AOSIS

A sixfold biblical approach to social transformation in the local community in terms of the ELIJAH model: A challenge for today's church

CrossMark
click for updates

Authors:
Noel Woodbridge[1]
Shaun Joynt[2,3]

Affiliations:
[1]South African Theological Seminary, Bryanston, Sandton, South Africa

[2]Department of Practical Theology, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa

[3]Department of Practical Theology, North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa

Corresponding author:
Shaun Joynt,
shaun@joynt.co.za

Since its inception, the Christian church has been involved in social transformation, especially when it has sided with the poor and the oppressed. Despite losing its focus from time to time, throughout church history, it has mostly managed to adhere to its missional responsibility. Given the increasing poverty, violence and injustices in today's world, more than ever the Christian church is called upon to engage in and continue with its task of being an agent of social transformation. Its calling is to fulfil the biblical imperative to proclaim the kingdom of God and make disciples of all nations, which includes promoting social justice in the local community. The aim of this article is to ground and describe a sixfold biblical approach, which the Church can implement to promote social transformation in the local community in terms of the ELIJAH model, namely, the Equality Approach, the Legislative Approach, the Incarnation Approach, the Justice Approach, the Apportionment Approach and the Holistic Approach.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: The research offers a biblical approach for consideration concerning social transformation and its implementation within the contemporary local congregation, namely, the ELIJAH model, resulting in a practical theological and sociological dialogue.

Keywords: social justice; social transformation; ELIJAH model; church; community; practical theology.

Introduction

Since its inception, the Christian church has been involved in social transformation (De Santa Ana 1981; McNeal 2009:xxiii, xiv; Pillay 2017:1), especially when it has sided with the poor and the oppressed, yet at times, it has lost its focus (Ndukwe 2008:2; Pillay 2017:11). However, throughout church history, it has managed to by and large adhere to its missional responsibility (De Santa Ana 1979; Pillay 2017):

> Today, more than ever, given the increasing poverty, violence and injustices in the world, the Christian church is called upon to embrace, engage and continue with its task of being an agent for transformation and change. It needs to fulfil the gospel imperative of making the world a better place for all to live with justice, peace and harmony. (Pillay 2017:11)

The aim of this article is to describe a sixfold biblical approach, which the local church can implement to promote social transformation in the local community in terms of the *ELIJAH model*, namely, the Equality Approach, the Legislative Approach, the Incarnation Approach, the Justice Approach, the Apportionment Approach and the Holistic Approach.

The ELIJAH model: A Christian perspective
A biblical grounding of the ELIJAH model

As a sixfold biblical approach for helping the local church in promoting social transformation in the local community, the authors propose the ELIJAH model comprising six components, each of which can be scripturally grounded as follows:

- *The Equality Approach* – The following Scriptures show that everyone is equal before God; this implies that the rights of the poor need to be guarded: 'Rich and poor have this in common: The Lord is the Maker of them all' (Pr 22:2, NIV) and 'So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them' (Gn 1:27, NIV).

- *The Legislative Approach* – The last six of the Ten Commandments show that God provides good moral laws to prevent social injustice:

  > And God spoke all these words: 'I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery … Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor'. (Ex 20:1, 12–17, NIV)

- *The Incarnation Approach* – The following biblical passage demonstrates the importance of the Incarnation Approach to social transformation, which promotes radical identification and servant leadership:

  > Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. (Ph 2:5–8, NKJV)

- *The Justice Approach* – The following scriptural passage demonstrates that justice is important to God and that his people should engage in social issues such as poverty and injustice:

  > I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them … Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. But let justice roll down like water and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. (Am 5:21–24, ESV)

- *The Apportionment Approach* – The following Scriptures illustrate the Apportionment Approach meant to eliminate poverty by sharing: 'All the believers were together and had everything in common' (Ac 2:44, NIV) and 'they sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need' (Ac 2:45, NIV).

- *The Holistic Approach* – The following biblical passage demonstrates a holistic approach to social transformation, which integrates evangelism with social action. Speaking of himself, Jesus indicated that his task on earth and by implication the task of the Church is twofold, namely, to preach the Gospel (good news) and to mend broken lives:

  > The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. (Lk 4:18–19, ESV)

The influence of Bellingham's training manual

The authors were influenced by Bellingham's (1987) training manual, entitled *A Biblical Approach to Social Transformation*. It provides an overview of the guidance the Bible gives for engagement in ministries of service and justice and serves as the basic source of the ELIJAH model. In his training manual, Bellingham includes 20 biblical approaches to social transformation from both the Old Testament and the New Testament. The authors have selected six of these approaches and included them in the ELIJAH model. The authors selected the six approaches because they were deemed to constitute the main approaches to social transformation. At the very least, they could be regarded as a representative sample of Bellingham's 20 biblical approaches to social transformation.

The connection between the ELIJAH model and the prophet Elijah

The ELIJAH model is a fitting name for a model that seeks to promote social transformation in the local community because it was during his ministry that Elijah criticised the apostate reigns of Ahab and (later) his son, Ahaziah. His criticism is particularly seen in the matter relating to Naboth's vineyard (1 Ki 21), when Elijah stood for social justice and the rights of small landholders against royal prerogative. Throughout his ministry, Elijah cured the sick, enriched the poor and promoted social justice and welfare. The authors hope that the members of the local church will be able to use the sixfold biblical approach, as portrayed in the ELIJAH model, to promote social transformation in the local community.

