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The Case for Practical Theological Interpretation in Faith-based Organizations

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Faith-based organizations have been known to struggle with mission drift, or the tendency to 'inevitably drift from their founding mission, away from their core purpose and identity'.¹ Mission drift has been a concern for both practitioners and scholars.²

Since mission drift is influenced by an organization's environment, disciplines such as organizational studies and sociology can contribute to an understanding of it. At the same time, in a Christian context theology will contribute to understanding of the intended mission and its sender. Practical theological interpretation looks for a theological interpretation of the situation and the process of arriving at the solution.

The practical theological approach recognizes theology as 'an ongoing, second-order, contextual discipline that engages in the task of critical and constructive reflection on the beliefs and practices of the Christian church for the purpose of assisting the community of Christ's followers in their missional vocation to live as the people of God in the particular social-historical context to which they are situated'.³ This understanding of theology actively engages and reflects on Christian beliefs and tradition for the purpose of supporting the Christian community. It engages with the various theological sub-disciplines as well as with other relevant academic disciplines.

In this paper, I consider how the tasks involved in practical theological interpretation, as well as the appropriation of different academic disciplines and theological sub-disciplines, be used to strengthen the Christian identity.

¹ Peter Greer and Chris Horst, *Mission Drift* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 2014), 15, 18.

² See Anselm Reimer, "How Do We Maintain a Credible Diaconia for the Future? Some Thoughts from a German Protestant Perspective," *Diaconia* 2, no. 2 (2011): 170–74, and Johannes Eurich, "Diaconia Under Mission Drift," *Diaconia* 3, no. 1 (2012): 58–65.

³ John R. Franke, *The Character of Theology: An Introduction to Its Nature, Task, and Purpose* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 44.

tity of an organization, thereby countering mission drift.

I. Practical Theological Interpretation

Richard Osmer's framework of practical theological interpretation is well established and broadly received within the field. It consists of four distinct but interrelated tasks: descriptive empirical, interpretative, normative and pragmatic application.⁴

This framework intentionally engages and dialogues with different theological sub-disciplines as well as with other academic disciplines. Such broad engagement opens up the potential of developing new approaches to 'defining and analysing a research problem that more closely represents the reality in which such problems are situated'.⁵

The particular way in which the different disciplines interact with each other follows Hans Frei's tradition of 'ad hoc correlational model of cross-disciplinary dialogue'. Appropriating this tradition, theology enters into a dialogue with other fields. 'It transforms their insights as they as they are placed in the altogether different language game of theology'.⁶ In this paper, the academic disciplines appropriated include organizational studies, sociology and Reformational philosophy.

II. The Descriptive Empirical Task

Faith-based organizations have been defined as 'any organization that derives inspiration and guidance for all its activities from the teachings and principles of the faith or from a particular interpretation or school of thought within that faith'.⁷ Such organizations normally exist in a broader context, categorized as civil society. The term 'civil society' is a popular catch-all term for the broader civic action performed by institutions or networks that advances the common good of society, independent of the state and the market yet at the same time closely related to both and at times even permeating them.⁸

As faith-based organizations depend on their understanding of their faith in their expression of the common good, it is important to understand the process and extent of the influence of faith on the organization. This factor can be discussed in two different ways: how identity is formed in organizations and how faith is measured.

1. Identity formation in organizations

An organization's identity is not constructed purely by management or by the staff members' perception. The theory of the tacit identity of an or-

4 Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 4.

5 Patricia L. Rosenfield, "The Potential of Transdisciplinary Research for Sustaining and Extending Linkages between the Health and Social Sciences," *Social Science and Medicine* 35, no. 11 (1992): 1343.

6 Osmer, *Practical Theology: an Introduction*, 169.

7 Gerard Clarke and Michael Jennings, *Development, Civil Society and Faith Based Organizations: Bridging the Sacred and the Secular* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 6.

