practices. It highlights the prophetic *diakonia* that addresses peacebuilding, climate justice, gender justice, racial justice, and

health and healing. It also aims to address the diverse practices of *diakonia* and the theological background of *diakonia*, as well as misleading theologies.

Called to Transformation has its origins in a conference held in Malawi in 2014 that worked on clarifying the relationship between churches and specialized ministries. Since then, there have been further developments, not least the launch of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 and the COVID-19 pandemic since 2020. Both of these require churches and their diaconal agencies to respond and engage. To be effective, such engagement requires coordination, cooperation, and mutual aid, delivered in a spirit of prayer and Christian loving-kindness; hence, the emphasis is on a truly *ecumenical diakonia* that should be the leading approach for future *diakonia*.

Called to Transformation describes some key challenges for our times. It covers many topics, ranging from the ecological dimension of *diakonia* to the consequences of malpractice in diaconal institutions. It shows that much common ground exists between the church-related development agencies (gathered in the family of ACT Alliance) and the churches (gathered in the family of the WCC). In fact, we do not and should not have time for disagreement and division. We must work together in partnership to try to achieve the transformation that is essential in striving for justice, safety, and well-being for all. The document tackles the question of how we address the SDGs, which, despite their shortcomings, still represent one of the most clearly expressed ways of improving the quality of life for the one billion poorest people in the world. Right now, the targets of the SDGs are far from being accomplished. The world needs to redouble its efforts, not write off the SDGs as a failure.

With this document in mind, I want to focus on this conference's theme of the contested spaces of *diakonia* – seeking justice, safety, and well-being – and to reflect on the future of *diakonia* and diaconal research.

Many organizations are addressing the variety of challenges in the world, and rightly so, because the issues are enormous and require as many players as possible to make the world a better place for all creation. We need to understand that we ought to be in collaboration and not competition as we seek to make a difference, share a common goal, and contend with limited resources. Our strength is found in cooperating and acting together for transformation and change. This requires interdisciplinary work and collaboration on a number of fronts: in the work we do, the research in which we engage, and the impact for which we long.

While churches are called to cooperate and to work with other organizations in transforming the world, they must not lose their own point of entry and focus. While, like other organizations, we are interested in addressing the evils and wicked problems in the world, our starting point is our faith in Jesus Christ that leads us into the praxis of faith (James 2:14-26). Thus, we need to understand that we are not just another NGO but part of the faith communities that are responding to the faith imperatives that drive our vision and energy to transform the world, so that all may have fullness of life. Diaconal ministries are rooted in the history, theology, and polity of the Christian church.[3]

Diakonia in the History of the Church

The diaconal imperative has been with the church ever since its inception. This is something evidenced in its care and concern for the poor and needy. However, over the ages, we have come to understand that the root causes and effects of poverty, inequality, and injustice must also be addressed in changing the material conditions of the poor and needy. Thus, over the years, the concept of *diakonia* has broadened to include involvement in the life of humankind, in the making of nationhood, in the building of culture, in the structuring of society with its functions and institutions, and in the shaping of the form and quality of political systems to work toward justice.

The early church was driven by the example and ministry of Jesus to care for the poor, lame, sick, and needy. In his careful and well-documented discussion of public life in the first century, Bruce Winter shows how early Christians took part in public life in the Greco-Roman communities in which they lived.[4] He argues that "the early church in fact taught a civic consciousness among its members."[5] Christians were not to abandon life in the public sphere (*politeia*) but to address their obligations as citizens from the perspective of the Christian ethic. Every Christian had an obligation to promote the welfare of the city and to help the poor, even without the rewards that were traditionally accorded the benefactor.

David Bosch points out that transformation (humanization) has been a part of the Christian mission and influence in society right from the beginning.[6] In what has been described as a "macabre world, submerged in despair, perversity, and superstition," Christian communities emerged as something entirely new in the populous and far-reaching Roman Empire.[7] The early church was on the periphery of society. It found many of its earliest adherents among slaves, women, and foreigners – people who had no special influence on the shape of society. Yet, it was to have an impact on society, especially over the next two millennia.

