

## Evangelicals and Social Justice: Towards an Alternative Evangelical Community

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### Abstract

The God of the Bible is unquestionably a God of justice and compassion. Christians have differences as to how human government and the church should bring about a just social order. Evangelicalism, amongst the many religious voices in South Africa, advocate separation between Church and State. Many Evangelicals understand the social engagement of ‘doing justice’ as inextricably linked to the loss of sound doctrine, spiritual dynamism, and a watering-down of the Gospel. Therefore, within Evangelicalism, right doctrine takes precedence over right action. This focus created a dysfunctional understanding of the world and how one engages it. De Gruchy (1986:33) protested the church's complicity with the apartheid government. What could have led most Evangelical churches to turn a blind eye to the murder and dehumanisation of the masses in South Africa (emphasis mine)? He concludes that it because of unbiblical privatisation of piety, which separated prayer and the struggle for justice. Evangelicalism had become dangerously individualistic and ‘otherworldly’ spiritual.

This article is an attempt to call Evangelicals in South not to abandon their prophetic mandate, and a call to creative action for

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an ascetic/privatised spirituality. Therefore, encouraging Evangelicals in South Africa to act against systems that assault or dehumanise the *Imago Dei* in a pluralistic and democratic South Africa, by becoming an alternative community. Using B.S. McNeil's work 'Road Map to Reconciliation', recommendation will be made to help the Evangelicals to become an Alternative community.

## 1. Introduction

In 1994, South Africa emerged from a State of legislated racial separateness known as Apartheid into a democratic State, when the African National Congress was elected to power by the majority. During the apartheid era, the Evangelical Church adopted this system either explicitly or implicitly by adopting a 'policy of no comment'. While there were personal members who supported political parties, there was no collective voice against the dehumanisation of the masses. What led the Evangelical church to adopt this policy of no comment or non-engagement in the socio-political realities of South Africa?

However, there were some sporadic voices from within the church, namely: Allan Boesak, Bishop Desmond Tutu, Beyers Naudé, and David Bosch (all from the Reformed Tradition) that opposed this heretical system and called for an alternative community. The alternative community had to confront this oppressive system that dehumanised the majority. The alternative community, more so for Bosch (1982), had to be confrontational and liberative and not recuse itself from personal piety, but to embrace gospel performance. This type of movement had to be revolutionary in its engagement, but not violent. However, Pillay (2015) states 'in South Africa under apartheid the human community was separated and destroyed by racial and economic oppression. The task of the church is to rebuild this human community. Some 20 years after the establishment of a democratic South Africa it is questionable whether we are succeeding in the endeavour of building such a community'. This paper seeks to address this issue by suggesting that the Church must see itself as an alternative community to address through prophetic utterance and creative action and challenge issues that impinge upon the *Imago Dei* and dignity of being human in this present dispensation.

The *Cambridge Dictionary* defines alternative 'as something that is different from something else, especially from what is usual' and community as 'people living in one particular area or people who are considered as a unit because of their common interest,

background or nationality'. For the church to become alternative in this new dispensation in South Africa, it must call itself to address the human needs in response to and in light of 'the active presence of God for the life of the world' (Dykstra and Bass, 2002:18). The church as an alternative community forms practices that are communal yet unique by demonstrating through its enactments that it is God's redemptive movements within society. The church becomes the embodiment and revelation of the living presence of God through its actions because of grace and a continuing relationship with God through the Holy Spirit. Volf (2002:255) indicates this most clearly 'human beings (Church) are made participants in the divine activity and therefore are inspired, empowered and obliged to imitate it (Grace)'.

Swinton and Mowat (2006:83) describe Christian engagement as the 'resonance of grace' that occurs in response to the human experience of divine grace. Such practices are designed to sustain faith and hope in a context that often appears hopeless and less than grace-filled. The practices of the alternative community thus form the constituent element in a way that life becomes incarnate when the church lives in the light of and in response to God's gift of abundant life. The key to the success of the alternative community is practice. It is not enough just to know what to do, but to do it. By consistently doing, practice becomes a habit, thus, for the church Christian practice is not seen as something we do, but rather who we are, a community of reconciliation, compassion, and love. We become a people who are dependent on God because we know God. Before we engage, the practices of an alternative community attention must be drawn to the existence of early Judaic alternative communities. Due to the nature of the limited scope of this paper, a brief description is undertaken as part of our investigation on alternative communities.

