Social transformation through affirmation of human dignity in a faith-based organisation[1]

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Abstract

The contribution towards poverty upliftment in South Africa by a faith-based organisation ("FBO") which practises integrated spirituality has not been clearly ascertained. Based on a case study conducted within the field of Theology and Development, it can be suggested that an FBO, through the practice of holistic spirituality, can empower people who are economically deprived, by assisting them to activate their agency, as their human dignity is affirmed, and vocation recovered. In drawing on resources relating to its faith dimension, including theological concepts such as the *imago Dei, shalom* and the kingdom of God, in the instance of the study reported on, the role of the FBO can be valuable in development work. The conclusion drawn is that recent interest in inclusion of spirituality within development discourse is to be welcomed as a beneficial addition in striving towards social transformation.

Key words

Faith-based organisation; human dignity; spirituality; development; transformation; integral mission

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1   It should be noted that this article explores the key findings of a PhD thesis. See Mellow, S. 2021. *Transformation through affirmation of human dignity: a case study of Learn to Earn*. PhD Practical Theology. Stellenbosch: University of Stellenbosch.

Introduction

Given South Africa's humanitarian crisis, with its unenviable reputation as one of the most unequal societies in the world[2], Faith-based Organisations provide an important intervention in addressing the devastating and pervasive poverty evident in the country. FBOs – which in this article specifically refers to faith based non-profit/non-governmental organisations[3] – have long been recognised as valued actors in the development sphere as "more likely to score highly in terms of moral and ethical standing, understanding of the local context, flexibility and the ability to mobilise energy and resources" (Tomalin 2013:699). However, the practice of spirituality in FBOs has, until recently, been disregarded in the development discourse as providing an element of well-being (Tomalin 2015:80; Buijs 2008:225).[4]

Recognising that religious and secular traditions relating to development issues overlap in material ways, specifically as regards matters pertaining to human dignity and social justice, this steadfast exclusion was persistently queried by development practitioners and scholars (Deneulin & Bano 2009:10–11). Interest, albeit tentative, in the benefit of harnessing the potential of faith traditions in contributing towards development, has finally been expressed in development discourse, as Myers (2019:13) notes in an article with the most aptly descriptive title: "The Secular Development Community Is Suspicious Yet Curious".

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2   South Africa's social inequality is of such a magnitude that a 2018 report of the World Bank reveals it to be possibly the most unequal society in the world (Hurlbut 2018:xv). "With a Gini-coefficient of 0,63 in 2015, South Africa is the most unequal country in the world" (Hurlbut 2018:42).

3   In using the term FBO in this article it is important to note that this is in reference only to non- profit organisations and does not include the broader definition of FBO, which often includes local congregations and other faith-based bodies. It should also be noted here that the FBO under discussion is Christian in nature.

4   One would certainly expect spirituality to be a noteworthy feature in FBOs, but their contribution towards addressing poverty is thus far unclear, owing largely to the nebulous nature of the term "FBO" and the difficulty of classifying the entity. As Hefferan (2015:42) notes, the term "FBO" is so broad, "capturing such a vast array of different organizations" that defining with any precision what an FBO is, proves problematic.

There are, however, limited empirical studies into the potential contribution of spirituality in FBOs specifically, which therefore warrants closer scrutiny.[5] This article thus contributes to the emerging conversation in development matters regarding the overlap of spirituality and development, by discussing the findings of one such empirical study which was undertaken recently.[6] In the study, "spirituality" was attributed the meaning of "a relationship with the supernatural or spiritual realm that provides meaning and a basis for personal and communal reflection, decisions and action" and "the personal and relational side of those beliefs, which shape daily life" (Ver Beek 2000:32). Since it was a practical theological study which was undertaken, "spirituality" is specifically the practice of Christian spirituality.[7] The study pursued an understanding of the possible contribution which the practice of integrated spirituality in an FBO makes towards initiating social transformation through affirming human dignity in impoverished people.

