

**The Relationship between Baptism according to John Calvin and
Transformation as a Diaconal Concept**

Presented by

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DEDICATION

This has been an exciting, tough, engaging and eye-opening academic journey. Indeed, it became bloody tough and sweat-flushing! To my wife MARTHA PHIRI and our dear three children: MARANATHA, MARTIN Jr and MARIANTHIE, thank you for allowing me to be out for one academic year when you needed me the most. Your moral and spiritual support has been astounding. Your prayers and encouragement helped me to sail through to the other shore of the sea of knowledge. I further dedicate this piece of work to my late Father JOHN MWALE and late Mother MARGRATE PHIRI. Thank you posthumously for raising me, and it would have be much to your delight to witness my successes for your pride today, Continue Resting.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Since the 1990s, transformative diaconia has developed as a theological model for doing diaconal work. This suggests that diaconia is an important ministry in the life of the Christian Church for addressing both the spiritual and social issues affecting society and people. Through diaconia as a ministry department my own Church (Reformed Church of Zambia) expresses commitment to address the social needs affecting humanity. However, from my physical location as a member of the Church and leader, there appears a lack of spiritual understanding of diaconia. Therefore, there is a need to explore the connection between diaconia and baptism, because the spiritual strength of the Church is the greatest in her sacraments for both Eucharist and baptism. The link between baptism and diaconia has not been researched much yet, whereas the connection between Eucharist and diaconia has received more attention. Diaconia seeks to attend passionately and with love to the physical needs of people and entire well-being of the creation. The act of diaconia in the context of the Christian religion takes the form of response through action towards humanity in distress, unable to lead a dignified life. The ugly scenes of poverty and suffering in Third World countries such as incurable and terminal diseases, wars, corruption and injustices pose spiritual challenges to the Christian faith and to the significant role of the Church in society. This research is aimed at exploring possible theological interpretations by examining the relationship between baptism as envisioned by Calvin and diaconia expressed through the transformational model. Therefore, this thesis presents a theoretical discussion in order to understand the possible relationship between baptism and diaconia. The discussion is set in a conversation with the Christian faith and diaconal practitioners.

1.2 Problem Statement

The sacrament of baptism is one of the fundamental Reformed liturgical practices for public witness and existential individual presence. John Calvin, the Reformed theologian from Geneva,

noted in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, “Baptism is the initiatory sign by which Christian believers are admitted into the fellowship of the Church that is engrafted into Christ to be accounted Children of God.”¹ However, from my observation through social interaction with people as a congregational minister, I see that the connection between belief in God as espoused in the baptismal sacramental life of the Church, and diaconia as a concept in the concrete sense, appears challenged if not absent completely. This disconnection is usually seen in the separation of the sacrament of baptism itself from actual diaconal action without taking into account that theology at the conceptual level should be relational and practical. Therefore, as an indigenous African care provider, and minister of the Word, Sacrament and Pastoral Care, I undertake an attempt to bridge the gap between baptism and diaconia. The aim is to help to establish concrete and lived theological importance for the Church in the practice of diaconal work and other services. Richard Crouter, professor of Religious Studies at Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota USA, brings out Friedrich Schleiermacher’s perspective and theological position that theology should be practiced as a Christian consciousness that should be transmitted through a specific community.² The formation of a good conscience is a fundamental element of the community of faith. Therefore, in the perspective of Christian consciousness, I define consciousness as judgment of reason by which the members of the community engage with its faith, practice and tradition. Stressing the need for theology to be birthed from the experience of the Christian community, Norheim Bard Eirik Hallesby, an associate professor of Practical Theology from Norway, argues, “Christian life is fully and finally presented, visibly, tangibly, in both deeds and in words.”³ He is of the view that the Christian community must ask questions to its believing life system. Asking such questions will help the Christian community honor all creation as belonging to God, and thereby teach the community to dwell rightly and faithfully within God’s creation.

In view of the above problem, I will look at the relationship between baptism according to John Calvin and transformation as a diaconal concept as a way to try and contribute to bridging the dichotomy therein. The fact that Calvin is a Reformed theologian and a vital source of theology for the Reformed family including my own denomination (Reformed Church in Zambia), makes his views on baptism an important source to use. This study seeks to benefit from the baptismal

¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. by Henry Beveridge, p. 1600.

² Richard Crouter, *Shaping an academic discipline. The Brief Outline on the Study of Theology*, p. 117.