## 2. Early Judaic Alternative Communities

During the times of the earthly ministry of Jesus, the Jewish nation was under the control of the Roman Empire. Before the Roman control of Israel, the Jews were under the governance of the Greeks (330–30 BC). It was during this time that alternative communities developed within common Judaism to either help with the Hellenisation of the Jewish nations (Sadducees), or be like the Pharisees who maintained a legalistic religiosity that prevented Hellenistic spirituality from contaminating their religion. The Essenes isolated themselves from all public life by becoming ascetic, and the Zealots were made up of Jews who rebelled against the Greco-Roman empires by taking up arms.

Within Judaism, another community developed around AD 33, called the Church. The term church is derived from the Greek word *kuriakos* 'belonging to the Lord'. However, to define the word church, it must be seen against two backgrounds, that of classical Greek and the Old Testament. Erickson (1999:1041) states that in classical Greek the word finds its expression in *ekklesia*, and is found as early as Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon and Euripides. It refers to a *polis* (city). In the secular sense, the word relates to a political gathering or simply an assembly of persons or those called together by a herald, a meeting of people. The Greco-Roman usage of the term *ekklesia* would refer to a political gathering. Thus, the Christian usage of the term *ekklesia* is radically different from how the Greco-Roman world used and understood it. So, the etymology of the term resonates more with the Hebrew word *kahal* that is employed in the Septuagint to infer those gathered by God. Kung (1986:82) states, 'By taking over the term *ekklesia*, the early Christian community made its claim to be the true congregation of God, the real community of God, and the true eschatological people of God'.

The Christian church is that community of people called into being by the life and resurrection of Jesus, (Kung, 1981:75). Cone (1986:115) argues 'the identity of the church [is] found in Jesus. To ask "What is the church" is also to ask "Who is Jesus" for without Jesus the church has no identity.' Therefore, without the raising of Jesus from the dead, the church has no meaning. With the affirmation of faith that Jesus is what he claimed to be, the Messiah, a new alternative community was born. At the centre of the Church's teaching stands Jesus, Messiah, Man, resurrected Lord and Saviour. True God and true man, the Lord of the cosmos. The New Testament teaching is that Christians must now live the way of Jesus (Matt. 16:24). Christians are called to model Jesus everywhere, privately and in the public square. Therefore, understanding the gospel Jesus proclaimed underlines the practice of the church. This gospel calls all people, and those who 'enter do so by sheer grace.' (Sider 2007:171). This new alternative community that Jesus formed requires of his followers to live by a new radical ethic to minister to the oppressed and marginalised, to challenge the privileged or wealthy, to reject the way of violence and to love our enemies. For those who become part of this alternative community do so by responding in faith to Jesus Christ, and his message brings them to salvation. Therefore, this new way of life in Jesus Christ includes a relationship with God through Jesus Christ and a new economic sharing with others (Luke 19:9) as demonstrated when Zacchaeus responded to the message of Jesus. This new community also has a new social order,

where racial and social hostility is overcome by the power of the resurrected Christ (Gal. 3:28). Sider (2007:173) states that this 'new alternative community, the church is visible, public and in some very real sense political reality. The economic sharing and rejection of ethnic division were so visible that it drew non-Christians to embrace Christ.'

### 3. The Present South African Context

The present South African context is one of a burgeoning democracy, which is fast becoming one of the most socially unequal countries in the world in which to live. In South Africa, 26 million of the 55 million citizens are now living below the poverty index of 2 US dollars a day. Shabala (2016) in his article 'Entitlement is the keyword in racist thinking' brings this out most clearly:

Most black South Africans—and most Africans in particular—remain severely disadvantaged compared to white South Africans. 4% of adult Africans have a tertiary qualification; 25% of white South Africans do. Throughout the South African economy, 70% of top managers and 59% of senior managers are white. The unemployment rate among Africans is 28.8%; among white people, it is 5.9%. 61% of white South Africans live in households that spend more than R10 000 a month; only 8% of Africans can spend that much. 16% of Africans live in extreme poverty and regularly suffer hunger; 99.9% of white South Africans are better off than that.