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5   Ware and Clarke's (2016:325) extensive study into the impact of the practice of spirituality in FBOs "does not seek to explore social change broadly".

6   The article emanates from the findings of the first author's doctoral dissertation at Stellenbosch University entitled *Social transformation through affirmation of human dignity: a case study of 'Learn to Earn'*. The co-author was the project's study leader in the department of Practical Theology and Missiology, Theology and Development at Stellenbosch University.

7   Distinguishing "spirituality" from "religion" is not a straightforward exercise, leading Ver Beek (2000:32) to remark that "in practice, the two are commonly intertwined", and much depends on the perspective of the person using the term. This means, for instance, that a theologian's intended meaning will differ from the perspective of a sociologist (Tomalin 2013:52). In current literature, "religion" and "spirituality" are frequently used interchangeably, or "religion" impliedly includes "spirituality" (Lunn 2009:936; Tomalin 2013:3). In broad terms, "religion" has connotations of "an institutionalised system of beliefs and practices concerning the spiritual realm" (Lunn 2009:937) and is frequently considered to be "the formal adherence to a belief system, the endorsement of the values, ethics and beliefs of a specific faith" (Kruger & Williams 2003:347). "Spirituality", on the other hand, embraces less emphasis on the institution and greater emphasis on the personal experience, and can thus be considered as "the search for meaning in one's life and the response to the events in life over which a person has no control" (Kruger & Williams 2003:348) or "the personal beliefs by which an individual relates to and experiences the supernatural realm" (Lunn 2009:937).

Development as transformation

Within development discourse, the relatively recently recognised discipline of Theology and Development[8] can play a valuable role in facilitating understanding of movement towards social transformation initiated by an FBO. This is because Theology and Development takes seriously the striving for economic justice, as evident in Jesus' solidarity with the oppressed, and God's liberating will (Chung 2014:103; Phiri 2019:483). In determining a theological link to development, according to de Gruchy (2003:20), all theological action is based on the call for action in James 2:26 whereby "faith without works is dead". Commenting on de Gruchy's assertion, Hancox (2020) draws on the work of Myers (1999:20–56) and Msabah (2016:31–34) in suggesting that a "robust biblical conceptualisation for Theology and Development" is to be found in the notion of seeking God's kingdom and its *shalom*. The kingdom of God and *shalom* are thus both notions from which indications of social transformation are sought in research within Theology and Development.

From a theological perspective, the inadequacies of secular development theory, with its focus on increasing material wealth, gave rise to a process of exploring a theology of development in the latter decades of the last century, to address social concerns, eventually encapsulated in the term "transformation" (August 2010:22). Seen in this light, the emphasis on social change thus became on the transformation of life as a whole, and not merely on increasing material wealth (Bowers du Toit 2010:263). Transformation refers to God's continuing efforts in history to restore his fractured creation and can be described as "the change from a condition of human existence contrary to God's purposes to one in which people are able to enjoy fulness of life in harmony with God (Jn 10:10; Col. 3:8–15; Eph. 4:13)" (Samuel & Sugden 1999:x).[9]

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8   For background to this discipline's origins, see, for instance Swart (2010), August (2010).

9   Extracted from paragraph 11 of the Wheaton Statement composed at the Wheaton Conference of world evangelism in 1983, headlined "The Church in Response to Human Need" (Bosch 2011:417). The conference produced a comprehensive statement on what became termed "transformation", which was intended as a biblical perspective on development.

Social transformation becomes apparent when God's redeeming and reconciling purposes, as reflected biblically in the imagery of *shalom*, are evident, whereby peace and justice prevail, and fractured relationships are restored to a harmonious state. Attainment of God's redeeming and reconciling purposes portrayed by *shalom* are dependent upon the recovery of a person's true identity as a child of God and the recovery of his or her true vocation as a productive steward of gifts from God for the well-being of all (Myers 2011:17). Indications of social transformation occurring in the findings of the study, which are discussed hereunder, was thus viewed in this light.