8 Jonathan Chaplin, *Herman Dooyeweerd: Christian Philosopher of State and Civil Society* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2011), 9.

ganization understands that 'identity formation is both culturally embedded in complex and taken-for-granted ways and undertaken as part of organizational practice'.⁹ This implies that identity formation is both the 'narrative unconscious in the stories that people live by' as well as the 'formative organizational practice'.¹⁰

The process and content of an organization as a collective 'self' can be viewed from three perspectives: object, subject and stories. The self as object and story together form the *content* of identity, whereas the self as subject is involved in the *process*. This theory presents a more comprehensive way of looking at how identity is formed in the organization.

a) The process of identity

Two main processes are related to the social construction of organizational identity: self-authoring and self-enacting.¹¹ Authoring relates to the selection of organizational experiences and the attributing of meaning in the form of self-conceptions and self-stories; enacting refers to the living out of these self-conceptions and stories.

To focus on the process requires focusing on the stakeholders involved in the different organizational proc-

esses and the plausible management implications that result. Such a focus recognizes the importance of practices related to the construction of organizational identity.

Experiences within an office context provide the opportunity for staff members to frame meaning based on their own self-conception of the organization. From this point of view, 'the processes of self (as the organization) are processes of participation in and performance of embodied, valued producing activity (by the staff members)'.¹² These practices described as 'formative practices' are influential for the overall understanding of self as subject.¹³

b) The content of identity

As already noted, the content of identity can be investigated through the study of the organization as an object or through the story or narrative lived by the organization.

Self as object was the primary focus in early organizational identity research.¹⁴ This approach asks how the organization wants to be perceived and views identity construction as involved in creating such an image.¹⁵

Self as story takes seriously how the organization is situated in its loca-

9 Chaplin, *Herman Dooyeweerd*, 9.

10 Arne Carlsen, 'On the Tacit Side of Organizational Identity: Narrative Unconscious and Figured Practice', *Culture and Organization* 22, no. 2 (2016): 107.

11 Carlsen incorporated the work of William James, 'A World of Pure Experience', in *Writings of William James, a Comprehensive Edition*, ed. John J. McDermott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), vol. 2, chapters 9 and 10.

12 Carlsen, 'On the Tacit Side', 116.

13 Philip Selznich, *Leadership in Administration. A Sociological Interpretation* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1957).

14 See K. Corley et al., 'Guiding Organizational Identity Through Aged Adolescence', *Journal of Management Inquiry* 15, no. 2 (2006): 85–99.

15 M. Hatch and M. Schultz, 'The Dynamics of Organizational Identity', *Human Relations* 55, no. 8 (2002): 989–1018.

tion, its temporality, and its purpose within society.¹⁶ It affirms the importance of narrative in providing continuity and purpose in human experiences. People continuously construct and reconstruct to make sense of their past and anticipate their future. In the same way, organizational members look at the situatedness of the organization as they try to understand the organization's identity. Looking at the narrative clarifies where the identity arises from. The sources can include the culture of the organization or specific events considered important in its story.

c) Forming a tacit religious identity

Together, the organization as content and process interact with each other to form the tacit identity of the organization. This identity captures more than the management control activities that occur within the organization; it also takes into account the staff members' interpretations and the story of the organization. All these factors create a mediated religious identity.

2. Measuring faith in organizations

Organizational literature has typically examined how different organizational variables are influenced by religiosity.¹⁷ In addition, typologies have been

created to indicate the role of faith within various organizations, ranging from faith-permeated organizations to secular organizations.¹⁸ Such typologies generally focus on explicit variables that are outwardly measurable. This assumes a direct causal relationship between the explicit variables that leaves out the impact of the people in the organization. To include the staff members' perceptions within an organization is to recognize the organization as the 'product of beliefs held by members of society'.¹⁹ Staff members can influence the overall expression of the organization's expression in society.

Organizational culture is a good tool to understand the perceptions of staff members. It is composed of the unconscious assumptions shared by members of the organization. Organizational culture has been defined as 'a pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it solved problems of external adaptation and internal integration, which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct ways to perceive, think and feel in relation to these problems'.²⁰

Measuring the organizational culture supplements available explicit information about the role of Christian

16 Carlsen, 'On the Tacit Side', 129.

17 See for example Thomas H. Jeavons, 'Identifying Characteristics of "Religious" Organizations', in N. J. Demerath III, Peter Dobkin Hall, Terry Schmitt and Rhys H. Williams, eds., *Sacred Companies: Organizational Aspects of Religion and Religious Aspects of Organizations* (New York: Oxford University Press,

1998), 79–95.