Over the last few months, South Africans have witnessed a rise in protestation. While most South Africans want to live in harmony with each other, this desire is being frustrated by the legacy of apartheid leading to hatred. It is in this context that the church must respond, not in living an 'ascetic' life by disconnecting itself and becoming otherworldly, but by immersing and identifying itself in words and deeds with the struggles of the majority in post-apartheid South Africa; to become the voice of the voiceless and marginalised by becoming the prophetic conscience to government and to those who hear the message of this community. The church as an alternative community in post-apartheid South Africa is to be the catalyst for the flourishing of others, thus requiring it to affirm the bonds of common humanity. This calls for the active caring for justice and the common good, flowing from identification with the needs and rights of others. Thus, 'solidarity is not a state of affairs or goal, but a virtue that impels the church into action' (Cochran 2007:5).

#### 4. What must Evangelicals be in the Present South African Context?

The Church of Jesus Christ is a liberated and separated people, whose faith in Christ is a life lived in the presence of the Creator. This critical awareness of God's presence manifested through the Church calls for ethical responsibility: a responsibility to ask what should be done to restore the dignity of the once oppressed majority. To put it in the words of Brunner (1937:164) 'the true being of man, therefore, can mean nothing else than standing in the love of God, being drawn into his love for man. This means living life as a community which derives its source in God through Christ which is directed towards other human being and the interest of others'. In other words, this understanding sees 'Being' as a gift of the Creator God, who has revealed himself through Jesus Christ, and is simultaneously the recognition that the end of humanity is active discipleship of love for God and neighbour. Thus, Evangelicals become a model which a wounded country can follow. While the church lives in a secular culture, it does not in any sense transcend the culture around it, unless it is willing to challenge its injustices. To do this, one needs to become alternative. The following section will deal with the features that must be demonstrated in the life of the Church if it wants to live as an alternative community in post-apartheid South Africa.

#### 5. The Expression of the Church as Alternative Community in South Africa

The expression of the church in South Africa must be undergirded by our understanding of Scripture that calls us to love one another. Kant (1947:7) put it very clearly:

For love as an inclination, cannot be commanded. However, kindness done from duty, also when no inclination impels it, and even when it is opposed by a natural and unconquerable aversion, is practical love, not pathological love. It resides in the will and not in feeling, in principle action and not in tender sympathy; and it alone can be commanded.

However, this love has its first expression in the action of Jesus on the cross. This action, which has its birth in the *missio Dei*, finds expression through the actions or praxis of the church in faithful communion with the God, who acts. Root (2014:81) states that in *participatio Christi* the Church participates in God through Jesus Christ. It affirms our cooperation with the divine life that our life is hidden with Christ in God. Thus, God's being is given in God's acts—God's act is the revealing of the Godself for the sake of

ministry (Barth, 1961:85). When the church engages ministry as the body of Christ, it reflects the being of God as a moved being—a compassionate Being. God moves towards humanity in the shape of ministry, as an invitation to take action and share in another’s being. This act of God is seen in reconciliation. Therefore, Root (2014:94) argues that ministry as the act of God is the event of the God’s being coming to humanity. This takes shape in the Christ action, what Root (2014) terms the *Christopraxis* of the church. When the church expresses compassion, it expresses the God Being.

The expression of this alternative community is thus one of engagement: in the internal (spiritual) and external (socio-political) through prophetic<sup>2</sup> engagements by speaking to institutional structures that keep people separated, and by acting out through creative compassionate acts that demonstrate love at its fullest. Reuther (1989:173) states:

The theology of prophetic critique locates God and the spokespersons for God on the side of those victimised or despised by the social and political elites. The word of God comes as a critique of these elites, calling them to reform their ways in order to be faithful to divine justice.

Frame (2008:xxv) makes this clear by stating, ‘For the Christian life is not only a matter of following rules of morality, but a dynamic experience: living in a fallen world, in fellowship with the living God’. One of the tests of the authenticity of the church’s claim to transcendence or to be counter-cultural is its capacity to represent in its congregation a ‘socially heterogeneous’ people (Cone, 1986:119). This is a community that reflects Jesus Christ as the One who breaks down barriers that separate people.