Study methodology: A case study of "Learn to Earn"

Case study of "Learn to Earn"

A case study of the FBO called "Learn to Earn" ("LTE")[10] was conducted, which aimed to understand how the participants in the study, namely previously unemployed students at LTE, understood their human dignity when spirituality was practised as an integral part of their skills development training.

LTE came into existence thirty-one years' ago, out of concern for poverty and unemployment. Its intention was to provide skills training to facilitate employment in the economic sector and also to foster ability amongst previously unemployed people to launch businesses through entrepreneurial skills.[11] Training is provided by LTE in the areas of baking for profit, graphic design, office skills, basic computer literacy, woodwork, basic home maintenance, sewing and cashier and barista courses.

LTE operates its main campus, and draws its students from, the deprived area of Khayelitsha. Despite being a mere twenty-minute drive from Cape Town's commercial centre, it is an area marked by "high levels of food insecurity, hardship, crime and informal housing" (Turok, Visagie &

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10   See www.learntoearn.org.za.

11   People in material deprivation have a greatly reduced chance of finding formal employment but entrepreneurship and micro industries are shown to pave the way to employment in the absence of formal employment. Current levels of entrepreneurship and micro businesses in South Africa though are "disappointing" (Hurlbut 2018:87-88).

Scheba 2021:74).[12] Khayelitsha stands in startling contrast to Cape Town's reputation as one of the most desired tourist destinations, voted best city in the world for the seventh consecutive year by London's Telegraph newspaper readers, a city renowned for its exceptional restaurants, world-class attractions and magnificent natural beauty.[13]

LTE is an overtly faith-based entity, identifying strongly with the Christian faith. Occhipinti's (2015:331) observation in respect of LTE would be true, that, for most FBOs, faith is not an "add-on" to development but an integral part of it and frequently the main reason for engaging in the work.[14] What is distinctive about LTE, as an entity engaged in the development and poverty upliftment sphere, is that its approach to skills training is intentionally holistic, whereby the spiritual dimension of a person is attributed the same prominence as emotional, social and economic needs. The practice of spirituality takes the form of conventional Christian worship, including church-style gatherings, with prayer and hymn-singing, as well as teaching in the "discipleship class". Acknowledging that South Africa's apartheid history has caused deep-rooted trauma in their students, LTE practises integrated spirituality in the course of their skills training, intentionally aiming to restore a person's human dignity by demonstrating a person's worth and purpose for which God has created that person.

Data collection methods

Due to the nature of case study methodology, data collection was triangulated. Data collection was, therefore, collected by means of interviews with staff and students of LTE as well as a desktop analysis of documentary records. These records included LTE newsletters, course evaluation forms, student follow-ups, annual reports as well as social media

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12   A subsidiary campus is located in the coastal town of Hermanus, one hundred and twenty kilometres from Cape Town, where most students reside in the adjoining area called Zwelihle, a residential area marked by social problems, including drug and alcohol abuse, crime, food insecurity and inadequate housing (Cele et al. 2014:25). The township has high unemployment, which at 42%, is significantly higher than the national average (Cele et al. 2014:16).

13   See eatout.co.za. "2 Cape Town restaurants in world's top 100", 23 September 2021, and telegraph.co.uk "Why Cape Town is the best city in the world", 12 January 2020.

14   Similarly, LTE's approach to its work is confirmatory of Bowers du Toit's (2019:6) finding that faith is usually central to the development work undertaken by FBOs.

posts.[15] Seventeen interviews were held with current students, as well as with the organisation's founder and director, and five staff members, two of whom were former students. In selecting which students attended an interview some measure of diversity across genders, ages, branches, and courses was strived for.