The Equality Approach (Guarding the rights of the poor)

Throughout the ages, the Church has been challenged to minister to the poor (De Santa Ana 1979; Pillay 2017:11). This challenge has not disappeared. Currently in South Africa, we as Christians are called upon by God to respond to the cry of the poor (Mathole 2005:4).

The books of Proverbs, Psalms and the Prophets share many themes regarding social justice, with Proverbs focussing more on the dangers of the wealthy (Robinson 2014):

> The wicked or unrighteous have no understanding of the rights of the poor (Pr 29:7). A King who oppresses his people is like a beating rain that leaves no food (Pr 28:3), akin to a natural disaster. This wicked ruler is also called a predator (Pr 28:15). (n.p.)

Washington (1994:142) argues that Proverbs reflects a heightened awareness of the poor in society. More specifically, Robinson (2014) demonstrates how Proverbs provides the simple guideline that everybody is equal before God, irrespective of their social position: 'Rich and poor have this in common; The Lord is the Maker of them all' (Pr 22:2, NIV). This aligns with the Genesis account stating that all of humankind are made in the image of God: 'So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them' (Gn 1:27, NIV). In view of this biblical principle, oppressors and mockers of the poor not only harm the poor but they also insult God: 'Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God' (Pr 14:31, NIV) (Robinson 2014).

In contrast to unrighteous oppressors, Proverbs also describes people who are righteous, as opposed to the unrighteous oppressors (Robinson 2014):

The righteous are concerned with justice, they are generous (Pr 22:9), they know the rights of the poor (Pr 29:7) and how to defend them, they open their hands to the poor and reach out to the needy (Pr 31:20). Rulers are tasked with the mission of speaking out, judging righteously, and defending the rights of the poor and needy (Pr 31:9). (n.p.)

Contemporary Evangelicalism appears to espouse a greater concern for spiritual matters than for the material condition of people (Chester 1993:69, 73). For this reason, one of the most urgent questions that need to be addressed by the Evangelical Church, within a climate of the growing gap between the rich and the poor, is (Harold 2011):

How can the Evangelical become the voice of the poor? The concern for the weak and vulnerable was first and foremost in the mind that produced the words of the wise in Proverbs. (pp. 56–57)

A parallel approach that considers the material and the spiritual simultaneously would address both needs without overemphasising one over the other, thus preventing a 'pendulum effect' of being socially just at the cost of preaching the gospel or being evangelistic at the cost of social justice.

The above point (dual attention to the spiritual and the material) may be illustrated by the following example. Tswelopele Step by Step, founded on 09 March 2003 by Colin and Denise Dredge, then members of Hatfield Christian Church, a Charismatic megachurch in the east of Pretoria, is a non-profit organisation (NPO) that focusses on the homeless. The Dredges had observed homeless people drifting from concentrated city centres to urban residential suburbs and sought to invest themselves in one such community within the area they lived while avoiding 'the pitfall of creating dependence or institutionalising the poor' (Tswelopele Step by Step 2018:1). They learnt from the community, created interventions, tested these, received feedback from the community and repeated the process – thus the 'step by step' approach of Tswelopele was born. By 2009, they became aware of the informal settlement adjacent to *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk* [Dutch Reformed Church – DRC] in Moreleta Park, a megachurch in the east of Pretoria, and moved their street outreach programme to this community.

Prior to their work at this informal settlement known as Woodlane Village or Plastic View, they (Tswelopele Step by Step 2018) assisted:

- in relocating the terminally ill back to their families or into hospices so that they could die with dignity
- people wherever possible to apply for South African ID documents
- the elderly in applying for Older Persons' Grants and wherever possible reuniting them with their families
- the elderly who could or would not go back to their families with placement into old age homes
- with arranging the placement of children at risk by means of social workers
- linking people to employment and/or training opportunities

- teaching life skills classes, basic literacy, English, Afrikaans, food garden development, hand crafts and Bible studies (the Dredges had started with life skills and the rest of the classes were requested by the people themselves)
- in ongoing advocacy on behalf of the street and veld [field] dwellers in their area.

Tswelopele Step by Step serves as one example of how both individuals and the local church can be involved in guarding the rights of the poor, namely, the Equality Approach of the ELIJAH model.

The Legislative Approach (advocating good moral laws to prevent social injustice)

'The maintenance of social justice within a society depends largely on the fairness and strength of its legal system' (Markl 2011:n.p.). One of the chief causes of poverty and social injustice in today's world is corruption, which is a violation of the legal and moral framework of a society (Markl 2011).

Regarding the biblical legal system, God himself is the supreme example of a just judge (Ps 9:5). Numerous psalms praise him as such: 'He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord' (Ps 33:5). 'Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains; your judgments are like the great deep' (Ps 36:6). 'He will make your vindication shine like the light, and the justice of your cause like the noonday' (Ps 37:6) (Markl 2011).