18 Rick James, 'What Is Distinctive about FBOs', *INTRAC* 22 (February 2009), www.intrac.org/data/files/resources/482/Praxis-Paper-22-What-is-Distinctive-About-FBOs.pdf.

19 Mary Jo Hatch, *Organization Theory: Modern, Symbolic, and Postmodern Perspectives*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 42.

20 Edgar Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 18.

faith in an organization as described in typologies, as well as identifying religious characteristics. This provides a fuller picture of the impact of faith within the organization.

3. Data collection

My case study examined the international Christian organization World Vision in two locations, Nepal and Papua New Guinea. I asked the following questions:

- How has World Vision's collective Christian understanding been expressed in its organizational variables and how has this Christian understanding evolved in the development of the organization?
- Using the framework of organizational culture dimensions, what Christian values and assumptions are espoused by World Vision based on its core documents?
- What actual values and assumptions are held by members in each of the two country offices based on the dimensions as determined in the first question?
- What is the state of relationships held by different internal stakeholders of the organization?

The first of these questions focuses on the organization as object as well as subject, considering World Vision as a single entity. The next two questions take seriously the experiences of different offices by uncovering the organizational culture in these locations. Question three recognizes the experiences and interpretation of staff members as indicative of the overall religious identity of the organization. Finally, question four takes seriously the relationships within the office. These

relationships mediate the overall dialectic process in the identity formation model between process and content within the organization.

I applied a mixed-methods approach in my data collection. I used qualitative research, examining archival records and policy documents, to interpret World Vision in its entirety. I also used focus group discussions and interviews to validate measurements of organizational culture at the two country locations, engaging in open, deep discussion of specific cultural features.

I also used a questionnaire to address the last two questions in a quantitative manner. The questionnaire was designed to study respondents' attitudes, values, beliefs and motives. I asked questions about organizational cultural dimensions, as well as about relational proximity so as to understand the state of relationships in offices.

My respondents included staff from various functional units across World Vision, including Operations, Christian Commitments, Administration, and People and Culture. They encompassed members from different levels of the organization. Key discussion points included (1) determining World Vision's Christian values and practices based on its core documents alongside the organizational cultural dimensions, and (2) reviewing research tools—namely the questionnaire, focus group discussions and interviews.

III. The Interpretive Task: Appropriating Organizational Studies

The next key task in practical theological interpretation is the interpretative

task, which takes into consideration (1) relevant particulars of specific events and circumstances, (2) discernment of the moral ends at stake and (3) determination of the most effective means to achieve these ends in light of the constraints and possibilities of a particular place and time.²¹ In the following discussion, the analysis of each organizational self is outlined.

1. Summary analysis of self as object, story and process

With regard to organizational self as object, World Vision is clear and consistent in its Christian understanding, as expressed in the different organizational variables as well as public documents. It has intentionally considered what it means for Christian faith to permeate through organizational variables. This commitment is held at the highest level of the organization, where policies dealing with this Christian understanding are approved by World Vision's international board.

World Vision's 'Witness to Jesus Christ' policy is an example of how the organization has been intentional in its Christian understanding on various organizational variables. These include clear elements within the policy on what witness looks like in its programs, in activity systems related to different stakeholders, or in external partnerships.²²

With regard to self as story, it is clear that World Vision has evolved since its early days. What began as an

evangelical missionary organization 'to meet critical needs of the Orient' has since evolved into an ecumenical organization with clear operating structures, working in relief, development and advocacy. It no longer exists primarily as an intermediary organization with the focus on churches and their involvement in the mission field, but rather is aligned with known players in the wider development and humanitarian sectors, drawing funds from a wider base than the church.

In addition, who works for World Vision has changed. Once the staff were predominantly evangelical Christians; now they include people from many denominations and even from other faiths. At present, there is an intentional effort to communicate World Vision values to staff members through the mission statement, core values and vision statement of the organization. These are included in orientation practices for new recruits. However, these efforts seem to be less than fully successful, as staff members describe other priorities as more important than the organization's Christian values.