Interviews were semi-structured and included questions to students in order to understand what the respondents' life challenges had been prior to arriving at LTE and the extent to which they had noticed changes as a result of participation in the Christian activities. The data was then transcribed and thematically coded using ATLAS.ti software. Ethical clearance for the study was obtained via the University of Stellenbosch Ethics Committee and all protocols in this regard were strictly observed.[16]

Prior exclusion of spirituality as a factor in development discourse

LTE's approach to addressing poverty, through practising integrated spirituality, warranted exploring, since the perspective of spirituality has in the past been excluded in development discourse.[17] Rakodi (2015:18) attributes the exclusion of spirituality from development to its roots in the ideology of modernity, which ousted religion as a truth source, owing to spirituality's incompatibility with modernity's prized ideal of reason. Religion was seen as a "traditional and conservative force" destined to vanish as society progressed towards modernisation (Jones &

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15   Observational methods were impacted negatively by COVID-19 regulations, restricting interaction, necessitating the desktop analysis of documentary records playing a more prominent role than originally intended, to the extent that documents exceeding six hundred in number were analysed.

16   Ethically responsible research, as prescribed by the institution of Stellenbosch University in their "POLICY FOR RESPONSIBLE RESEARCH CONDUCTED AT STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY" dated 24 June 2013, as updated in January 2016, was undertaken in the project. Approval for the research was granted on 5 October 2020 by the duly appointed ethics body of Stellenbosch University, the Research Ethics Committee: Social, Behavioural and Education Research.

17   Whilst the term "development" was first used to address the devastation and deprivation caused by World War II (Myers 2011:27-28), it is noteworthy that Cornwall (2020:41) describes as a "convenient fiction" the post- World War II origins of development, making specific reference to the colonialist policies of the United Kingdom already evident in 1929 in the Colonial Development Act of the same year.

Juul Petersen 2011:1291). The aim of development was purely to achieve economic "take-off" in largely colonised nations whereby a form of what was euphemistically called "trusteeship" was introduced, in order to offer a better future to these nations' people (Rakodi 2015:19).[18] All facets of culture, which encompassed issues of a religious nature, were deemed irrelevant to this vision of what constituted a better life. The recent interest in spirituality within the development discourse arose when it became evident that adherence to a religion and practising spirituality was a major component in people's conception of what constitutes living a good life (Deneulin & Rakodi 2011:48).[19]

Findings of the study

Practice of spirituality facilitates affirmation of human dignity

So obvious is the devastation caused by abuse of power by the non-poor to human dignity that Koopman (2008) is in favour of development being understood as restoration of human dignity. Social transformation is inhibited when a marginalised and vulnerable person conducts a personal assessment of his or her worth, frequently based on the judgment of the non-poor, which then has a deleterious effect on his or her human dignity perception. The consequence of this subjective estimation of human dignity is what Jayakumar Christian (1999) terms "marred identities", whereby an impoverished person believes that he or she has no value, and human dignity is diminished. Christian (1999:159–161) depicts this powerless captivity of people in economic distress in the image of a "web of lies", made up of the interplay of oppressive relationships created by the non-poor resulting in an impoverished person fallaciously believing that his or her circumstances are immutable. For this reason, it becomes essential that human dignity be affirmed in order to facilitate social transformation.

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18   It has been suggested that the intention of development has not actually been to offer a better future to vulnerable people but rather to maintain the status quo to the benefit of those purportedly doing the developing (Hefferan 2015:43).

19   This finding is confirmatory of Clarke's (2011:21) reference to the largest survey of the views of economically deprived people, which reveals the important tie which spirituality and religious observance have with a sense of well-being.

Instead of being an attribute which can be subjectively determined, human dignity is seen as inalienable when viewed as being anchored in the *imago Dei*, having its roots in Christ's redemption.[20] Kilner (2015:315–7) thus explains how all human beings have a sacredness about them, in reflecting the image of God, and, as such, are to be treated with reverence, independent of material wealth or individual characteristics.