³ Norheim Bard Eirik Hallesby, *Practicing baptism. Christian Practices and the Presence of Christ*, p. 155.

theological insights as envisioned by Calvin for the diaconal growth of the Church in the 21st century. The Church is charged with the priestly function as well as the prophetic mandate to ensure human dignity for all. Hans Morten Haugen, professor of Theology, Diaconia and Leadership Studies in Norway, adds to the diaconal debate, “Diaconia must be undertaken in a non-discriminatory and holistic approach irrespective of people’s abilities, sex, condition and conduct or otherwise.”⁴ This research desires to bring harmonization between baptism as understood by Calvin and transformation as a diaconal concept.

1.3 The Main Research Question

1.3.1 How can the relationship between baptism as envisioned by John Calvin and transformation as a diaconal concept be understood?

1.3.1.1 Sub-Questions

1.3.1.1.1 What is John Calvin’s view on baptism in the *Institutes*?

1.3.1.1.2 What is transformation as a diaconal concept?

1.4 Key Definitions

1.4.1 Diaconia

Commenting on diaconia, Smith Tettey and Malan Nel define diaconia in the perspective of the responsible service of the gospel by the deeds and words performed by Christian believers in responding to the needs of people in society.⁵ Paulos Mar Gregorios, a well-known Orthodox theologian and philosopher, argues that authentic diaconia is more than giving of financial help, goods or services, and more than sharing of resources and personal goods. Gregorios emphasizes that diaconia demands taking upon oneself the self-sufficiency of the server, in order to feel and take on the sense of helplessness and needs experienced by the served.⁶ The two thoughts share aspects that describe diaconia as service to humanity through deeds and words for the well-being of society and its people. Both definitions stress the importance of the action of believers being

⁴ Hans Morten Haugen, *Diaconia as Christian Social Practice. An Introduction*, p. 123.

⁵ Smith Tettey and Malan Nel, “Transformational diaconia as educative praxis in care within the present poverty-stricken South African context”, p. 3.

⁶ Paulos Mar Gregorios, *The Meaning and Nature of Diakonia*, p. 12.

committed out of faith as a response to the needs of people. Therefore, in my view, diaconia is more than charity work, and more grounded in the Bible and theology as its motivation.

1.4.2 Transformation as a Diaconal Concept

Transformation is an important element for diaconal work. Therefore, diaconal work ventures to struggle for justice and bring transformation to marginalized societies and groups for a dignified life. Transformation is a process which involves change in thinking, social structures, and behavior of people and lives of marginalized people.⁷ Additionally, transformation can be viewed as a process to give an alternative way of life to marginalized and oppressed people. Cornie Groenewald, emeritus professor of Sociology from South Africa, defines social transformation as change in human relationships, communities, and the living conditions of people. It is the process of change in the conditions of the lifestyle of people and the qualitative change in the nature and character of human societies.⁸ Therefore, transformation as a diaconal concept is a holistic approach aimed at changing undignified human conditions to dignified living. Transformational diaconia transforms the social structures through acting out the possible alternatives to bring about well-being of life and creation.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

A discussion to link baptism as envisioned by Calvin to diaconia is necessary both for the spiritual and numerical growth of the Church and for research in the field of diaconia. In doing so, a theoretical approach and a literature review are preferred for this research. Bruce Berg defines qualitative research in terms of meanings, definitions, concepts and description of things.⁹ In another view, David Gray posits that “qualitative research seeks to comprehend issues within their specific domain.”¹⁰ Therefore, with this perspective in mind, qualitative research provides the means to access undisputed facts on a specific topic of interest through theoretical/literature review. However, as regards absolute and specific sets of interpretive practices, qualitative

⁷ Lutheran World Federation, *Mission in Context*, p. 32.

⁸ Cornie Groenewald, “Social Transformation: Between Globalization and Localization”, p. 18.

⁹ Bruce Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods and Social Sciences*, p. 6.