### 5.1. Reconciliatory

The fundamental message of the church is one of reconciliation. McNeil (2015:22) states ‘reconciliation is an ongoing spiritual process involving forgiveness, repentance and justice that restores broken relationships and systems to reflect God’s original intention for all creation to flourish.’ The church becomes prophetic when it creates and sustains a reconciled and reconciling community. Thus, the task of the prophetic ministry of the church is to nurture, and nourish an alternative consciousness to the dominant culture around us (Bruggeman, cited in McNeil 2015). Reconciliation with God must be demonstrated by genuine reconciliation within the church and by continuing ministry of reconciliation to the world. Volf (1999:7–12) calls this a Pauline concept of social reconciliation. Such a community of reconciliation is then alternative in South Africa, because it is in active tension

<sup>2</sup> By prophetic I mean, ‘a theology that is socially critical and world transformative, that is, one that explicitly relates the Word of God to the social and political context within which it is proclaimed’ See J. W. de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology* (1990:19).

with the surrounding context and culture of separateness. As South Africa can be still characterised as socially and racially separated, the church should structure itself to become an alternative conscience and counter-cultural, or what K. Barth refers to as a 'foreign community'. In the place of justice and righteousness, normal society brandished violence and oppression—and called it justice. Bonhoeffer (2005:63) encapsulated this function of the Church well:

The church is the place where the witness is given to the foundation of all reality in Jesus Christ. The church is the place where it is proclaimed and taken seriously that God has reconciled the world to himself in Christ. The space of the church is not there in order to fight for territory, but precisely to testify to the world that it is still the world, namely the world that is loved and reconciled by God.

While the church pursues justice and reconciliation, it defines its mandate in biblical terms and thus rejects all forms of violence, manipulation, and injustice. Liberation then is not a mere political movement and power struggle. The message of reconciliation of the church is to preach the good news about the peace Christ brings, reconciling man to God, man to man, and harmony with God's creation. Conradie (2013:27) calls this cosmic reconciliation. Reconciliation is thus with God, with the church and with those who have been sinned against. How then is reconciliation to be enacted? The alternative community must be agents of spiritual and racial reconciliation. Reconciliation is more than mere words, it demands action. Vellem (2013:111) underscores that if justice becomes subservient to reconciliation, then reconciliation is just cognitive, something that aborts the true reconciliation. He (*ibid*) states that what is needed is the discovery of reconciliation through experience. It is through restitution that this is possible. In a previous article, co-authored with Alexander (2015:29-42) we state 'that when the church fully understands the impact of decades of separateness has on the masses and the degradation it has caused, by making human beings non-persons requires a practical engagement' or what Vellem (2013:109) terms 'logic of experiential clarity regarding reconciliation'. If reconciliation is to be realised, restitution has to be made. This is where Evangelicals can challenge the government to speed up its programme of Land Reform, and where certain racial groups in South Africa benefited unethically from the 1913 Land Act reconciliation requires that restitution is made to those who suffered under an evil system. Restitution is perhaps the most human part of the reconciliation process, and restitution requires that we give up something, which brings us to a better understanding of the suffering that apartheid



caused to the majority. When the church as the community of God's people leads this process, it does so from a 'place' of compassion.

## 5.2. Compassion

In Exodus 33, Moses requested *YAHWEH* to show his glory; the request was denied because no man can see God and live. Yet, God did reveal to Moses who he is, a loving and compassionate God. The church is thus called to reveal the character of God demonstrated through its acts of compassion and love. Therefore, this requires that a definition of compassion be explored and applied to the South African context. The church in South Africa can become what all other communities aspire to be, a loving, caring and compassionate community. Davies (2001:17) states that compassion calls for the radical decentering of self, and putting at risk, in the free re-enactment of the dispossessed condition of those who suffer. Compassion begins with the recognition of the other as created in the image of God. It is because of this understanding that self assumes the burden of the other. It is here Davies (2001:17) argues that in recognising the veiled presence of God's image in the other we come to understand our identity. Nouwen, McNeil and Morrison (1982:3–4) state that the word compassion means to 'suffer with'. Compassion, therefore, requires one to enter spaces where one identifies with the weak, vulnerable and powerless. Compassion means full immersion in the condition of being human. Compassion is not 'simple pity', but finds it is the purest expression unfolding in the incarnation of God. God's compassion becomes our compassion. This principle of self-denying or 'kenotic love' (Davies 2001:21) touches all levels of human experience, and tries to make social harmony a possibility. This radical manifestation calls for the very reflection of personhood to be seen in the other. Thus, the church as the alternative community seeks to see the image of God in all persons in society. This calls for a radical shift, from theology to ministry. Stone (1996:43) elaborates that 'ministry has a three-fold character: it is a response to grace, it is participation in grace, and it is an offer of grace.' Through the ministry of the church, the work of restoring the image of God in us is extended to the rest of the world. This calls for a very intentional entering into the suffering of others and working on behalf of their liberation. The church as an alternative community reflects its knowledge of God in two ways, namely theologically and practically. I believe the latter is a stronger demonstration of our love for God. Brown (1984:69) states this very clearly. 'This notion is so strange to us that 'knowing God' is a matter of deed rather than word, that one could affirm God

without saying God's name or deny God while God's name is on our lips is not so strange to the Bible.'