Finally, with regard to the self as subject, there has been a reported increase in the complexity of processes as the overall operations of World Vision have increased. Originally an American organization, it has since expanded its operations in many different contexts with diverse cultural and religious groups. Much has been done to organize the work of World Vision as well as to manage its decision making. Resources have been invested periodically to structure the organization in light of these changes.

One early initiative in structuring the different offices of World Vision

21 Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 84.

22 World Vision, 'Witness to Jesus Christ Policy', Partnership Policy and Decision Manual (16 September 1995).

was the covenant of partnership. This construct has since been further clarified, with World Vision structured as a federal model, accommodating diversity yet at the same time giving reserve powers to the Global Centre.

This increase in complexity of processes resulted in rational bureaucratization. Policies and systems were drafted for smooth operations of the organization. At the same time, policy documents were drafted to articulate how World Vision understands its Christian faith in different areas of its work, such as inter-faith participation, partnerships with churches, and children's well-being.

Another obvious phenomenon with regard to the processes was the increasingly diverse influence from the external environment, driven by the increasing number of diverse stakeholders. As World Vision spread across different cultures and in different sectors, there were more decision makers within the organization with different agendas. These agendas pull the organization in different ways, depending on the needs and particularities of World Vision in a given time and place. As a result, the organization has evolved differently in various contexts. It can be argued that the organization's Christian identity has been relegated to a supporting role that is not always prioritized.

2. Uncovering tacit Christian identity through study of the organizational culture

Measurements of the organizational culture give further insight into the interaction between the different organizational selves that result in the tacit religious identity.

As we have seen, Christian values were clearly articulated in World Vision's core documents. These values were, however, not forthcoming as resultant values among the staff members at the Nepal and Papua New Guinea offices.

In Nepal, the non-Christian context was identified as the main reason for difficulty in the transmission of Christian values. There was evidence of management activities (such as a deliberate internship program from churches, an appointed spiritual point person for each office location who was responsible for regular devotions, updates, etc.) that tried to foster Christian values. However, these activities did not seem to translate into a deep embrace of Christian values at World Vision Nepal.

In Papua New Guinea, the grant-funded context was considered the primary reason for difficulty in the transmission of Christian values, despite statistical indications that Papua New Guinea is a predominantly Christian country. The organization emphasized the need to focus on the project plans, strict budgets and timelines. Working in such a context, staff members emphasized the clear regulations that viewed religious activities as forbidden.

3. Relationships as key in mediating content and process

In both offices, field staff felt the most distance from senior management. This is noteworthy as senior management has the most links to other parts of the organization. Access by other staff members in a country office to information on the partnership with the central office is often dependent on

senior management. A distant relationship could result in limited access to and therefore diminished influence of partnership information, including the World Vision emphasis on Christian understanding as intended to be part of the daily operations implemented by field staff.

In addition, perceptions between different stakeholders were not necessarily reciprocal. When one stakeholder deemed a relationship as close, the response of the other stakeholder was not always the same. This was particularly true for the senior management team, who reported a closer relationship to staff members than those staff members reported about their relationship with the managers. As a result, actions authored by the senior management team might not be enabled among the staff as readily as they expected.

Most stakeholders indicated that their closest relationships were with other stakeholders in the same category. This could imply that field staff, who formed a majority of employees at each location, are significantly influential in shaping the organizational culture of World Vision, in that a greater frequency of authoring and enabling takes place amongst them.

Finally, external stakeholders were held at a greater distance compared to relationships in the local office. This can be problematic for the transmission of Christian values as these external stakeholders, such as the Global Centre or the Regional Office, are key offices responsible for the reserve powers of World Vision. Reserve powers include decisions that are considered both high-risk and broad in scope. The reserve powers include the need to 'promote the World Vision way', which

is where the content and accountability of Christian identity lie. Given the distant relationship, external stakeholders have little influence in the overall organizational culture in these locations.

It can be concluded that the current state of relationships is not conducive to promoting Christian values. We move now to the normative task involved in practical theological interpretation.