¹⁰ David Gray, *Doing Research in the Real World*, p. 164.

research does not favor one method over the other. This is simply so because there is no theory without bias or set of methods entirely applicable on its own.¹¹ Denzin and Lincoln elucidate that qualitative research remains open to other methods as well. Hence, in addressing the plurality of approaches available in qualitative research, Uwe Flick argues that qualitative research in its application is not based upon one unified methodological approach.¹²

In this research, literature review is used as an approach to look at the primary sources on Calvin's views on baptism in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* and transformation as a diaconal concept. I have chosen to look at baptism because it is a spiritual practice by the Church, and specifically Calvin's views represent the Reformed tradition which is close to me in my Church as a primary source of theology. However, I recognize the strong theological tension and debate around Calvin's views on baptism. With this in mind, my focus is on specific aspects of Calvin's views that are relevant and connect well with transformative diaconia. The notions that I will work with as espoused in Calvin's baptismal and sacramental theology are regeneration, sanctification and justification, and dying and rising with Christ. In this research, transformation has been carefully chosen as a diaconal concept and is viewed in order to closely relate it to baptism within Calvin's concept of baptism. Therefore, I expect that the transformational model of diaconia corresponds well with baptism as a spiritual liturgical practice of the Church.

In the light of the above, the researcher used critical analysis of the study literature as a method. I critically analyzed the literature on the relationship between diaconia and baptism as envisioned by Calvin, and transformation as a diaconal theory. However, given that transformational diaconia is a relatively new diaconal concept, there is little literature that specifically links the two very well. The positive note of this research is that my own background as a congregational minister motivates me to explore this relationship to motivate the local congregation to embrace the spirituality of diaconal work. While, to the contrary, the theological disconnection between baptism and transformational diaconia as a concept results in dichotomization. This research seeks to close this wide gap and conceptualize the connection through a process of critically reviewing the study literature using a theoretical analysis approach. In achieving the objectives of this

¹¹ Denzin and Lincoln, *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*, p. 2.

¹² Uwe Flick, *An introduction to Qualitative Research*, p. 16.

research, the researcher posed critical and relevant questions in order to deepen the understanding of the relationship between baptism and transformational diaconia.

1.6 Research Methods

As indicated above, this research employed a qualitative approach by using critical literature analysis as a process to synthesize textual material. Using literature review as an approach, texts are used to make sense of the world and construct and justify a logical diaconal theological position. Sue McGregory argues that critical text analysis challenges us to move from seeing language as a mere abstract to seeing words as content and meaning in a particular historical, political and social environment.¹³ Allan Lucke adds that texts are inter-subjective, thus they involve social and discursive relations between humans and subjects, writers and readers, and speakers and listeners.¹⁴ This is very important to the field of diaconia, which deals with social problems of people. Therefore, in this research, I relied on critical text analysis as an approach because texts position and construct individuals using meanings and ideas. The researcher consulted Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* on baptism, secondary sources including the World Council of Churches' report on diaconia and transformation, and other supportive literature, academic sites, articles and journals relevant to the study. The sources were subjected to critical analysis and synthesis. The data have been carefully reviewed, analyzed, synthesized and applied to the subject at hand.

1.7 Relevance of the Study

This research seeks to make an academic contribution to the diaconal discourse, specifically on transformational diaconia in relation to baptism, which is a spiritual practice of the Church. However, to achieve this objective, this research joins the current voices that have commented on the connection between sacramental theology and diaconia in general. Some of the notable scholars in this field include Erica Meijers and Smith Tettey and Malan Nel. Meijers is a faculty

¹³ Sue McGregory, *Critical Discourse Analysis: A Primer*, p. 2.

¹⁴ Allan Lucke, *Text and Discourse Analysis*. New York: American Educational Research Association, p. 13.

member and lecturer of Christian Social Services at the Protestant Theological University, Netherlands. Meijers wrote a well-researched article titled ‘Come and Eat: Table fellowship as a fundamental form of diaconia’, in which she mainly linked diaconia to the Eucharistic celebration of the Christian liturgy using the views of Calvin on the Eucharist. Meijers looked in detail at the ritualized Eucharist from the diaconal perspective on meal sharing and the openness of table fellowship. Smith Tettey and Malan Nel condense diaconia as service by deeds and words performed by Christian believers in response to the needs of people in society. On the other hand, Ignatius Swart argues that ‘the Church in diaconia implies the God given mandate’ to participate in God’s mission in the world.