This is seen most clearly in Matthew 25:31–46 that distinguishes knowing God and knowing about God. James (2:19) qualifies this statement even further by mocking those who claim to have faith, but who fail to take care of the marginalised in society. 'You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe and shudder.' Mere knowledge of God cannot replace living faith, living a compassionate life. Thus, the Church as an alternative community is called to action.

This action to compassion is brought into focus, by asking the question, what is it to be created in the image of God (*Imago Dei*)? This 'image' is given by God and is central to human dignity, because the central theological issue in human dignity is the merciful, compassionate God. This understanding compels the church as an alternative community to be confrontational and transformative, to speak to institutional and economic barriers that keep people separated. Evangelicals must assume the responsibility to see people as children of God, created in his image rather than being directed to see people through the socio-economic and political policies of the land. The Evangelical churches in South Africa must become places where people who were once stripped of their humanity and dignity find hope and restoration of being human again. The church becomes the prophetic voice that speaks out against poverty that forces people to live in situations of inferiority and bondage in relation to those on whom they must remain dependent, and be enslaved to. Because the church understands the profound truth that human beings share with the character of God, even in a limited and derivative sense, it therefore allows us to engage and ask about the One who grounds the purpose and structure of our existence as being human, but also calls the church to live and minister as the 'authentic possibility of our existence' (Stone 1996:19).

Poverty is the starting point attacking the image of God, as revealed in the living condition of many South Africans. The reality in South Africa is that poverty is overwhelmingly Black. The results of almost 350 years of colonisation and oppression through restriction on freedom of movement and relationships have had considerable economic effects that are still crippling most Blacks in South Africa today. Thus, the church is called to a ministry that balances itself between support and development. Development ministries equip or enable those who are too poor to provide for themselves, because according to Myers (1999:14) when the church understands its true identity as children of God, it

recovers its true calling by seeing itself as 'faithful and productive stewards of God for the well-being of all.' Chester (2013:156) using Ezekiel 34 affirms the need for development ministries in that God condemned the shepherds of Israel for not strengthening the weak. Chester's point is to be noted that God does not rebuke the shepherds for failing to provide for the weak, but that they have not strengthened the weak. The church bears the responsibility to the poor and oppressed. God's community is called to defend the cause of the poor, the needy and those who have no social and economic power. The church works for the physical and social needs of people not as though this was the primary need or exclusive task, but as a testimony of a redeemed, holy and alternative community.

When the church shows compassion, it demonstrates the heart of God and is concerned with sharing God's love in words and deed. It becomes an alternative community.

Another aspect of the South African context that assaults the 'image of God' and human dignity is racism. Grant (1992:49) writes:

Politically, racism disenfranchises; socially it ostracizes; culturally it degrades and robs the people of those characteristics that make them a people; religiously it brainwashes and indoctrinates so that the oppressed people believe not only that it is impossible for God to like them or for them to image God, but that God ordains racist oppression.

The church as an alternative community must speak out against these issues that blur the image of God in persons, by creating a community of faith where these differences do not impede fellowship and love one for another. When governed by this vision, the church will have adequate theological resources to resist the temptation to become accomplices in racial and socio-economic segregation (Volf 1999:19). Thus, through the acts of compassion, the church becomes an agent of reconciliation, where human flourishing takes place. St Augustine *On the Trinity* writes, 'God is the only source to be found of any good thing, but especially by those which make a man good and those which will make him happy; only from him do they come into a man and attach themselves to a man.' Human beings truly flourish in this alternative community, when love is demonstrated, by God becoming the centre of our lives. A human being as with all created things ought to be loved. However, the only way to properly love is to love people in God (Volf 2011:58).