IV. The Normative Task: Appropriating Reformational Philosophy

The normative task involves the direct dialogue of the situation, seen from a particular point of view. It focuses on what 'ought to be going on' with the situation at hand. Osmer outlines the normative task in three different ways: theological interpretation, ethical reflection and deriving norms from good practice.²³

I approached this normative task through the lens of Reformational philosophy, a branch of philosophy that is clearly rooted in the Christian faith. Reformational philosophy stresses that reality is not neutral but always has a starting point. Reformational philosophy takes its starting point from the Christian God, the creator.

This normative practice model has been developed as an alternative to applied ethics, in which ethical principles are applied to ethical dilemmas. The model takes actual practice seriously, recognizing a specific practice as constituted by a constellation of norms. At

23 Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 132–60.

the same time, its normative structure resists the tendency of blindly following popular ethical trends within the social, scientific or economic domains.

The key concepts that underpin the normative model include the concept of practice, whereby the understanding of practices refers to categories of human activity that exist in society, the understanding of meaning in practices as found in structures with different constellation of norms, and finally, the understanding of plurality.²⁴

The normative practice model has three components: structural, directional and contextual. The structural side focuses on the nature of practice as related to the constellation of norms of practice (in World Vision's case, its development practice). The directional, or regulative, side of the practice describes worldview-based ideas of the practitioners that give the actual performance its specific character. Finally, the activity always occurs in a specific context with its specific restrictions and opportunities (i.e. the contextual side).

The analysis of the structural side found clear evidence that the core documents of World Vision were in alignment with the normative structure of the development practice. Operationally, it was also clear that World Vi-

sion's development program approach was in tune with wider development practice. What remained unclear was how together the three pillars of World Vision—development, relief and advocacy—would work together to fulfil the mission of 'human transformation'.

On the directional side, World Vision has evolved in its Christian understanding since its founding. Despite the official preference for Christian staff members, employees stated that the Christian values of the organization were not prioritized in the organizational culture and did not have significant implications for their daily work.

Finally, on the contextual side, World Vision had a clear understanding that beneficiaries influence the work that it carries out. Besides the beneficiaries, the two offices had different influential stakeholders. In Papua New Guinea, donors were considered particularly influential; in Nepal, the local context seemed more influential, with a focus on government relations as well as country statistics. These stakeholders can influence the overall development work done by World Vision in each office.

V. The Pragmatic Task: Appropriating Theology

The pragmatic task consists of forming and enacting strategies of action that influence events in desirable ways. This task involves practical actions that the organization can undertake, drawing on the analysis of both the process and content of the organization. Before I suggest possible action strategies, I first outline the kind of theological approach, namely constructive theology, that I apply here.

²⁴ The understanding of normative practices detailed in this section is based on Henk Jochemsen, 'Normative Practices as an Intermediate Between Theoretical Ethics and Morality', *Philosophia Reformata* 71 (2006): 96–112, and Gerrit Glas, 'Competence Development as Normative Practice: Educational Reform in Medicine as Heuristic Model to Relate Worldview and Education', *Koers: Bulletin for Christian Scholarship* 77, no. 1 (2012): Art. #411, <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/koers.v77i1.411>.

The term 'constructive theology', coined by systematic theologian Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, describes theology as 'an integrative discipline that continuously searches for a coherent, balanced understanding of Christian truth and faith in light of Christian tradition (biblical and historical) and in the context of the historical and contemporary thought, cultures and living faiths'.²⁵

Such an approach is compatible with the context in which a faith-based organization operates because of the key principles involved in this approach. First, it incorporates a non-foundationalist understanding to theology. Theology is envisioned as 'an ongoing conversation between Scripture, tradition, and culture through which the Spirit speaks in order to create a distinctively Christian "world" centred on Jesus Christ in a variety of local settings'.²⁶ This openness is particularly useful for a faith-based organization that is deeply immersed in a public context.

Second, the theological interpretation that ensues is not rigid, but rather coherent and dialogical. It recognizes theology as a second-order discourse that 'describes the grammar or internal logic of first-order language and assesses such language critically'.²⁷

Third, an ecumenical approach is also implied in the appropriation of constructive theology. This is particularly useful because it takes seriously the pluralistic contexts in which faith-based organizations work. As these entities work alongside other kinds of

institutions in the public sphere, the finer points of dogma that differentiate denominations take a back seat, since they are less relevant in a pluralistic context.²⁸ A deliberate ecumenical approach categorizes Christian faith-based organizations as a collective category of organizations in their dialogue with the broader pluralistic society.