The body of Ten Commandments is the heart of the Old Testament law. God revealed these laws to Moses after he had brought the Israelites out of Egypt and before they entered the Promised Land. The first instruction in the Ten Commandments can be summarised as follows: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength' (Dt 6:51). The last six laws in the Ten Commandments define the meaning of these moral and social laws. They remain relevant for today because they deal with the following key areas of conduct (Bellingham 1987):

- Obligations to parents – honour father and mother
- Value of life – no murder
- Sanctity of marriage – no adultery
- Rights of private property – no stealing
- False testimony – no lying
- Undisciplined desire – no coveting. (p. 142)

The Church has a moral duty to use its voice to influence the legislative process. For example (Dobson 2010):

Legislation to criminalize the buyers of sex services could be another useful tool in the fight against human trafficking, and the Church can and should lobby government for the enactment of such legislation, which has proven to be extremely effective in Sweden. (n.p.)

In his study, Singh (2016:vi) found that in post-apartheid South Africa, the Evangelical Church seems to have found its voice in relation to 'legislation pertaining to sexual and

moral ethics, such as abortion, homosexuality and corruption'. Regarding the advocacy work of Evangelical organisations, Singh (2016:83) found the evangelical community to be 'robust and determined in its engagement with social, legal and theological debates related to the Sexual Offences Act of 2007'.

However, within the South African context, Kuperus (2011) observed a diminished legal advocacy by the church in general since the de-legislation of apartheid. Kuperus (2011) considers four main role-players in the post-apartheid dispensation, namely, the DRC, the South African Council of Churches (SACC), Rhema (a Charismatic megachurch located in Johannesburg) and the Zionist Christian Church (ZCC) representing the African Independent Churches (AICs). She contends that the DRC no longer has the political platform or the credibility to speak out on sociopolitical issues (Kuperus 2011:286), that the SACC has diminished political influence as a religious actor concerning the African National Congress government (Kuperus 2011:295), that Rhema's 'ability to actually nurture democracy is limited' because of its 'largely white and middle-class' composition (Kuperus 2011:298) and that AICs have maintained their 'apolitical' stance concerning the government, namely, remaining nationally aloof, although 'many scholars have argued that the strength of the ZCC (and other AICs) is its influence on society "from below"' (Kuperus 2011:300–301). Kuperus (2011:305) recommends that these churches and religious bodies should continue with (1) 'maintaining a critical, independent voice vis-à-vis the government', (2) 'developing sound principles of political engagement', (3) 'building ecumenical bridges in public affairs discourse' and (4) 'affirming the public role of theology'.

Christian churches clearly have a critical role to play in the legislation process in South Africa during the 21st century, especially pertaining to sexual and moral ethics, such as abortion, homosexuality and corruption. The authors therefore recommend that Kuperus' four broad aims relating to the role of the church and religious bodies in legal advocacy should be implemented by means of, among others, publishing editorials in newspapers, petitions, engaging in media debates and more.

The Incarnation approach (radical identification)

For Jesus, the Son of God, the incarnation meant stepping down to experience human life. What did Jesus relinquish? The biblical evidence gives a clear picture:

- *At his birth*. 'And they found Mary and Joseph, and the *babe* [Jesus] lying in a manger' (Lk 2:16).
- *In his ministry*. 'The foxes have holes and the birds of the air their nests, but the son of Man has nowhere to lay his head' (Mt 8:20).
- *At his death*. 'They stripped Him and planted a crown of thorns on His head and mocked Him' (Mt 27:28–29) and 'They led Him to a place called Golgotha and crucified Him' (Mt 27:33).

- *Paul's account of his humiliation.* 'Though He was rich yet for your sakes He became poor' (2 Cor 8:9):

> Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. Moreover, being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Ph 2:5–8)

Christians today cannot do what Jesus did in terms of incarnation, but they are called upon to reflect his attitudes and priorities. Moreau, Corwin and McGee (2004) describe incarnational mission as follows:

> Just as Christ was incarnated as a person, so missionaries … need to incarnate themselves into a new context. They cannot become newborns, but they can learn the language and culture of their new context in such a way that they can behave like one who was born in that context. (p. 12)

The incarnation demonstrates God's great commitment to all of humanity, to live among us and to die on our behalf. But Jesus' very humanity means that God, ironically, has shown us by his own example how to be human. Our faith in Jesus includes a calling to be Christ-like, 'to walk just as He walked' (1 Jn 2:6). This implies, among other things, a similar commitment to be with people, to be present, available to be used by God (O'Callaghan 2009).

Basing his view on John 20:21, John Stott (cited by Chester 1993:73) suggests that 'the pattern for mission laid down by Jesus is one of service and incarnation', seeing both evangelism and social action as 'authentic expressions of the love that serves'. Social action is therefore incarnational, because it is the consequence of evangelism (an active response to the Word/the Gospel). James confirms that the Word becomes 'alive' through works (Ja 2:15–16). For James, any faith without works is dead (Ja 2:17).

The example of Jesus fundamentally calls upon Christians to become missional-incarnational agents of healing and restoration, bringing light where there is darkness, life where there is death, meaning where all meaning is lost and hope where there is no hope (Campbell 2005:183). It is often in the context of loss, brokenness, crisis and disorientation that the need for alternative narratives is born and in which we can make a radical missional and restorative impact in the world for the Gospel is in essence, a message of healing, restoration and reconciliation (Mt 10; Lk 7:22; see also Jn 12:40; Jr 6:10; see also Kok 2008:108–109).