Christianity began by preaching and practising the "gospel of love and charity," which included almsgiving and care for widows, orphans, slaves, travellers, the sick, the imprisoned, and the poor.[8] Driven by the love of Jesus, believers went out and expressed their love for their neighbour. The early disciples showed true mercy and compassion. Their input into changing society was essentially to provide charity and love as expressed in the scriptures. Yet, they were to have a profound effect in helping the poor and neglected.

During the Middle Ages, the church advocated a moral code sometimes called the Christian corporate ethic, reflecting the fact that all of society was considered a single entity or corporation.[9] This led to a strong paternalistic obligation toward the common people, the poor, and the general welfare of society. Members of the monastic movement, though unlikely agents because of their withdrawal from society, were nevertheless able to transform society.

The Benedictine monastery, for example, became what St Benedict called a "school for the Lord's service" and was to have a profound influence in the centuries to follow. From its inception, the monastic movement has been concerned not only with the spiritual side of life, but also with its social and economic components. During the Middle Ages, the church was deeply concerned about economic matters, not only on the theological level, but also on the

operational one. Hospices, orphanages, and philanthropic work were supported by income generated through economic activities. However, most of these activities were undertaken through the monasteries. Julio de Santa Ana has pointed out that it was the monasteries that chose to radically eradicate poverty.[10] The monks saw the need to be involved in changing society as their gospel responsibility. However, their work was centred more on poor relief than on transforming society fully.

The 16th-century Protestant Reformation was an attempt to reform and transform both church and society. The Reformation embraced a number of distinct yet overlapping areas of human activity: the reform of the morals and the structures of church and society, new approaches to political issues, shifts in economics thinking, the renewal of Christian spirituality, and the reform of Christian doctrine.[11]

The Reformers, according to Stivers, not only influenced their society but were also influenced by the (economic) ideology of their time.[12] While this was something they were guilty of, most Reformers generally advocated involvement in society, unlike the early church or the church in the Middle Ages, and they went a step further in the attempt to transform society. Their theology in many ways encouraged the transformation and development of community. And they engaged in this as they influenced social and economic policies of the governments of the day.[13]

This reveals that Christian mission and *diakonia* started to broaden its terrain and impact in transforming people, communities, and society. It is thus not surprising that some secular interpretations tend to discount the importance of the religious element in the Reformation. They simply state that Luther, Calvin, Knox, Zwingli, and others are products of their socio-economic and political backgrounds and circumstances.[14] Other factors doubtless played a role, but the religious one cannot be ignored. The Reformation movement did not renew and change the church but leave the world untouched. This movement intervened dramatically in the lives of all and brought about radical changes in the social, political, and economic aspects of a new developing world. It gave rise to a new epoch in the history of humankind. And all through this time, small groups of Christians kept to the task of transforming the lives of the poor. Thus, unsurprisingly, one of the theological miracles of the late 20th century is the rediscovery of the biblical witness to God's particular concern for the poor and oppressed. This has become a major focus of the ecumenical church, in particular.

Globalization and an *Oikocentric* Perspective

The ecumenical movement argued for God's “preferential option for the poor” and placed emphasis on the poor as the agents of change. It was no longer a case of the rich developing the poor but of the poor developing themselves. This taught us that economic growth as the paradigm for transformation of society is clearly insufficient. The needs of human beings and their communities – present and future generations – as well as creation as a whole must be the starting point for a transformed world.

The ecumenical movement also gained a better understanding of the multifaceted meaning of the complex problems in the world and called for a comprehensive approach. As a result, all community projects and programmes, as well as education and training, needed to

emphasize social justice, people's participation, and the role of people's movements and the need for networking between them. This also provided a growing awareness that *diakonia* must go beyond mere service, charity, and relief: it must engage in radical transformation.

I have previously argued that this broader definition of *diakonia* not only embraces the notion of development but also expands into global solidarity, engagement, and transformation.[15] The ecumenical church has impressed upon us the need to shift from an ecclesiocentric to an *oikocentric* perspective of *diakonia* that leads to a different approach to our task in the world.[16] The mission and diaconal praxis of the church are to be signs and actions that address the groaning universe. The biblical understanding of the kingdom or reign of God gives credibility to the interconnectedness and interdependence of a single world society.