As stated above, there is little written on the rationale to link baptism to diaconia. Therefore, the Church’s sacramental participation in Christ determines the ecclesial praxis in the service of mercy to others in form of diaconia.¹⁵ The societal aim of this research is to teach the Christian community to honor the creation as belonging to God, and thereby dwell rightly and faithfully within God’s creation. Therefore, linking baptism to transformation as a diaconal concept will contribute to the body of knowledge, and the proceeds of this relationship will help to enrich the practice of diaconia. At the end of this research, I hope to establish a concrete and relevant theological relationship between baptism and diaconia that will be able to summon critical reflective action by the Christian Church. Further, the outcome will also specifically contribute to the Reformed Church in Zambia with a critical theological diaconal perspective that respects human dignity while engaging with society in its spirituality.

1.8 Literature Review

The starting point of this discussion is the need to shift to transformational diaconia as an alternative to the practice of diaconia. It is important to ask questions at this point: What is transformational diaconia? How can baptism help in deepening the understanding of transformation as a diaconal theory? The report of the central committee of the World Council of

¹⁵ Hankbong Kim, *Person, Personhood, and the Humanity of Christ: Christocentric Anthropology and Ethics in* Thomas F. Torrance, p. 161.

Churches on ‘Diaconia and Transformation’ observed and proposed transformation as a new diaconia concept which is theologically holistic and includes transforming social structures.¹⁶ On the other hand, Smith Tettey and Malan Nel argue that self-understanding of persons in the social machinery is cardinal for the transformation of every society.¹⁷

However, my reading on the subject of baptism as envisioned by Calvin brings in notions such as regeneration, sanctification, and justification, the work of the Holy Spirit, and dying and rising with Christ, which is emphatically the union with Christ. Calvin defines a sacrament as “an outward sign by which the Lord seals on our consciences the promises of God’s good will towards us in order to sustain the weakness of our faith: and we in turn attest our piety toward him in the presence of the Lord and his angels and before men.”¹⁸ Therefore, baptism is a sacrament of faith, a mystery to attest that Christian believers are buried together with Christ so that they may become dead to the flesh and be alive in God. Calvin observes that Christian believers obtain regeneration from the event of the Christ death and resurrection when we are sanctified by and imbued with a new and spiritual nature.¹⁹ The implication of this relationship is that those who are baptized are not merely experiencing it but at the same time are able to reflect on the glory of God as they are transformed by the Holy Spirit into the likeness of God with an ever-increasing splendor. According to Calvin, baptized members live for the sake of Christ, Church and the world which Christ loves while waiting in hope for the manifestation of God’s new creation.²⁰ Commenting on transformational diaconia, the Lutheran World Federation handbook on diaconia, *Diaconia in Context*, maintains the argument that diaconia is a theological concept that points to the very identity and mission of the Church. The identity and mission as noted above mean a ‘call to action’, a response to challenges of human suffering, injustices and care for the entire creation.²¹ Anderson argues, “Jesus is a transformational minister who by being the son of the father was a servant and

¹⁶ World Council of Churches, “Theological Perspective on Diaconia in 21st Century (Diaconia for transformation)”, [Theological Perspectives on Diaconia in 21st Century | World Council of Churches \(oikoumene.org\)](https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/publications/theological-perspectives-on-diaconia-in-21st-century).

¹⁷ Tettey Smith and Malan Nel, “Transformational diaconia as educative praxis in care within the present poverty-stricken South African context”, p. 9.

¹⁸ Charles Partee, *The Theology of John Calvin*, p. 272.

¹⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Trans. by Henry Beveridge, p. 861.

²⁰ Charles Partee, p. 272.

²¹ The Lutheran World Federation, *Diaconia in Context: Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment. An LWF Contribution to the Understanding and Practice of Diaconia*, p. 8.

benefactor of the world.”²² Wanda Deifelt and Beate Hofmann observe, based on Jesus’ discipleship, “Christians are not called out of the world, but most precisely into the world to offer witness to the message of love that restores hope, dignity and wellbeing for the entire creation.”²³ The very similar role of the Church includes prophetic messaging, denouncing wrongdoings and injustices while at the same time performing the priestly functions of announcing hope and wellbeing. Ignatius Swart builds the argument that “the Church in diaconia implies the God given mandate of participating in God’s mission to the world.”²⁴ The act of being involved in diaconia starts with God and it is in the diaconia of God as an integral part of God’s mission that the Church as community of believers is called together in the unity of the sacrament of baptism to participate in the mission of God in the world.