The organisation Diversity Dialogues, started in 2016 by Vera Marbach and based in South Africa, provides an 'opportunity for people to use the incarnational approach if they step into someone else's voice' (Marbach 2018:pers. comm.). Marbach (2018:pers. comm.) states that:

> A Diversity Dialogue is not about solving all the problems South Africa experiences. It is not a quick fix. It is about connecting

more deeply with each other as the body of Christ, really listening to each other and sharing of ourselves on a deeper level than what we do in our regular conversations, which often tend to be more superficial. As believers, we think it would be wonderful if the church could play a role in improving racial relationships and understanding and addressing the hidden toxicity that often underlies our interactions. Loving our neighbour starts with listening to and understanding our neighbour better and we see these dialogues as an opportunity to do so.

The process involves a number of steps over a four hour period, namely: (1) an introduction; (2) agreements and tips for participation; (3) choosing and voting for a topic; (4) dreaming about what South Africa would be like if that topic was not an issue; (5) establishing voices or points of view that will serve as starting points to the dialogue; (6) the actual dialogue; (7) a time of harvesting insights [that have been] gained or ways [participants] have changed during the process; (8) actions and accountabilities – how [participants] take this new understanding [they] have gained into [their] own space in a practical way; and (9) a closing ceremony (Marbach 2018:pers. comm.).

The organisation Diversity Dialogues serves as one example of how both individuals and the local church can be involved in radical identification, albeit merely starting with identifying with the voice of the other, namely, the Incarnational Approach of the ELIJAH model. It is this incarnational identification with the voice of the other that may prove to be a useful start in a local congregation's attempts at social transformation within the very community it serves.

The Justice Approach (engaging in social issues of poverty and injustice)

After more than 20 years of democracy, 'South Africa is still battling with issues of poverty, inequality, unemployment and hunger' (Statistics South Africa 2013:22). The latest 2014 Ipsos poll research study, 'Pulse of the People', reflects this dire situation. In the Ipsos polls from 19 September to 24 October 2014, 3608 randomly selected adult South Africans were interviewed in their homes in their home language. They were asked: 'What are the most important issues or problems facing this country that the new government, elected in 2014, should address?' It should be noted that this was an open-ended question, and hence, the respondents were free to mention any problem or issue spontaneously. After the interviews had been completed, the results were coded into categories. The issue of 'unemployment/job creation/too few jobs' was the top priority for almost nine out of every ten South African adults (87%). Other key challenges facing the South African government identified by the respondents were poverty (59%) and crime (57%) (Ipsos 2015).

The above-mentioned issues are a challenge to the Christian church to provide social services to disadvantaged communities. On an international level, historically, churches have always played a key role in service delivery to the poor, the sick and the needy (Lidzén 2008:1–7). In Africa, the family has always been regarded as the primary caregiver. When Christianity came to the continent, this changed. Lidzén (2008:1) explains that 'the church adopted the role of a "surrogate family" and worked in close partnership with governments of the countries'.

The Pentateuch prescribes unconditional justice in the court: 'You shall not render an unjust judgment' (Lv 19:15); 'You shall have one law for the alien and for the citizen: for I am the Lord your God' (Lv 24:22). The Bible has much to say on the topic of injustice. God is clearly in favour of justice and against injustice. Proverbs 20:23 (NIV) states: 'The Lord detests differing weights, and dishonest scales do not please him'. Throughout the Scripture, there are many verses that reveal God's distaste for injustice (2 Chr 19:7; Job 6:29; 11:14; Pr 16:8; Ezk 18:24; Rm 9:14).

God chose Israel to be his special nation. As such, he had special expectations of them. As God is holy, just, faithful and merciful (Is 6:3; Dt 7:9; 1 Jn 1:9), he expected his people to be holy, just, faithful and merciful (1 Pt 1:15–16; Lk 6:36; 1 Cor 4:1–2). However, the prophet Micah states that there are no righteous people, and there is no justice in the land (Mi 7:2). The judges accept bribes (Mi 7:3), the rulers oppress the poor (Mi 3:1–3), the prophets lead the people astray (Mi 3:5) and the priests are easily bought (Mi 3:11).

The prophets lash out unrelentingly against unjust laws and judges:

> Ah, you who make iniquitous decrees, who write oppressive statutes, to turn aside the needy from justice and to rob the poor of my people of their right, that widows may be your spoil, and that you may make the orphans your prey! (Is 10:1f)

> Ah, you that turn justice to wormwood, and bring righteousness to the ground! … Hate evil and love good and establish justice in the gate (Am 5:7, 15) (Markl 2011).