According to Albrow, globalization refers to "all those processes by which the people of the world are incorporated into a single world society."[17] Similarly, according to McGrew, globalization constitutes

> a multiplicity of linkages and interconnections that transcend the nation states (and by implication the societies) which make up the modern world system. It defines a process through which events, decisions, and activities in one part of the world can come to have a significant consequence for individuals and communities in quite distant parts of the globe.[18]

Globalization is a multifaceted phenomenon that includes economic, political, cultural, and social dimensions. However, scholars tend to emphasize economic globalization. Although this is an important factor, one must not ignore other important factors, such as political, cultural, and social.[19]

Returning to the Christian understanding of *diakonia* and globalization, we can draw from John Calvin's view when he wrote that no member has "power for itself nor applies it to its own private use, but each pours it out to the fellow members." What chiefly matters is "the common advantage of the whole body."[20] Occasionally, Calvin identified this community with the whole human race: "We ought to embrace the whole human race without exception in a single feeling of love."[21]

***Diakonia* and the Theology of the Christian Church**

Having shown that *diakonia* is grounded in the *history* of the church, I shall now proceed to discuss how it is rooted in the *theology* of the Christian church. For the focus of this paper, I will not delve into deep theological details but look at some aspects of the theology undergirding *diakonia* by reflecting on the theme of this conference on justice, safety, and well-being.

Justice

The word "justice" appears no less than 173 times in the Bible. So, justice matters to God. The God portrayed in scripture is the "lover of justice": "The King is mighty, he loves justice – you have established equity; in Jacob you have done what is just and right" (Ps. 99:4, NIV; see also Ps. 33:5; 37:28; Is. 30:18; 61:8; Jer. 9:24). We see in his dealings with Israel how God seeks

justice for his people. In sympathetic response to the groaning of Hebrew slaves (Ex. 2:23-24), the God "who executes justice for the oppressed" and "gives food to the hungry" (Ps. 146:7) pushed Moses to become the liberator, smashed the shackles of Pharaoh, and led the people to a new homeland. God's deliverance became the paradigm of justice for Israel and continues to be so for us today.

Injustice was a violation of the covenant and an act of faithlessness. In the light of the covenant, to know God is to show justice (Jer. 22:13-16; Micah 6:8). Indeed, justice in the prophetic tradition is a spiritual discipline, an act of worship, without which the value of other spiritual disciplines – prayer, fasting, sacrifice – are negated (Is. 58:1-10; Amos 5:21-24; Hos. 6:6).

Faithfulness to covenant relationships demands a justice that recognizes special obligations, "a preferential option" for widows, orphans, the poor, and aliens – in other words, the economically vulnerable and politically oppressed (Ex. 23:6-9; Deut. 15:2-11; 24:14-22; Jer. 22:16; Amos 2:6-7; 5:10-12). This tradition of concern for the weak and poor was embodied in the idea of the Jubilee Year (Lev. 25). The Jubilee Year prevented unjust concentrations of power and poverty by requiring the return of property every 50 years. Similarly, the Year of Release (Deut. 15:1-18) provided an amnesty for debtors and the liberation of indentured servants every seven years.

Classical definitions of justice exist in legal and philosophical contexts, including in the works of Plato and Aristotle. Perhaps, though, it is easier to identify and characterize injustice. Striving for justice and against injustice was key to the struggle against apartheid in my home country, South Africa. The legacy of the injustices of apartheid left a deeply scarred and divided society in need of reconciliation and hope, especially for those affected by generations of exclusion from economic advancement. Justice is not a one-off event; it is a mindset and a process. With justice should come a proportionate response, mercy, and compassion. In this regard, justice is a related function of *diakonia* as we work against injustices in the world.

Diakonia, then, is an agent of justice. In the Old Testament, in Proverbs 21:3, we read, "To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice" (NKJV). In an ancient culture, where sacrifice was a central part of worship, this may have seemed a radical and indeed countercultural statement, but it goes to the core of what should be the human response to God's grace. In Matthew 23:23, Jesus says, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practised without neglecting the others." We see God's priorities here – it is not tithing herbs or other such diversions or trivialities that matter, but the core message of justice. In underlining the indivisibility between justice and *diakonia*, there is perhaps no finer text than Matthew 25:34-40:

> Then the king will say to those at his right hand, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me." Then the righteous

> will answer him, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."

Applying this in the contemporary context requires commitment and principles. Many churches do great work at the local level in providing food to the hungry and other basic services that make a real difference to individuals, often with few resources, and this is to be commended. In fact, some church traditions, such as Reformed and others, have *diakonia* centred in the polity of the church. This is often seen in the system of deacons who are responsible for "temporal" or service ministry to the poor and needy.