### 5.3. Love

The good news of the Bible is that it that the 'kingdom of heaven has come near' (Matt. 10:7) and fundamentally through the incarnation of Jesus Christ (Luke 17:21). Therefore, the message of the gospel is 'a spontaneous love that forgives sins and serves others' (Jackson 2001:44). This love is beyond calculation and payment (Matt. 10:8). Thus, Jesus calls his followers to follow his example, to unconditionally love God, love your neighbour as oneself (Mark 12:29–31). This is the fundamental aspect for prophetic utterances and compassion. Therefore, within Christian thought God is love and loves unconditionally. A relational community, the triune God provides a model for human love. The life and practice of the church in response to God's love are summarised adequately in Mark 12:29–31. Hence the term 'living in love' is not something a community can achieve by its own efforts and in its own strength, but something that happens to them in faith, from God. The decisive element in this life in love is always to allow ourselves to be loved by God. By being loved by God, the church understands what it means to reflect the reality of God, to demonstrate the reality in all we do. This means we perceive through the lens of God's love (Labberton 2010:175). Brunner (1937:163) argues that this unique love is only manifested to those in faith through Jesus Christ. Therefore, the expression of loving that has its genesis in God through Jesus Christ is portrayed by the action of the Church.

## 6. Recommendation

When the church reverses its desire to conform to the world, it lives out a new social world, directed by Scripture. The actions of Evangelicals form a movement that is not their own, but God's being becoming. In her book *Road Map to Reconciliation*, McNiel (2015) illustrates this process by reflecting on four important steps that enable the church to become an alternative community.

### 6.1. Realisation Phase

This phase is more than an intellectual understanding or awareness for the sake of awareness. This state brings the church to a response that is contextually connected, and part of that realisation requires the church to 'lament' by accurately naming the situation and bringing our anger and frustration to God. This state of consciousness requires a response, and it creates a readiness for reconciliation, because it causes us to realise at a profound level that things must change.

## 6.2. Identification Phase

South Africa is still a racially divided nation, and the church becomes a picture of what South Africa can become. The church must see itself as kingdom people and reconcilers. It begins with building an alternative community that has a new collective identity. This community then sets its values, desires and experience they collaboratively hold, thus enabling the church to shift the cultural identity which sees people based on skin colour or social status. The motivation for identification is the realisation that human beings are no accident; we are created in the image of God. Without this belief, we are forced to face the implication that ultimately there is no good reason to treat a human being as having dignity. While at the same time, in the service of God, in this alternative community people are free to embrace their culture, their ethnicity, their personality, and gender, as part of what it means to be made in the image of God (McNeil 2015:71). With this comes the identification to the mission of the community of the Lord. Like the early Church, we are called to respond to Jesus' call for justice and mercy. The early Church gives us the clearest picture of how to live together (Acts 2:38) *koinonia*.

## 6.3. Preparation

Within this phase, the community gets ready to be transforming agents in society. This brings to remembrance the parable given by Jesus to count the cost. Reconciliation is going to be costly. In seeking God's guidance, we need to understand that God is already at work in a community; our responsibility is to ask what is God doing? Moreover, to join him. To join God on his agenda means presenting ourselves to be transformational. Following Jesus requires from us to help the poor make a living. This requires people to ask, what are we prepared to give up? This also requires the discarding of old patterns of thoughts, and facing up to our fears, individually and as a community.

## 6.4. Activism

Too often Evangelicals in South Africa see activism as a form of liberalism, and therefore shy away from their calling to be the presence of Christ in the world, the body of Christ. This non-engagement by claiming ascetic piety is seen to be orthodox. However, orthodoxy must lead to orthopraxis, doing the right thing. The church cannot see blatant oppression taking place and remain silent. To stay silent is to adopt the status quo, and therefore be accountable for our non-action. While holding mass prayer meetings to deal with this evil system that impinges upon the image of God in humanity, action must be taken. The apostle James (James 1:27, 2: 14–26) instructs us that if someone is

hungry or cold, do not just pray for them, help them. True faith within the alternative community is seen through its action. Actions through which love for God and people is demonstrated. People who know their God shall stand and take action.

## 7. Conclusion

Before his ascension, Jesus instructed his followers to continue his teaching to the entire world (Matt. 28:19). This prophetic engagement continues through the Church, the visible manifestation, the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12). For a follower of Jesus, this prophetic task continues by responding to challenges today. The reason the church can make a difference in the world, is because of Christ, who made the difference by becoming man and fulfilling the just requirements of God in reconciling man to God. Therefore, 'the church does not have a social ethic, the church is a social ethic' (Hauerwas 1983:99). This act of love, compassion and reconciliation is demonstrated through the life of Christ the head of the Church, and leaves us an example to follow empowered by the Holy Spirit, who leads us into all truth. The Evangelical Church, therefore, has no excuse but to be Alternative by engaging, inviting and loving our friends and neighbours.

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