For this reason, it is indispensable that reliance be placed on the notion of *imago Dei* as the basis for communicating the inalienability of human dignity, rather than on ambiguous secular interpretations, where dignity frequently adheres to material acquisitions and achievements (Soulen & Woodhead 2006:12). In this regard, the study showed that LTE expressly communicated the message of *imago Dei* in seeking to affirm the human dignity of the students and thereby heal their self-worth. One of LTE's trainers puts it thus: "I keep on reinforcing that they [the LTE students] are made in the image of God; they have value".

The results of the study indicated that, once the students recognised that their worth is derived purely from the *imago Dei*, they appreciated their true identity as God's children made in his image, and healing of "marred identities" occurred in many of them. Accordingly, confirmation becomes apparent of the observation of Myers (2011:179), that central to recovering true identity and vocation is the recognition of humans being made in the image of God. This basis for appreciating their true identity appears in one respondent's remark:

> I think it's a phrase that says you are made in the image of God. That makes me feel alright, it makes me feel wonderful. No one can just sacrifice something for you, especially life for you, if you're worthless. So we are worth something, and I'm designed in the image of him so I should be proud of myself.

In addition to the intentional communication of the *imago Dei*, the study demonstrated that, when the participants were nurtured in an environment where they were treated with respect and where they were displayed love, this

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20   Koopman (2007:180) alludes to Helmut Thielicke's notion of "alien dignity" on the basis of human dignity being imputed to human beings and not earned. Human dignity is an alien dignity by virtue of being bestowed by God as a gift of grace and this alien dignity becomes humanity's dignity by God's design (Kilner 2015:314).

positively influenced the participants' perceptions of their human dignity. The respect and love displayed by LTE, of which the participants spoke, could be interpreted as the proclamation of the kingdom of God, through the staff's conduct, and included the staff accepting the students "as they were" and refraining from judging them for their financial predicament. The respect of the staff resulted in prior feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt in the students being replaced by feelings of pride in their abilities, and healing of self-worth became apparent in increased self-confidence and self-esteem. One of the students summed up her feelings by stating simply "When I see my life now, it is more precious".

The participants to the study had, prior to LTE, apparently been made to feel unworthy of respect, as though inferior to others and not deserving of being spoken to in a way which conveyed a message that they were valued. The following particularly poignant comment of a student emphasises this point: "… to have such a place that could have faith in you and hope and belief in you, even though you know, people who used to be around you, they lost hope in you a long time ago." This sentiment of unworthiness reflects the psychological impact of poverty, described by Prilleltensky and Nelson (2013:19–34), caused by "disrespect, exclusion, humiliation and erasure of identity". It indicates the desperate need for human dignity to be affirmed if social transformation is to be given a chance. Since the respect demonstrated by LTE contrasted so starkly with what the participants were used to experiencing in their daily lives, the study found that the loving and respectful conduct of the LTE staff made a meaningful contribution towards the affirmation of the students' human dignity.

Practice of spirituality facilitates recovery of vocation

Vocation has often been damaged in those in states of vulnerability.[21] Gorlorwulu and Rahschulte (2010:201), commenting that vocation can be understood in terms of "meaning, purpose or calling", observe that implicit in "recovery" of vocation is "wholeness". Significantly, wholeness as a sense of well-being, was reported by many of the respondents during their time at LTE, attributed directly to experiencing God's love within the practice of

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21   As alluded to by, for instance, Sands (2010), to the effect that the fall has damaged the way human beings pursue their vocation.

spirituality. Since vocation has been interpreted as a calling to follow God, an obvious indication of recovered vocation is a calling to the love of God (Badcock 1998:123).