Our current situations have shown us that ministries of service, good as they are, are not enough. We also have to address structural sin and injustice in society: tax policies where the hyper-rich can end up paying less tax than the middle-income earner; where bank loans for the poor have higher interest rates than for the wealthy; where pollution and climate change disproportionately affect the poor; and where exploitation and greed are still highly profitable.

Further, it must be noted that justice goes beyond what you do for others. The aim has to be the creation of a society based on justice. In his book *Liberating Diakonia*, Kjell Nordstokke writes:

> Within diakonia there has been a growing awareness of the need to move away from paternalistic patterns of action *for* people in need towards practices *with* people, in a way that allows marginalized people to be subjects in the effort of changing their conditions of life.[22]

This is vitally important for the future of a *diakonia* based on justice. The entire agenda of ecumenical *diakonia*, by its very definition, must be inclusive and collaborative rather than exclusive and paternalistic. Christian churches have not always taken these considerations seriously in their diaconal endeavours. Many factors prevent the process happening. Sometimes projects end up benefiting the rich because of a failure to analyze the power factors in the community. Sometimes they become dominated by the functional purpose and lose the perspective of transformation that the particular function is meant to serve. Sometimes they support or supplement government plans and projects instead of organizing the people so that they have power to bargain with government. Sometimes they instil competitive profit-seeking that obstructs the building of any new community. People need to be full participants in planning and implementing according to their needs so that they are always aware that the struggle is theirs.

Perkins states that if the perspectives of evaluation are transformational and sensitive to the humanizing process, the basic questions will be the following:

> How does the project release people, build sharing community, and enhance the solidarity of the people?
>
> Does the project give power to the people to share their own future as a community, and uncover their potentialities and strengths within cultural realities?
>
> Does the project enhance their understanding of their situation and the power factors operating in it, and their will to do something to change it?[23]

And I would add to the above questions: "How does the project benefit the poor?"

From a biblical and theological perspective, justice clearly ought to be an important aspect of *diakonia*. The need to work against injustices and structural sins is also an imperative that will need to be taken very seriously in future diaconal work. Although churches are not engaging in this in a full-scale way, they are increasingly becoming aware that justice ministries ought to be part of diaconal work. Thus, many changes are taking place, and these are closing the gap between elders as spiritual leaders and deacons as the ministry of service and are now combining these ministries in the polity and structure of the church. The dichotomy between word and deeds is slowly being overcome in the ministries of churches. This will probably be the future trend of *diakonia* in the church.

Safety

After considering the importance of justice, safety may sound a little bland and cautious. But the 49 references to safety in the Bible show the importance of safety in the quality of human existence. The Psalmist writes, "I will both lie down and sleep in peace; for you alone, O Lord, make me lie down in safety" (Ps. 4:8). Numerous prophetic warnings echo the need for peace and security (Jer. 6:14; Ezek. 13:10; Micah 3:5; 1 Thess. 5:3). Safety and protection are found in the Lord (Ps. 46, Ps. 91:1-2, 2 Sam. 22:3-4). Safety, security, peace, and protection are important themes in the Bible. This often reflects on the time in biblical history that is no less different for us today.

Far too many people do not enjoy a safe existence. The news from Sudan and Ukraine remains ominous. Wars, conflicts, factions, and ethnic, racial, gender-based, and religiously inspired violence are the norm of daily experiences across the globe. Every news report of bloodshed comes with grief and loss for a family. For Norway, 22 July 2011 was a terrible day in its history, with 77 people killed by a far-right terrorist in Oslo and on the island of Utøya. These innocent victims were denied the safety that they deserved. Thinking again of John 10:10, the words of Jesus – "I have come that they may have life . . . life in all its fullness" – counter the nihilism of the men of violence.

In May 2022, I was in Sri Lanka: a country so rich with natural beauty, yet scarred by an ethnically motivated civil war, terrorism, and the aftermath. The country has descended into economic chaos and bankruptcy. Sri Lanka is not alone in needing help, but it is an example of the precariousness of the global economic model, where fiscal vulnerability can have terrible consequences for the population. The situation was not created by individual Sri

Lankans, but they are the ones bearing the brunt of the chaos. In all of this, we must consider the safety of the people against the whirlwinds of economic injustice.