Transformational diaconia calls for a re-conceptualization of the Christian life as a way of life in both specific and multiple contexts by intensifying diaconia as an equal and necessary ministry. Norheim Bard Eirik Hallesby says, “Christian life is fully and finally presented, visibly, tangibly, in both deeds and in words.”²⁵ Hallesby further suggests that it is important for the Christian community to ask questions on its believing life with the view of teaching the Christian community to dwell rightly and faithfully within God’s creation. Hankbong Kim synthesizes, “the Church’s sacramental participation in Christ determines the ecclesial praxis in the service of mercy to others in form of diaconia.”²⁶ Through the sacrament of baptism the Church has union with Christ, and the union with Christ is clothed with the need and misery of the other. The Christ incarnate event is premised on Christ himself being identified both with humanity and with the creation as a whole within its misery and abject need for diaconal care. These notions will be further explored in Chapter Two on baptism, and Chapter Three on transformational diaconia.

²² Anderson Sherman, *Ministry on the Fireline. A Practical Theology for an Empowered Church*, p. 49.

²³ Wanda Deifelt and Beate Hofmann, “Towards a Comprehensive Concept of Diaconia. Care, Transformation, Empowerment, Advocacy and Conviviality”, *International Handbook on Ecumenical Diaconia*, p. 56.

²⁴ Ignatius Swart, p. 62.

²⁵ Norheim Bard Eirik Hallesby, *Practicing Baptism: Christian Practices and the Presence of Christ*, p. 155.

²⁶ Hankbong Kim. *Person, Personhood, and the Humanity of Christ: Christocentric Anthropology and Ethics in Thomas F. Torrance*, p. 161.

1.9 Structure of the Research

This research contains a total number of five chapters. The Introduction covers as Chapter One and states the research question and the problem statement, theoretical framework and methodology used. The second chapter looks at the views of Calvin on baptism as they are presented in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* focusing on ‘regeneration, sanctification and justification, dying with Christ and rising in union’. This chapter does not deal with historical questions nor engage in the debate with Calvin concerning sacramental theology. In the third chapter, the research looks at transformation as a diaconal concept. The fourth chapter addresses the main research question by connecting baptism as envisioned by Calvin to transformation as a diaconal concept. In conclusion, the fifth chapter looks at the observations drawn from the research and makes some recommendations.

CHAPTER TWO

BAPTISM AS ENVISIONED BY JOHN CALVIN

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter the main aim is to explore the views on baptism expressed by Calvin. My work in this chapter is based on the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* as translated by Henry Beveridge. The choice of the translation by Henry Beveridge is based on this translation being the most current compared with other translations. Beveridge's translation of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* is widely accepted and appreciated by many Reformed theologians and scholars alike. My interest is in the work done in Chapter 15 of the fourth book because it deals with the views of Calvin on baptism specifically. Additionally, other separate sources relevant to the subject in this chapter have been considered to support the primary source and to solidify the claim and argument advanced. Calvin's views on baptism are critical and central in the Reformed tradition and for a long time have influenced the Protestant and Reformed Churches in the way they view and practice baptism.

In responding to the dichotomization in practice between baptism and diaconia, the following questions need to be answered. What would be the relationship in which the views of Calvin on baptism can have a significant theological development for the practice of diaconia and spiritual growth of the Church? How does baptism relate to diaconia in its practice to establish a theological base that would help the Church in her diaconal mission? These questions will be addressed more fully in Chapter Four, while in this chapter I am exploring the theological aspects linked to transformational diaconia as reflected in Calvin's views. With the above questions in mind, I would like to look closely at the theology of John Calvin on baptism. To achieve this, I will look at specific aspects in Calvin's theology on baptism, and at the same acknowledge the ongoing academic debate and discussion on baptism as work in progress. The notions to be considered in this chapter include the following: baptism as a sign, purification and sanctification in relation to justification, and dying and rising with Christ in union. The notions named have been carefully chosen based on their critical significance in Calvin's views on baptism and their relation to

transformational diaconia in this study. The core concern of this study is transformational diaconia, and the views by Calvin are used to understand transformation as a theological diaconal concept.