Recovery of vocation is apparent in the participants' newly acquired sense of purpose, which enabled them to adopt concrete plans for their future, using their God-given gifts and skills to produce income, thereby changing their economic circumstances. The sense of purpose enabled the participants to envision new goals for themselves and to have the motivation to work towards realising those goals, as one respondent testified: "But when I got myself a job, I told myself that I must get myself a licence. So I worked on the goal. And now I have a driver's licence." In some of the study participants, the sense of purpose was evident in their assumption of family responsibilities whilst earning an income, whilst others spoke about having had their passion ignited through discovering and exercising their talents, which had a meaningful effect on their sense of purpose.

The practice of integrated spirituality facilitates activation of agency

Prilleltensky and Nelson (2002), in pointing out the psychological damage caused to personal identity and social relations by poverty, determine that a sense of agency in meeting individual and collective needs, is required to increase power and thereby improve well-being. De Gruchy (2015:146) endorses the prominence of agency in transforming the circumstances of individuals immersed in poverty, stating "The importance of the agency of the poor lies in the fact that human dignity is rooted in the importance of both being and doing".

De Gruchy's insistence on activation of agency in overcoming of powerlessness was seen in the study whereby the reaction of the participants to their recovered vocation was to take steps to uplift their circumstances in adopting income production measures. In addition to producing income to improve their own situation, the participants also expressed the desire and will to use their skills which they had learned to contribute to society. This agency and ability to contribute to society is an indication of social transformation in progression towards *shalom*. An awareness of the well-being of others, moreover, reflects Tinder's (2003:48) opinion that this consciousness of the destiny of others is what imbues us with human dignity.

Although the students at LTE cannot be said to be entirely self-reliant, they emerge from LTE with the skills and emotional and spiritual tools to become self-supporting in meeting their and their families' needs. Within the parameters of the practice of integrated spirituality, LTE's approach to affirming human dignity, based on the *imago Dei*, thus facilitates autonomy in the students in their pathway out of poverty.

The affirmation of human dignity can result in social transformation

With their human dignity restored, many of the LTE students were able to escape the "web of lies", formerly convincing them that their situation was permanent, and were able to strive towards economic independence, whereupon there was movement towards social transformation. Myers (2011) proposes that indications of *shalom*, suggesting social transformation, would include "just and peaceful relationships", whilst Bragg (1987:39) similarly observes reconciliation in discordant relationships, thereby echoing Anderson's (1982) emphasis on harmony and wholeness evident in the restoration of fractured relationships.

In this regard, many of the participants shared stories of restoration of previously fractured relationships, mainly with family members, but also with their community, following the abandonment of a life of crime and gangsterism by a number of LTE students. *Shalom* is evident in the participants' remarks how they felt more loving and caring towards others, experienced greater control over anger and were more forgiving. One participant expressed character changes, which could be described as a greater degree of the "fruits of the spirit" (Gal. 5:22–23), as follows: "When I came to LTE, my life started to change around a lot. I started to value other people, I started to respect other people, I started to show some remorse and started to ask for forgiveness." This development of godly character traits reflects Myers' (2011:179) observation that, once people discover their true identity as God's children, their characters are able to be formed to reflect this new reality through instilling values which permit a better future.

The aspiration of achieving justice, founded on Jesus' explicit linking of the kingdom of God with justice (Mt. 6:33), occupies a focal point in the biblical notion of *shalom*. According to Clarke (2011:126), a focus on achieving justice aspires to eliminate suffering and exploitation and entails

emancipation from economic, social, and political constraints causing oppression, as well as the assumption of control of one's own destiny. LTE's motto "A hand up, not a handout" reflects such an emancipatory approach to eliminating constraints causing oppression, founded on kingdom liberation and *shalom*, as advocated by Bowers du Toit (2018:33), rather than on a charitable approach to community development.

The study revealed how hope had become evident in the lives of the LTE participants, facilitating the attainment of justice. Feelings of hope were expressed by some of the participants in having "dreams" for their future, implying that they had not previously had so, while others contrasted their feelings of hope for their future, with previously having felt fear associated with their future.