The prophet Amos calls for 'justice to roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream' (Am 5:24, NIV). Micah's message was like that of Amos, because both called upon Israel and Judah to repent. Micah threatened them of 'coming judgmsent if they refused to heed God's merciful warnings' (Andrews 2018). 'Micah speaks as though he is attending a court case where God is the plaintiff, the prosecutor and the judge, and Israel is the defendant' (Yilpet 2006:1055). 'Micah told them exactly what God wanted them to do' (Wiersbe 2006:1459):

> He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.
> And what does the Lord require of you?
> To act justly and to love mercy
> and to walk humbly with your God. (Mi 6:8, NIV)

Taking its name from the above passage, the *Micah Challenge* is a 'global movement of Christian agencies, churches, groups and individuals that aims to encourage people to

engage more with the global issues of poverty and injustice'. It has the following two aims (Micah Challenge 2018), namely, to motivate 'Christians from all backgrounds to show God's kindness and justice and to speak out against the injustice of poverty' and to equip 'Christians to campaign and urge decision makers to fulfill their promise to achieve the Millennium Development Goals on global poverty by 2015'.

In 2005, the Micah Network created a strategic partnership with the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) to form a global campaign to activate Christians against poverty (Micah Network 2019:About Micah Challenge), while in 2007 Micah Challenge South Africa mobilised in four key regions:

> One event took place in an informal settlement where access to clean drinking water, unemployment and hunger as issues pertinent to the community were discussed. Follow up steps are being taken to tackle some of the commitments made by local council. Another event at a local clinic used \'Stand up'\ to draw attention to the lack of effective delivery regarding Voluntary Treatment and counselling services to the community. The campaign is keen to continue with these active citizenship activities. (World Evangelical Alliance 2007: Micah Challenge Update)

Engaging in social issues of poverty and injustice, namely, the Justice Approach of the ELIJAH model, is exemplified by organisations that have been described in two sections of this article: Tswelopele Step by Step (in the Equality Approach section) and the James 1:27 Trust (in the Apportionment Approach section).

The Apportionment Approach (eliminating poverty by sharing)

Many scholars have made perceptive comments concerning sharing in the scriptures. Costas (1979) summarises the New Testament position as:

> The stress on poverty in the life and ministry of Jesus coincides with the social teaching of the Old Testament, where the poor occupy a privileged place, and with the poverty program of the early church … with the special attention given to widows; with the concern for the poor of Jerusalem reflected in Paul's collection … James' stern denunciation for the oppression of the poor by the rich in the church … Luke stating: 'Blessed are you poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God'. (p. 77)

Acts 2 describes the final goal of the church in the process of eliminating poverty – 'no needy persons among us'. How did the early church achieve this? 'They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer' (Ac 2:42, NIV) and:

> Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. (Ac 2:46–47, NIV)

It can be argued that the *everyday togetherness* of the church was not superficial. It was a daily commitment of a shared faith. It was in the context of being in *everyday togetherness* that 'they sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need' (Ac 2:45, NIV), 'the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved' (Ac 2:47, NIV) and they eradicated poverty, 'All the believers were together and had everything in common' (Ac 2:44, NIV). Hence, there was no needy person among them.

What are signs of Christian answers to poverty today? What structures and actions have the potential to be signs of a new way of living? Is the goal of 'no needy person among us' a priority in the church? What proofs do Christians offer of changed beliefs and values?

A contemporary example of the church being involved in eliminating poverty by sharing is seen in the ministry of the James 1:27 Trust, founded by Robert Botha on 11 October 2004 and based on the scripture:

> [*P*]ure and lasting religion in the sight of God our Father means that we must care for widows and orphans in their troubles and refuse to let the world corrupt us' (Ja 1:27, NLT). (James 1:27 Trust 2018a:2)

Their vision is 'a crowdfunding service to connect caring organisations with potential donors and the development of world-class software and systems to strengthen the reach and effectiveness of their care' (James 1:27 Trust 2018b). They have three focus areas: James Care, James Social Market and James Agency Services. Through *James Care*, they provide direct holistic care to 20 children and youth and support organisations managing Orphan Child and Vulnerable Youth care through their online care management platform (James 1:27 Trust 2018a:6). Through *James Social Market*, they provide 'a fundraising channel for the holistic care of orphans, vulnerable children and youth, as well as other community care services' (James 1:27 Trust 2018a:6). Through *James Agency Services*, they provide 'financial, technical and other professional services to organisations managing care' (James 1:27 Trust 2018a:6). The James 1:27 Trust values of Christ-centredness, relationality, creativity, integrity, commitment and care drive their social justice focus and actions (James 1:27 Trust 2018c), while their 'dream is a society that cares for every person' (James 1:27 Trust 2018d), which they achieve through agency services, engaging with donors and care management.

Of particular interest is their idea of social insurance as (James 1:27 Trust 2018e):

> … [*A*] mechanism for channeling resources from resourced sectors of society to fund social development in areas of greater poverty. Social insurance is a means for individuals to mitigate against the risk of social upheaval and in so doing promote personal interests. (p. 10)

Their substantiation for this specific approach of social insurance is that (James 1:27 Trust 2018f):

> South Africa remains at risk and we need a bold vision to rethink the issue of capital and the inequality gap within the country. We see the kingdom of God being located in this gap between the resourced and the poor. And we see ourselves as a servant of

Christ in which we shift capital (social, human, financial, spiritual, etc.) from the resourced to the poor in order to address this. South Africa is standing at a critical juncture. We need to invest in mechanisms that address the imbalances in our society and respect the dignity and rights of all our citizens. South Africa's inequality may not simply be a problem but an opportunity, and one which could be addressed through innovation, social entrepreneurship and enterprise development. It requires collective action. It will, nevertheless, remain a dream without the necessary support to develop and build these systems. (n.p.)