2.2 Baptism as a Sign according to Calvin

The subject of baptism is one of the most heavily contested theological themes and concepts, allowing theologians to exercise the right to differ in their opinions on it. Calvin was born in Northern France, on July 10, 1509, and died on May 27, 1564. He was concerned with the reforms of the Christian Church and with understanding the message of the Holy Scriptures as the word of God. John Calvin as a theologian commented with passion on sacramental theology. The three notable reformers in the debate concerning sacramental theology were Luther, Zwingli and Calvin. Luther's view of sacraments was that they are outward signs that accompany a promise. Luther's argument emphasizes that every promise God makes is accompanied by a sign, for instance the rainbow that comes with the promise not to destroy the world by flood again. Luther further argued with the Roman Catholics that "penance lacked a tangible sign and agreed with other reformers in accepting only Baptism and Eucharist."²⁷ On the other hand, Calvin agreed with most of the views of Zwingli, to the effect that "sacraments are, as it were, seals to seal the grace of God in our hearts and render it more authentic, for which reason they may be termed visible doctrine."²⁸ Calvin's contributions to the discussion on sacraments brings a fresh encounter on themes such as the mystery of God's revelation, faith, the work of the Holy Spirit and most emphatically the union with Christ. Calvin defined baptism as a sacrament, and as the initiatory sign by which Christian believers are admitted to the fellowship of the Church, engrafted Children of God.²⁹ From the definition given above, one may however discern the theological significance that Calvin awarded to baptism in order to direct and reform the Christian faith. Therefore, the definition of a sacrament in the *Institutes* according to Calvin implies that "the signs give an august representation of things spiritual and sublime."³⁰ The definition highlights two critical themes in Calvin's reflection on the sacraments, including baptism. Calvin regards a sacrament firstly as an action of God and secondly

²⁷ Martin Luther, "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church" in Martin Luther, *Three Treatises*, 2nd rev.ed, p. 132.

²⁸ Gregory Miller, "Huldrych Zwingli" in Carter Lindberg (Ed.), *The Reformed Theologians*, pp. 161-162.

²⁹ John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge, p. 859.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 843.

as a statement of belief and obedience for those who are the participants. In his work, Calvin accepted only two sacraments, namely Baptism and the Eucharist. However, Calvin rejected the doctrine of transubstantiation and replaced it with symbolic instrumentalism as a theological interpretation of the sacrament of Eucharist. Calvin's symbolic instrumentalism holds that the Eucharist is a present happening that is brought about through signs. The sacrament of Eucharist is also important for Calvin's views on baptism because both stress the forgiveness of sins and hence go with each other as means of grace. Thus both baptism and the Eucharist as sacraments are a creation of a sign.

Killian McDonnell, a German theologian and executive director at the Collegeville Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Research, notes how Augustine's theory of signs may have influenced John Calvin in his conception of sacramental theology.³¹ In the Augustinian conception of the theory of signs, the sign points to the real and substantial issue beyond the sign itself. Augustine, in *The City of God*, notes that we shall finally behold the glory of God and then our minds and thoughts shall be fully transparent to each other. Calvin's conception of sacramental theology which includes baptism is linked to the thought of Augustine on the theory of signs. Nonetheless, from Calvin's views on sacramental theology, baptismal life in this context is understood as the very inner reality of new birth as incarnated in the daily life of the Christian believer. This new birth is enabled by the Spirit of God who uses people even in their weakness and through this external influence a believer must be able to sustain his or her personal and internal faith.

According to Calvin, Christian believers receive the right and the inheritance to belong to the community of believers in Christ and to be named Children of God through the sign of baptism. Calvin argues that baptism as a gift is given to humans by God with the aim that they serve the Christian faith in God and act as a testimony in public for the Christian confession of what they believe in. Moreover, the two themes are cardinal to Calvin's sacramental theology in contributing to the Christian faith as a sign and evidence of the assurance of the forgiveness of sins. Calvin contends that baptism is not just a mark by which Christian believers profess their faith before men, but that believers receive baptism in connection with a promise to be called Children of

³¹ Killian McDonnell, *John Calvin, the Church and the Eucharist*, p. 14.

God.³² Those who believe shall receive baptism with a promise that “if they believe”, they “shall be baptized”.