In facilitating the students' recovered identities and vocation, which restored human dignity, LTE can be seen to be implementing a biblical vision of justice by focusing on elimination of suffering, economic emancipation and the ability to control one's own destiny. Once human dignity was affirmed, the students were able to attain financial autonomy through their skills training, and thus experience freedom from poverty's oppression.

The FBO can play a meaningful role in advancing social transformation

Whilst it has been noted that there are differing measures of religiosity in FBOs, there is no subtlety in the religious identity of LTE. On the contrary, LTE is an obviously Christian organisation, "wearing their religious colours prominently" (Clarke 2011:18). To such a great extent is the Christian faith the reason for engaging in their development work that LTE would more accurately be classified as a "Christian Development Organisation", defined by Hancox (2019:4) as "a civil society organisation that exists to promote human well-being through development activities, guided by its understanding and application of the Christian faith".[22]

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22 Hancox (2019:1) observes how entities of this nature, whose work is grounded in their Christian faith, are described in the applicable literature using vague and inconsistent terminology and are generally simply included in the category of FBOs. Hancox (2019:3), however, highlights several limitations of the term "FBO" for these entities.

According to Clarke (2011:16), this means that the faith factor can enable LTE to access resources apart from the secular development discourse, drawing on distinctive Christian values which are central to their existence, in addressing poverty. In this way, its faith dimension as an FBO enables LTE to bring understanding amongst the participants of the inalienability of their human dignity, through emphasis on the *imago Dei* as a distinctive Christian concept, together with the prominent use of biblical imagery and scriptures. By way of illustration, a trainer at LTE explains this as follows:

> And I always believe that a person would not know who they are, unless they know the God who created them. And the reason why he created them. … [or else] they don't really know why they are here. So you refer them to the Bible, tell them that you are wonderfully and fearfully made [Psalm 139]. So the fact that we are born, God had a purpose for you.

Furthermore, the proclamation of the kingdom of God[23], as a uniquely faith-based concept, reflects Jesus' favour towards the marginalised of society and challenges the distortion of truth, in their eyes and in the eyes of others, that they have no value. Kingdom of God understanding of identity enables the participants to break the "web of lies", affirming that "in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Rom. 8:37) (Christian 1999:192–194). Communicating the message that all humans are created in God's image and have human dignity, enabling the students to experience the love of God, is an intentional action by the LTE staff and is at the foundation of the operation of the organisation. As an FBO, therefore, LTE has access to Christian-based conceptual resources

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23   "Kingdom of God" is an elusive term, despite its status as one of the most scrutinised terms of all time, according to Harrisville (1993:140). "Kingdom of God" is also referred to as the "reign of God" by some scholars, such as Guder (1998:94) who views the latter as capturing better the dynamic meaning of the reigning itself as opposed to the more static image of "kingdom". "Reign of God" has also been preferred as a less androcentric term by feminist theologians who point out the urgent need for the affirmation of women as created equally as *imago Dei* (Moder 2019). In selecting "kingdom of God" rather than "reign of God" here, consideration was given to the fact that "kingdom of God" is the conventional and widely accepted translation of the Greek word *basileia* appearing throughout the NT (Guder 1998:94). In the evangelical sphere, "kingdom of God" is also the preferred term of several of the authors of works concerning social transformation to which reference has been made (Myers, Christian, Bragg).

which the study reveals plays a significant role in facilitating social transformation.

In addition to its faith dimension providing access to conceptual resources apart from the secular development discourse, it emerged from the study that the ethos of LTE as a consciously Christian organisation, and more specifically the express and implicit proclamation of the kingdom of God through the character and behaviour of the Christian staff, as viewed by the students, are facets of Christian spirituality which had a significant influence on the students. In essence, according to Samuel (2020:7), in the kingdom of God, we witness an environment "shaped by love, grace, sacrifice and truth", which is the kingdom inaugurated by Jesus and represented by him. It is this environment of movement towards *shalom*, aspired to by LTE, by means of the practice of integrated spirituality by the organisation.