Finally, a broad engagement of different theological disciplines, described by Kärkkäinen as integrative, is also deliberately included. The integrative aspect refers to the opportunity to 'utilize the results, insights, and materials of all theological disciplines. This includes fields such as religious studies, ethics and missiology'.²⁹ Together, these different theological disciplines can support each other in forming strategies of action.

I will now present some recommendations, using the framework of the organizational formation model.

1. Strengthening the content of the organization

First, how the Christian faith uniquely influences the development practice that World Vision seeks to express should be more clearly explicated. An intentional reflection of the Christian faith can shed light on the practices and institutions that the particular development practice embodied by World Vision should support. It also clarifies the end goal of the development prac-

25 Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Christ and Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 13.

26 Franke, *The Character of Theology*, 79.

27 Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 169.

28 Barbara Hargrove, *The Sociology of Religion: Classical and Contemporary Approaches*, 2nd ed. (Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson, 1989).

29 Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Trinity and Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 14.

tice, adding further information on the direction of the practice. An intentional discussion of the Christian faith indicates continued value for the organization by providing information that is relevant to current challenges.

As faith-based organizations express the public role of faith in society, it is important for them to give due attention to their faith identity. This involves being deliberate in making decisions that move the organization towards its ultimate goal of practice, which is the bringing to pass of the creator God's intent for the world. This means more than having statements of its Christian faith in its policy documents; in addition, it requires staff members to be involved in robust engagement with the Christian content of the development practice.

a) The Trinity as the main theological motif

To prioritize the Christian faith in an organization, one must first have a clear understanding of what the Christian faith entails. For faith-based organizations working in different contexts, a standard understanding of this Christian faith cannot be assumed. It is therefore recommended that the Trinity be used as the main theological motif to describe the Christian faith to which an organization like World Vision subscribes. The Trinity is both unique to and integral to orthodox Christian faith;³⁰ it also unifies the different streams of Christian tradition.

The doctrine of the Trinity reveals

God as one divine essence manifested in three divine persons.³¹ One way in which this understanding of the Trinity has been further developed has focused on the sending nature of God. In the classic doctrine of the *missio Dei*, God the Father sent the Son, God the Father and the Son sent the Spirit, and all three send the church into the world.³²

The purpose of this sending was to reconcile the world to God. Instead of leaving his people alone, God sought to redeem them to himself. Although faith-based organizations are not traditional churches, these organizations belong to the Christian sector within society and can be counted as part of the broader Christian family sent by God. One primary way in which such organizations are sent into the world is through their role in social justice,³³ which validates the important role of the Christian faith in addressing social issues. This role involves engaging the wider public, developing intentional coherence and working alongside other partners to uphold justice.

b) Flourishing as the goal of social justice

As a common term in the public sphere, *flourishing* can be useful to help faith-based organizations to articulate

³⁰ Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 7th ed. (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1994), 69.

³¹ John S. Feinberg, ed., *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005), 487.

³² David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 390.

³³ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 10. Here I appropriate Bosch's elements of what mission constitutes within the emerging ecumenical paradigm of missions.

their goals of social justice as they seek dialogue and cooperation within the broader society. From a Christian perspective, we can identify three aspects of what flourishing should look like and their implications for justice.

First, flourishing can be understood as reconciliation to God as God actively relates to human creatures.³⁴ In one way, human beings ‘flourish’ because God relates to us creatively—not through our own efforts, but simply because we are created by God. This truth ‘grounds the conviction that humans have dignity that deserves unconditional respect no matter how diminished’. Therefore, ‘The human being and his or her well-being should be the end of all economic, social and political processes.’³⁵

Another way in which human beings flourish is when they glorify God as they relate to him. This includes ways in which they relate to fellow human creatures and to their shared creaturely contexts so as to be loyal to their well-being.