To further explain baptism as a sign, Calvin links baptism to the Old Testament Jewish practice of circumcision. Calvin looks at circumcision as an event and a sign aimed at solidifying the covenantal relationship established by God with his people. Calvin’s theoretical framework on the theory of infant baptism corresponds to Jewish circumcision to imply inclusivity of all humanity. In Calvin’s theoretical conception, baptism occupies the place of circumcision to fulfill the same office among Christians.³³ Therefore, Calvin sees baptism and circumcision as the same confirmation of God’s covenant, which transcends from the Old Testament and continues in the New Testament. Here, in my view, it thus appears that for the Christian community, the reality of baptism lies not in the elements of baptism but in the fact that the elements are a sign and the means to the ultimate grace of God. Hence baptism is a sign that points to the saving grace of God for those who are able to believe and acknowledge baptism. Calvin further argues that it is a matter of indifference whether baptism is to be conducted by immersion or sprinkling, though he acknowledges that the ancient Church practiced immersion.³⁴ Another important aspect of baptism as a sign according to Calvin is confirmation of the faith of a believer, “for he consecrated and sanctified baptism in his own body, that he might have in common with us the finest bond of union and fellowship which he designed to form for us.”³⁵ Here, in no uncertain terms, Calvin recognizes the importance of baptism not just for an individual, but for all members of the faith community through which we enter, with one consent of faith and with love, into union with one another with whom the sign of baptism is shared equally.

2.3 Baptism as Sanctification, Purification and Justification

Sanctification and purification in relation to justification are among the evident notions in Calvin’s views on baptism. Calvin talks about sinners receiving forgiveness through baptism. He looks at

³² Ibid., p. 859.

³³ Ibid., p. 865.

³⁴ David Hall and Peter Lillback, *Theological Guide to Calvin’s Institutes*, p. 373.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 861.

baptism as a process which explicitly points to the fact that Christian believers are washed of their sins through the blood of Jesus Christ. In this process the Christian community holds the task to continually preach the gospel. Therefore, the washing away of sins implies a sign and token which gives reference to the sacrament of baptism as a product of the gospel preached by the justified community of faith. Arising from the above statement, for Calvin the goal of sanctification is union with Christ by which Christian believers participate in the benefits and blessings of Christ.³⁶ On the other hand, the opposite is also true that without being in Christ, Christ remains outside Christian believers who as such are separated from him and have no hope of attaining sanctification. Union with Christ means being engrafted into him as recorded in Romans 11:17, and therefore those who are outside Christ have no benefits from Christ and cannot be called the Children of God. The sign of baptism implies being baptized into Christ and buried with him into his death. Calvin here notes, “the sacrament of baptism presents Jesus Christ to the Christian believers so much more clearly as He has been shown to the people more nearly, since He was given and revealed to be just as the Father had promised.”³⁷ Calvin is acknowledging the very fact that baptism provides the evidence of witness to the Christian believers, and that they are purified and washed free of sins. The typical and traditional water element used in the administration of baptism is a sign implying the process of being washed in the blood of Christ and the sanctification of the soul. The Holy Spirit as the chief witness convinces Christian believers and confirms this testimony upon Christian believers of their purification from their iniquities.

The practice of baptism also affirms the mercy of God as a gift received following the forgiveness of sins procured by Christ for humanity and the entire creation. Calvin elaborates that baptism serves as a sign of our confession before men, even though it is also a mark to indicate our open and public declaration that we are ranked among the people of God.³⁸ Through the sign of baptism Christian believers testify their unity with the Holy Catholic Church in worshiping one God. In baptism, people publicly profess their faith in what they believe in their hearts, what they conceive with their minds, and what their tongues boldly confess. To justify this position on public confession and conduct, Calvin quotes 1 Corinthians 1:13 to illustrate a point with a biblical picture.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 861.

³⁷ John Calvin, p. 507.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 864.

By the very nature of being baptized in Christ's name, people are devoted to him and have sworn allegiance to him before men to confess only the Christ.³⁹ Having been persuaded that it is the Spirit of God who speaks to Christian believers through the sign of baptism, and that it is Christ himself who washes away the sins and prevents corruption, Christians believe that forgiveness and salvation are only found in Christ.

Moreover, according to Calvin baptism was appointed by the Lord as a sign and token of purification and sanctification, and therefore it is emphatically a sign and seal of assurance for the forgiveness of sins, buried and forgotten and never to be remembered. It is therefore equally important to recognize for the Christian community that the will of God is for those who believe to be baptized for the remission of their sins and impurity. It is important to further recognize that the believers' absolution and salvation is not perfected by water possessing the virtues of purification, regeneration and renewing unto salvation, but that the knowledge of such gifts are to be perceived in the sacrament of baptism as a gift.⁴⁰ This is critically vital in suggesting that, to the believers, water on this occasion only plays the role of signifying the actual sanctification in the sign of baptism. However, for Calvin baptism does not bring cessation to the corruption of the body. Baptism makes the desires of the flesh drown, so that sin is mortified and no longer has dominion over the baptized believers of Christ. Thus sins remain in the body, but are not able to rule and reign if believers faithfully hold on to the promise God has given to them through the practice of baptism.