By presenting social insurance to companies as an option to implement within their social transformation programmes and redress inequalities of the past, the James 1:27 Trust hopes to mitigate possible social unrest because of past social injustice.

Pieterse (2014:3) offers a statement constantly repeated by the participants in his survey of people living in poor communities in South Africa, namely, that 'when people reach out to the poor with help and assistance, they usually ascribe it in our society as coming from God'. The church has been tasked with both the privilege and responsibility of caring for the poor and in doing so shines its light before others, allowing them to see its good deeds and subsequently glorify God (Ma 5:16, NIV). In this way, the local church promotes the Apportionment Approach of the ELIJAH model, through its sharing and caring ministry to the poor.

The Holistic Approach (integrating evangelism with social action)

This approach is based on several statements that seek to explain the relationship between evangelism and social action. They are taken in historical order to help identify emerging convictions on this topic, although the statements come from different groups, contexts and theological traditions.

Tony Payne's (2008) six propositions on the biblical relationship between evangelism and social action are as follows:

- Evangelism and social action are distinct activities.
- Prayerful proclamation is central to the work of the Lord.
- Evangelism and social action are inseparable.
- Social action is unconditional love, not a tactic.
- Social action is not a magic evangelistic bullet.
- The Great Commission is to make and to teach.

It can be argued from Payne's six propositions that evangelism and social action should be regarded as equals, because if Christians served in social ministry, others would see their sacrificial service and hence respond to the gospel. In this regard, Walters (2019:1) indicates that it was during and after the Great Awakening that many great evangelical leaders pursued social concerns alongside the proclamation of the gospel. 'Men like Spurgeon, Wesley, Whitefield, and their contemporaries were actively involved in social ministry' (Walters 2019:1). However, as a result of debates between fundamentalists and modernists during the late 19th century, division arose among Christians over the relationship between evangelism and social ministry. McGavran reacted strongly against efforts to elevate social action over the proclamation of the gospel. He firmly believed that while social ministries are an important part of church ministry, 'the Great Commission demands a focus on proclamation of the gospel, even in the face of social problems and injustices' (Walters 2019:1, 12).

Sponsored by the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization and the World Evangelical Fellowship, the Evangelism and Social Responsibility Report (Evangelism and Social Responsibility Report 1982) was written during the International Consultation on the Relationship between Evangelism and Social Responsibility, held at Grand Rapids, Michigan, June 19–25, 1982. The members involved in the consultation, the Drafting Committee, drafted the report. Rev. John Stott, the chairman of the Committee, was responsible for the final editing. The Evangelism and Social Responsibility Report (Evangelism and Social Responsibility Report 1982) states that there is not only one relationship linking evangelism and social responsibility but three kinds of relationships:

- Firstly, *social activity is a consequence of evangelism*. That is, evangelism is the means by which God brings people to new birth, and their new life manifests itself in the service of others. Paul wrote that 'faith works through love' (Gl 5:6); James wrote that 'I will show you my faith by my works' (Ja 2:10). (p. 16)
- Secondly, *social activity can be a bridge to evangelism*. It can break down prejudice and suspicion, open closed doors, and gain a hearing for the Gospel. Jesus Himself *sometimes performed works of mercy before* proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom. (p. 17)
- Thirdly, *social activity … accompanies it [evangelism] as its partner*. They are like the two blades of a pair of scissors or the two wings of a bird. This partnership is clearly seen in the public ministry of Jesus, who not only preached the Gospel, but fed the hungry and healed the sick. In his ministry, *kerygma* (proclamation) and *diakonia* (service) went hand in hand. His words explained His works, and His works dramatized his words. (pp. 17–18)

Padilla (1984:19–20) in *The Mission of the Church in the Light of the Kingdom of God* sees the kingdom of God as not only including but integrating both evangelism and social responsibility. He concludes (Padilla 1984):

- Both evangelism and social responsibility can only be understood in the light of the fact that in Jesus Christ the Kingdom of God has invaded History and is now both a present reality and a future hope, an 'already' and a 'not yet' … Accordingly, [it is] … God's redemptive power released in history bringing good news to the poor, freedom for the prisoners, sight for the blind, and liberation for the oppressed. (p. 19)
- Evangelism and social responsibility are inseparable. The Gospel is good news concerning the Kingdom of God.

Good works are, on the other hand, the signs of the Kingdom, for which we were created in Christ Jesus. Both word and deed are inextricably united in the mission of Jesus and His apostles, and both must continue to be held together in the mission of the church in which Jesus' mission is prolonged, until the end of the age. (p. 19)

- According to God's will, the church is called to manifest the Kingdom of God here and now in what she is as well as in what she proclaims. Because the Kingdom of God has already come and is yet to come, 'between the times' the church is both an eschatological and a historical reality. If she does not fully manifest the Kingdom, that is not because God's dynamic reign has invaded the present age 'without authority or the power of transforming it into the age to come, but because the consummation has not yet arrived'. (pp. 19–20)