This understanding of flourishing focuses on relationships: first with God, and then with other humans and with the environment. The relationship with God is a response to the *missio Dei*, God’s pursuit of his people. Besides being God the Father who creates,

he is God the Son, Jesus who relates to created human beings and draws them to himself,³⁶ as well as Holy Spirit, the ‘ever-present, life-giving, life-supporting and energizing spirit of God’.³⁷ To consider the relationship of an individual to this God is to consider flourishing as involving spiritual, not just material needs.³⁸ In the same way, social justice must take into account the relationships involved.

Finally, our understanding of flourishing should consider the relationship among the different divine persons in the Trinity. This focus on relationships within God, as described by Kärkkäinen, has been a focus of communion theology, which looks at God as a ‘dynamic living, engaging community of the three’.³⁹ It is a fellowship of persons, categorized by ‘mutual relationality, radical equality and community in diversity’.⁴⁰

Social justice takes seriously, in its understanding of flourishing, what kinds of relationships exist. Just relationships can be modelled on the example of the Trinity.⁴¹ As people are made in the image of God, the Trinity as the ‘divine society’ can provide a ‘pointer toward social life’.⁴²

34 David H. Kelsey, ‘On Human Flourishing: A Theocentric Perspective’, Yale Center for Faith and Culture Resources, accessed 11 February 2016, http://faith.yale.edu/sites/default/files/david_kelsey_-_gods_power_and_human_flourishing_0_0.pdf.

35 Séverine Deneulin, ‘Christianity and International Development,’ in *Handbook of Research on Development and Religion*, ed. Matthew Clarke (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2013), 57.

36 Kelsey, ‘On Human Flourishing’, 3–4.

37 Kärkkäinen, *Trinity and Revelation*, 338.

38 Deneulin, ‘Christianity and International Development’, 58.

39 Kärkkäinen, *Trinity and Revelation*, 320.

40 Kärkkäinen, *Trinity and Revelation*, 321.

41 In making this proposal, I recognize the risk of theological inaccuracy that could result from relating the Trinity to a community’s social program. The divine community is not an equivalent of a worldly society but rather should inspire society.

42 Kärkkäinen, *Trinity and Revelation*, 322–

2. Recommendations related to the organization's processes

The processes of identity formation include 'processes of participation in and performance of embodied, value-producing activity' within the organization.⁴³ The issues raised in the analysis task are the result of the existing authoring performed by leadership and the enabling of the people within the organization. Such acts can be the result of intentional management control, as leaders decide what streams of authoring will be put in place. However, management does not have full control over all the authoring and enabling in the organization. Individual staff members and their perceptions also participate in this process.

The leadership process in an organization involves more than the leader and management control. It involves setting the tone of the organization by establishing its direction, aligning people with this direction and motivating and inspiring the people.⁴⁴ In addition

to the individual leader, the interpretations made by the followers, the goals of the organization and its context are other factors that can influence the overall leadership process.

Taking seriously the different factors in leadership, leadership is understood as a moment, constituted by the 'things of which they are part'.⁴⁵ These different things or pieces are the leader, context, purpose and follower. As a moment, the reality of leadership is dependent on these different pieces and cannot be separated from them.⁴⁶ 'Leaders relate to followers and together they interact within a particular context and move towards an explicit or implicit purpose.'⁴⁷ Figure 1 shows the central role that the leadership moment has on the processes involved in the organization, which is the result of authoring and enabling within the organization.

Leadership Differs from Management (New York: Free Press, 1990).

⁴⁵ Donna Ladkin, *Rethinking Leadership: A New Look at Old Leadership Questions* (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2010), 25.

⁴⁶ Ladkin, *Rethinking Leadership*, 26.

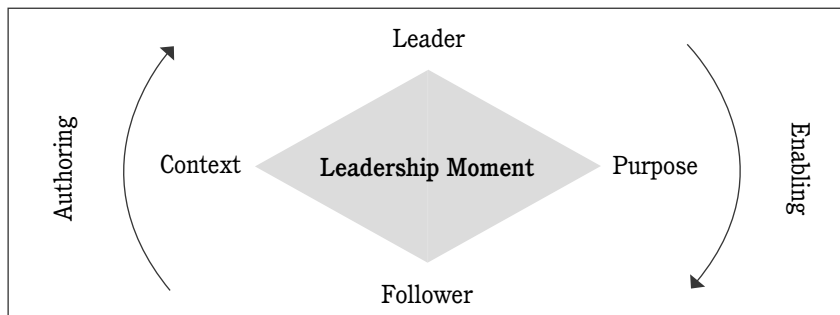
⁴⁷ Ladkin, *Rethinking Leadership*, 27.