Human beings need safety, warmth, and shelter. The diaconal response must be to address human need where it arises and to address the structures in society at governmental and macroeconomic levels that cause far too many to lack safety. In a world struggling with violence and insecurity, diaconal programmes and work ought to address issues of safety and security. The WCC is deeply involved in peace-making and peace-building programmes in the Middle East, Africa, and other parts of the world.

Addressing issues of safety and security must include a number of players and activists from a variety of different fields: religious, social, economic, and political. Thus, the WCC partners with other NGOs to engage in collaborative efforts to address these challenges. At the University of Pretoria, where I once served as dean of the Faculty of Theology and Religion, we established a Centre for Religion, Public Life and Security in collaboration with the Oxford Centre for Religion and Public Life. The main purpose of the centre was to address the issues, especially in Africa, that threaten safety, security, and peace.

A number of universities have set up departments to address issues of security and safety. It is important for religious organizations to partner with such institutions and organizations to transform broken and violent communities into places of safety and peaceful living. From a research point of view, this will involve breaking down academic silos and boundaries and engaging interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research to address the complex problems of society. While maintaining their point of departure in transforming society – following the call of Christ – churches and religious organizations must draw from the expertise and insights of other professions, and even from secular institutions, if we are to dialogue, research, and act in any significant way to transform society and not merely to put sticking plasters on deep wounds. The future of diaconal work will require formidable partnerships, research collaboration, and joint action for transformation with a variety of contributors and research disciplines.

Well-being

Justice and safety are essential in facilitating well-being. The sacrifice of well-being is described extensively in the Old Testament, notably in Leviticus 9:22-23:

> Aaron lifted his hands towards the people and blessed them; and he came down after sacrificing the sin-offering, the burnt-offering, and the offering of wellbeing. Moses and Aaron entered the tent of meeting, and then came out and blessed the people; and the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people.

In some verses in the Bible, health and wellness are related to serving God: if we serve the Lord in all aspects of life, he will bless us and heal us spiritually, physically, or emotionally (Ex. 23:25; 1 Cor. 10:31; Matt. 6:9-13). Yet, in many places, the health and well-being of people is at risk because of systemic and social injustices and sin.

The New Testament does away with concepts such as animal sacrifice as an atonement for sin or thanksgiving for well-being. In Matthew 9:11-13, following the call of Matthew the tax collector to be one of Jesus' disciples, we read,

> When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax-collectors and sinners?" But when he heard this, [Jesus] said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners."

Many different models of delivery of diaconal service exist throughout the world. In northern Europe, the level of professionalism creates services of a very high standard. Such work is unattainable in terms of financial, personnel, and physical resources in many countries, especially in the global South. Yet, in many of those nations, the worship life of the church is more closely integrated with diaconal service – and the church is growing and a sense of well-being is fostered. Perhaps in the global North it is time to look again at what can be learned from diaconal practice in the global South, where so much is achieved with so little. It is encouraging to note that many local churches in the global South address issues of health and wellness: churches have organized groups for walking, sermons and talks on well-being, clinics, hospitals, mental wellness programmes, and counselling services. Many of these were established during the COVID-19 pandemic, when faith communities were obliged to provide additional services to congregants and the community to help people struggling with a variety of challenges impinging on wellness and health. COVID-19 has taught us that religion, ethics, science, medicine, and other fields have to all come together to address a global crisis. Similarly, the global crises of poverty, hunger, food insecurity, violence, and the climate emergency all require collaboration and cooperation to create a better world and life for all creation.

The WCC has recently revived its work in health and healing with a commission established in June 2023. While it is composed of representatives of member churches, it draws on the services of professionals and experts in the field of health and social issues. The intent is to take a holistic approach to health and wellness. From a research point of view, it means drawing from a number of academic disciplines to create knowledge, understand the issues more fully, and find lasting and transformative solutions to enhance the quality of life and living. Diaconal work and ministries require a more integrated approach to dealing with the challenges that threaten health and well-being. The focus and interest, however, should not only be on human beings but on all creation.