- Because of His death and resurrection, Jesus Christ has been enthroned as Lord of the universe. The whole world, therefore, has been placed under His lordship. The Church anticipates the destiny of all mankind. Between the times, therefore, the church – the community which confesses Jesus Christ as Lord and through Him acknowledges God as 'both the Creator and the Judge of all men'. (p. 20)

Bellingham (1987) presents the following case study to illustrate this point:

> There is a tribal area in Andhra Pradesh in India, where people were poor, cultivation and hunting their main occupation. They were also addicted to liquor. When the Gospel began to penetrate their villages, apart from changing their lives, it changed their whole life style and their standard of living improved considerably. Apart from basic medical help and teaching from the Bible, they received no other aid. A few years later amazingly the tribal Christians were dressed in lovely clothes and participated in a convention in a disciplined manner in sharp contrast to non-Christian tribal people all around. How did transformation of their social conditions take place without any material aid being given? When these people believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, they allowed God not only to transform their lives, but also their families and environment. This example indicates that Jesus Christ not only transforms one's life, but also one's social and economic conditions, if one is obedient to Him. (p. 358)

Another example of integrated evangelism and social action, namely, the Holistic Approach of the ELIJAH model, is observed through the DRC's study on services offered at the congregational level. Three areas of services were focussed upon: (1) poverty alleviation and reduction, (2) unemployment and (3) addressing social injustice (Van der Westhuizen & Swart 2015:743). Congregations focussed on the following: food (parcels and feeding schemes), clothing (including blankets), housing (a very small percentage were able to provide this), networks and education related to sourcing and securing employment (developing skills and a self-help attitude), emergency relief (payment of rent or electricity) and 'social injustices were addressed by congregations through awareness programmes, mobilisation of communities and encouragement of active citizenship' (Van der Westhuizen &

Swart 2015:743–746). Both successes and challenges were experienced in these areas, and the authors of the study recommend that (1) congregations represent the 'voices' of the people (both congregation and community), (2) the focus of services on needs at the grassroots level address social injustices and (3) congregations strive to assist members to become active citizens (Van der Westhuizen & Swart 2015:748–751).

Conclusion

In this article, the authors have grounded and presented a sixfold biblical approach for helping the Church today to promote social transformation in the local community, in terms the ELIJAH model, which consists of the following components:

- The *E*quality Approach: Guarding the rights of the poor
- The *L*egislative Approach: Making good moral laws to prevent social injustice
- The *I*ncarnation Approach: Radical identification
- The *J*ustice Approach: Engaging in social issues of poverty and injustice
- The *A*pportionment Approach: Eliminating poverty by sharing
- The *H*olistic Approach: Integrating evangelism with social action

It is the hope of the authors that members of the local church will be able to use the sixfold biblical approach, as portrayed in the ELIJAH model, to promote social transformation in the local community.

Acknowledgements

Data availability statement

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

References

Andrews, M., 2018, 'Who is Micah?', viewed 06 August 2018, from https://mesuandrews.com/who-is-micah/.

Bellingham, G.R., 1987, 'A biblical approach to social transformation', D. Min PhD thesis, Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, viewed 12 July 2018, from http://www.urbanleaders.org/500Writings/000readings/Bellingham/Bellingham%20Social%20Transformationbmaster.pdf.

Campbell, J., 2005, *The way of Jesus: A journey of freedom for pilgrims and wanderers*, Jossey Bass, San Francisco, CA.

Chester, T., 1993, *Awakening to a world of need: The recovery of evangelical social concern*, Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester.

Costas, O.E., 1979, *The integrity of mission: The inner life and outreach of the church,* Harper & Row, San Francisco, CA.

De Santa Ana, J., 1979, *Good news to the poor: The challenge of the poor in the history of the church*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY.

De Santa Ana, J., 1981, *Towards a Church of the poor: The work of an ecumenical group on the church and the poor,* Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY.

Dobson, G., 2010, *South Africa and 2010: The church's role in countering human trafficking for sexual exploitation*, viewed 11 August 2018, from http://www.lausanneworldpulse.com/themedarticles-php/1225/01-2010.

Evangelism and Social Responsibility Report, 1982, *Evangelism and social responsibility: An evangelical commitment (LOP 21)*, A report by the International Consultation on the Relationship between Evangelism and Social Responsibility, Grand Rapids, MI, viewed 11 August 2018, from https://www.lausanne.org/content/lop/lop-21.

Harold, G., 2011, 'A sociological interpretation of Proverbs: The wisdom of care and social responsibility. A challenge to the Evangelical Church', *South African Baptist Journal of Theology* 20, 52–59.

Ipsos, 2015, *The 'People's Agenda' puts job creation as priority*, viewed 11 August 2018, from http://pressoffice.mg.co.za/ipsos/PressRelease.php?StoryID=256099.

James 1:27 Trust, 2018a, *James 1:27 trust introduction*, viewed 15 December 2018, from https://www.james127trust.org/globalassets/document-library/background-documents/j127t_introduction.pdf.

James 1:27 Trust, 2018b, *A vision to multiply care*, viewed 15 December 2018, from https://www.james127trust.org/our-story/.

James 1:27 Trust, 2018c, *Governance*, viewed 15 December 2018, from https://www.james127trust.org/our-story/governance/.

James 1:27 Trust, 2018d, *Our dream is a society that cares for every person*, viewed 15 December 2018, from https://www.james127trust.org/what-we-do/.