23.

⁴³ Carlsen, 'On the Tacit Side', 107–35.

⁴⁴ John P. Kotter, *A Force for Change: How*

Figure 1 Leadership Moment in Organizational Processes



In addition, understanding leadership as a moment acknowledges that leadership is made concrete in the work experiences of staff members in a specific context, as they work for an organization with a specific purpose. The different pieces of the moment are interconnected, such that changing one piece can result in an overall change in the experience.

It is recommended that World Vision and other faith-based organizations appropriate the theology of work as the hermeneutical lens used to review the existing leadership moment for the organization. This theology emphasizes the Christian presuppositions with respect to work, which influence not only the desired outcome of the work but also the understanding of work itself.

Appropriating the theology of work illuminates the gaps and opportunities faced by the organization from a distinctly Christian perspective. Working through these gaps enables the organization to change the processes introduced by management control, as well as to influence the interpretations made by staff members. These steps can influence the processes involved in the organization, thereby strengthening it and countering mission drift.

Following in the tradition of theologians like Miroslav Volf and Darrell Cosden, the purpose of reflecting on the theology of work is transformative and not merely descriptive. Within this tradition, the anticipated new creation undergirds the broad theological framework of work, providing a clear Christian perspective and norms. 'Work is done under the inspiration of the Spirit and in light of the coming

new creation', Volf observes.⁴⁸ Cosden provides this definition:

Transformative activity essentially consisting of dynamically interrelated instrumental, relational and ontological dimensions, whereby along with work being an end in itself, the workers' and others' needs are providentially met, believers' sanctification is occasioned, and workers express, explore and develop their humanness while building up their natural social and cultural environments, thereby contributing protectively and productively to the order of this world and the world to come.⁴⁹

Cosden's definition illustrates the three dimensions of work: instrumental, relational and ontological. The three are equally important in a proper understanding of work.⁵⁰ They are interrelated and none of them should dominate the others. Interpreting the work experience through these multiple dimensions can be useful in determining how management should influence organizational processes.

For example, consider how this lens can support leadership development in the relational dimension. The findings regarding World Vision revealed different degrees of relationships within the organization. Relationships are also the form by which the tacit identity of the organization is mediated. For an

⁴⁸ Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 79.

⁴⁹ Darrell Cosden, *A Theology of Work: Work and the New Creation* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2004), 179.

⁵⁰ Cosden, *A Theology of Work*, 178.

organization to truly express the social justice that it seeks to advance, it should work to foster justice in relationships. This can occur through World Vision's people management activity systems.

A relationship characterized by justice and love recognizes the inherent value of relationships and people. It 'seeks to enhance a person's well-being or flourishing and ... to secure that a person's rights are honoured, that she be treated with due respect for her worth.'⁵¹ This entails looking out for the rights of the other. This is more than a sentiment, but rather a concrete action towards the other's well-being. Such an action seeks to promote what one believes to be that person's good or right.⁵² It is not dependent on the actu-

al success of the concrete action or the plausible benefits of such an action.

Applying this understanding of love to work relationships guides us to consider other people's well-being in the course of completing work tasks. We recognize the importance of caring for others in the workplace as a valid priority. This care is not benevolent and unconditional, but rather an obligation owed to that individual, who is one's 'moral counterpart'. This implies the just treatment of the individual as a way of loving him or her.⁵³ It is about caring for the 'standard of well-being for all parties in a given community'.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice in Love* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 101.

⁵² Wolterstorff, *Justice in Love*, 103.

⁵³ Wolterstorff, *Justice in Love*, 83.

⁵⁴ Bruce C. Birch, Rebekah Miles and Allen Verhey, 'Justice', in Joel B. Green et al., *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011).