Conclusion

Justice, safety, and well-being should not be contested spaces for *diakonia*. They are integral to what we should do. We promote these three elements because they are humane, they are life affirming, and they are godly. *Called to Transformation: Ecumenical Diakonia* addresses these values and more, including the recognition that a faith-based and a rights-based diaconal agenda can and must coexist. Likewise, *diakonia* must be inclusive – doing acts of kindness to others not merely from a position of wealth or privilege but with the recognition

that human beings are equal in God's sight. Diaconal service must involve the user rather than treating them as a passive recipient of whom gratitude is anticipated.

The world's population has doubled over the past 50 years, from four billion people to the current eight billion. Special attention must be paid to the needs of the world's poorest one billion people. The church has a duty and calling to advocacy and service. At a global level, the WCC has a responsibility to address global economic trends and pressures, including through the work of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs. In the words of Martin Luther King, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."[24] We must strive to make the world a safer place for all and become advocates for peace and reconciliation, countering hatred and working for human flourishing. All human beings need a sense of well-being: not extremes of luxury or wealth but the essentials for a decent life. In order to meet the challenges of our times, we need to embrace the holistic understanding of *diakonia*, which calls not for lone rangers but for collaborative and integrated work on all levels in the ministries of the church, society, and academic institutions to transform a broken and suffering world.

Notes

[1]This is an edited version of an address given on 1 June 2023 to a conference in Oslo, Norway, organized by the International Society for the Research and Study of Diakonia and Christian Social Practice and VID Specialized University on the theme "Contested spaces of diakonia: Seeking justice, safety, and wellbeing."

[2] World Council of Churches and ACT Alliance, Called to Transformation – *Ecumenical Diakonia* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2022), https://www.oikou mene.org/resources/publications/ecumenical - diakonia

[3]See Jerry Pillay, "The Significance of Social Justice and Diakonia in the Reformed Tradition," HTS Theological Studies 78:4 (2022), 1–14.

[4] Bruce Winter, *Seeking the Welfare of the City: Christians as Benefactors and Citizens: First-Century Christians in the Graeco-Roman World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 200–10.

[5] Winter, *Seeking the Welfare of the City*, 3.

[6] David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*s, 20th anniversary ed. (New York: Orbis, 2011).

[7] Bosch*, Transforming Mission*, 197.

[8] Adolf von Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries* (New York: Harper, 1967), 147– 98.

[9] E.K. Hunt and Howard J. Sherman, *Economics: An Introduction to Traditional and Radical Views*, 4th ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), 6.

[10] Julio de Santa Ana, *Good News to the Poor: The Challenge of the Poor in the History of the Church* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1979), 62.

[11] See Alister E. McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction,* 4th ed. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

[12] Robert L. Stivers, *Reformed Faith and Economics* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1993), 33–48.

[13] Stivers, *Reformed Faith and Economics*, 33– 48.

[14] B.J. Van der Walt, *Anatomy of Reformation* (Potchefstroom: Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher

Education, 1991), 211.

[15] Jerry Pillay, "The Church and Development: Towards a Theology of Development," PhD diss., University of Cape Town, 2002.

[16] Beverley Haddad, "Service or Subservience? Diakonia in Our Globalized, Gendered World," *Ecumenical Review* 66:3 (2014), 276, https://doi.org/10.1111/erev.12105.

[17] Martin Albrow, "Introduction," in *Globalization, Knowledge and Society: Readings from International Sociology,* ed. Martin Albrow and Elizabeth King (London: Sage, 1990), 9.

[18] Anthony McGrew, "*A Global Society?" in Modernity and Its Futures*, ed. Tony McGrew, Stuart Hall, and David

Held (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 65–66.

[19] Lui Hebron and John F. Stack, Jr, *Globalization: Debunking the Myths* (Boston: Longman, 2011), 20–24.

[20] Calvin, *Institutes*, III, vii, 5, *in Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 1, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 695.

[21] Calvin, I*nstitutes*, II, viii, 55, in Institutes of the Christian Religion, 419

[22] Kjell Nordstokke, Liberating Diakonia (Trondheim: Tapir Akademisk Forlag, 2011), 60, https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/225934684.pdf.

[23] Harvey J. Perkins, *Roots for Vision: Reflections on the Gospel and the Churches' Task in Re-peopling the De-peopled* (Singapore: CCA, 1985), 60.

[24] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail," in *Why We Can't Wait* (London: Penguin, 2018), 87