As a result of drawing on these specifically faith-based resources, LTE's approach to affirming human dignity is effective in enabling many of the LTE students to overcome powerlessness, through entering the economic sphere, thereby initiating transformation of their own accord. It is evident that the organisation succeeds in attaining the level of development activity which Swart (2006:93) insists is necessary for social change, which "would have a more long-term, emancipatory and structural impact on the lives of the poor". Based on the empirical data derived from the study, it can be inferred that LTE plays a meaningful role in initiating social transformation and that this is as a consequence of its identity as an FBO.

Conclusion

The study reported on in this article may point to the value of the FBO in carrying out "development" or social justice-type work. Whilst the potential of FBOs to be beneficial in addressing poverty has been recognised recently (Deneulin & Rakodi 2011:45; Clarke 2006:841; Clarke 2011:14), the spheres in which the efforts of FBOs could be of value, have remained unclear, leading traditional development actors to invite further studies of the kind discussed in this article (Tomalin 2013:234).

In this regard, the LTE case study has facilitated understanding of how the FBO, distinguishable from its secular counterpart, the NGO, by its religious character and structure (Clarke 2011:16), can play a meaningful role in the process of bringing about social transformation, viewed through the lens of Theology and Development. Furthermore, as Hancox (2019:4) has noted, there currently exist limited studies into the value of organisations conducting development work under a classification which is specifically Christian. Therefore, given LTE's identification as a faith-based entity carrying out social justice-type work motivated by its Christian faith, the study reported on here may clarify the unique contribution of the Christian Development Organisation to poverty alleviation.

In this respect, it can be proposed that, the ability of an FBO to draw on Christian notions, as Clarke (2011) suggests, including *shalom*, the *imago Dei* and the kingdom of God (in the instance of LTE), enables an FBO to communicate effectively to individuals in economic distress that they no longer need to be trapped in poverty with a "marred identity", but can instead see themselves the way God does (Verster 2012:112). The research conducted at LTE revealed that a true understanding of self, based on the *imago Dei*, communicated to and accepted by those immersed in poverty, can restore value and worth in their own eyes. It can also be suggested, deferring to the example of the LTE staff, that proclamation of the kingdom of God, amongst marginalised and vulnerable people, based on specifically faith-based resources, can result in feelings of respect, to the extent that a diminished perception of human dignity is corrected.

Of significance is that, once the inalienability of human dignity is accepted, this can result in meaningful transformation among materially deprived people, as borne out by the responses from the participants to the study at LTE. Tied to healing of self-worth of the students, once vocation was recovered, there was economic empowerment by way of attaining financial autonomy, coupled with self-fulfilment through realising their abilities and reaching achievements of which they previously thought they were not capable.

In this way, the study is beneficial in that the correlation between affirmation of human dignity and social transformation, as proposed by Myers (2011:180), is borne out empirically. He states that where poverty

has dictated that people in material deprivation are worthless, movement towards transformation occurs when marginalised and vulnerable people recognise their true identity as God's children made in God's image with their human dignity affirmed, and their true vocation as stewards of God's creation, utilising the gifts God has given them (Myers 2011:180).

Finally, the signs of *shalom* amongst the students at LTE, arising from restored human dignity through the promotion of the *imago Dei*, indicates that the practice of integrated spirituality at LTE is central in advancing towards social transformation. Given that spirituality has been excluded from development discourse until recently, this article can be beneficial in reporting on how the practice of integrated spirituality in an FBO can fulfil the purpose which a number of scholars within the development discourse propose, in enhancing development goals.

It is accordingly hoped that the outcome of the case study of LTE will encourage Christian Development Organisations to practise the Christian faith more confidently, assured by the knowledge that once impoverished people appreciate the truth of what their worth is by virtue of being made in the image of God, and what purpose they were created for, they can be set free on a path of economic, emotional and spiritual emancipation.

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