James 1:27 Trust, 2018e, *Library*, viewed 15 December 2018, from https://www.james127trust.org/globalassets/document-library/background-documents/03-james-127-trust-services-profile.pdf.

James 1:27 Trust, 2018f, *Library*, viewed 15 December, from https://www.james127trust.org/globalassets/document-library/background-documents/01-summary-j127t-dream.pdf.

Kok, J., 2008, 'Siekte en gebrokenheid teenoor genesing en restourasie in Johannes (Afrikaans)', PhD thesis, University of Pretoria, viewed 06 November 2018, from https://repository.up.ac.za/handle/2263/29292.

Kuperus, T., 2011, 'The political role and democratic contribution of churches in post-apartheid South Africa', *Journal of Church and State* 53(2), 278–306, viewed 18 December 2018, from www.jstor.org/stable/24708172.

Lidzén, L., 2008, *A comparative study of the social welfare provided by three Christian churches in Accra, Ghana*, Institutionen för humaniora och samhällsvetenskap, Högskolon I Grave.

Marbach, V., 2018, *Diversity dialogue information*, personal communication via email received 18 December 2018.

Markl, D.S.J., 2011, *Social justice in the bible*, viewed 06 November 2018, from www.thinkingfaith.org/articles/20111014_1.htm

Mathole, E.M.K., 2005, 'The Christian witness in the context of poverty with special reference to the South African charismatic evangelicals', PhD thesis, University of Pretoria, viewed 11 August 2018, from https://repository.up.ac.za/handle/2263/28371.

McNeal, R., 2009, *Missional renaissance: Changing the scorecard for the church*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA.

Micah Challenge, 2018, *How do Christians respond to the challenge of world poverty and injustice?*, viewed 08 December 2018, from https://request.org.uk/issues/global-issues/micah-challenge/

Micah Network, 2019, *About Micah Challenge*, viewed 21 January 2019, from https://www.micahnetwork.org/about-micah-challenge.

Moreau, A.S., Corwin, G.R. & McGee, G.B., 2004, *Introducing world missions: A biblical, historical, and practical survey*, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI.

Ndukwe, O., 2008, 'Christian faith and social transformation: John Howard Yoder's social ethics as lens for revisioning the ecclesiological identity of the South Central Synod (SCS) of the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria (The PCN)', PhD thesis, Stellenbosch University, viewed 29 December 2018, from http://scholar.sun.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10019.1/1361/ndukwe_christian_2008.pdf.

O'Callaghan, R., 2009, *What do we mean by 'Incarnational Methodology'?*, viewed 06 November 2018, from https://wordmadeflesh.org/incarnational/.

Padilla, C.R., 1984, *The mission of the Church in light of the Kingdom of God*, viewed 07 August 2018, from https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/026537888400100206.

Payne, T., 2008, *Of coffee, gospel and social action*, viewed 21 January 2019, from https://matthiasmedia.com/briefing/2008/05/of-coffee-gospel-and-social-action/.

Pillay, J., 2017, The church as a transformation and change agent, *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 73(3), 1–12, viewed 07 August 2018, from https://hts.org.za/index.php/hts/article/view/4352/9470; https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v73i3.4352.

Robinson, R., 2014, *Justice in Proverbs*, viewed 07 August 2018, from https://anabaptistredux.com/justice-in-proverbs/.

Singh, N., 2016, 'Evangelical Christian Advocacy in post-Apartheid South Africa: The case study of the decriminalization of the child sex provisions of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offenses and Related Matters) Amendment Act', Master's dissertation, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.

Statistics South Africa, 2013, *Millennium development goals – Country report 2013: The South Africa I know, the home I understand*, Statistics South Africa, Pretoria, viewed 06 November 2018, from www.statssa.gov.za/MDG/MDGR_2013.pdf.

Tswelopele Step by Step, 2018, *Poverty alleviation, advocacy & community development*, personal communication via email received 18 December 2018.

Van der Westhuizen, M. & Swart, I., 2015, 'The struggle against poverty, unemployment and social injustice in present-day South Africa: Exploring the involvement of the Dutch Reformed Church at congregational level', *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 1(2), 731–759. https://doi.org/10.17570/stj.2015.v1n2.a35

Walters, J.K., 2019, 'Calling from death to life: Donald McGavran and the relationship of Evangelism and Social Ministry', viewed 12 April 2019, from https://www.mabts.edu/sites/all/themes/midamerica/uploads/Walters%20article%20McGavran.pdf.

Washington, H.C., 1994, *Wealth and poverty in instruction of Amenemope and the Hebrew Proverbs*, Scholarly Press, Atlanta, GA.

Wiersbe, W.W., 2007, *The Wiersbe Bible commentary: The complete Old Testament in one volume*, David C. Cook, Colorado Springs, CO.

World Evangelical Alliance, 2007, *Micah Challenge Update*, viewed 21 January 2019, from https://www.worldea.org/news/1574/Micah-Challenge-Update-December-2007.

Yilpet, Y., 2006, 'Micah', in T. Adeyemo (ed.), *Africa Bible commentary*, pp. 1049–1058, WordAlive Publishers, Nairobi, Kenya.