It is clear at this point, therefore, that for Calvin, sanctification, purification and justification are divine aspects of grace. In them and through them believers have the grace to be declared righteous and hence clothed with Christ's righteousness. Christian believers at baptism are set apart and made holy out of the union they have with Jesus Christ. Throughout the span of living on earth, Christian believers struggle with the residues of sin and therefore need to be continually cleansed. This kind of cleansing is continuous and progressive as an aspect of sanctification, yet on the other hand justification is definitive. Calvin writes: "the sinner receives forgiveness by the ministry of the Church by the preaching of the gospel that believers are washed from their sins by the blood

³⁹ Ibid., p. 864.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 860.

of Christ.”⁴¹ Here Calvin tries to demonstrate that the guilt of sin is taken away by Christ’s atoning sacrifice so that believers may not come to the judgment of God. This is achieved by the process of washing which takes away the wicked and sinful nature of the flesh by the Spirit of God. Therefore, baptism as a sign is the public evidence that forgiveness has been granted.

2.4 Baptism as Repentance and Regeneration

Calvin perceives regeneration as birth out of faith. This is a critical thought to understand that for regeneration to occur, one must be able to undergo the process of repentance and be able to recognize the mercy of God as recorded in the gospel.⁴² Moreover, Calvin defines repentance as “the true turning of a Christian believer to God arising from a pure and earnest reverence of Him.”⁴³ For Calvin, repentance hinges on the very fact that one must turn to God in totality, and this in turn subjects the old person to death and leads to one being filled and empowered by the life-giving Spirit. Furthermore, Calvin notes that by baptism Christian believers are initiated not into the name of man but into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Therefore, repentance and regeneration according to Calvin are two different notions yet strongly related, and to a large extent depend on each other. One ought to confess one’s belief in God and baptism provides such an opportunity, “but if baptism was of God, it certainly included in it the promise of forgiveness of sin, quickening of the Spirit, and communion with Christ.”⁴⁴ In essence, for Calvin forgiveness of sins also include aspects of washing, cleansing, and removing of all that is evil and its corruption, and practicing to do the good.⁴⁵ However, since the nature of the old man is hostile to God, believers must deny their own nature and dress in righteousness to do the righteous acts that are pleasing according to the design of God.

Another aspect of baptism according to John Calvin is that baptism in Christ means new life. This is an important aspect which touches directly on transformation as a concept, and I shall later return to this concept in relation to diaconia in Chapter Four. Calvin’s view on new life is that believers

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 860.

⁴² Ibid., p. 862.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 863.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 866.

⁴⁵ Les Galicinski, *John Calvin’s Doctrine of Sanctification*, p. 12.

are buried with Christ, and by baptism into his death they may walk into new life.⁴⁶ By these words Calvin exhorts Christian believers not only to imitate Christ because they are admonished to do so by baptism. Calvin teaches that just as Christ died, Christian believers emphatically die to the human lust and flesh which is at enmity with God and, as he rose, believers also rise to righteousness. Calvin condenses that baptism does not save Christian believers in the sense of intimate absolution and salvation as perfected by water, but in the sense that they possess the knowledge and certainty of the gifts granted in the sacrament of baptism by those who receive it with faith and affirmation as a gift from God.

Calvin decides to stretch the matter even further: “by baptism Christ has made the Christian believers partakers of his death, engrafting them into it.”⁴⁷ This statement carries the theological significance of how baptism as a sign gives inheritance to the candidates of baptism to become sons and daughters of God. To illustrate this process, Calvin uses the example of the fig tree that sucks through its roots the nutrients for its nourishment. Calvin’s views on baptism therefore are that “those who partake into baptism with true faith, truly feel the efficacy of Christ’s death in mortification of their flesh, and the efficacy of his resurrection in the quickening of the Spirit.”⁴⁸ The statement above shows Calvin’s exhortation that Christian believers must first be dead to sin and then come alive unto righteousness. Calvin’s view on regeneration is presented in a two-point category as follows: firstly righteousness is attained by forgiveness of sins and then by imputation of righteousness; secondly it is by the grace of the Holy Spirit that the Christian believer’s newness of life is formed. In addition, Daniel Migliore, a professor emeritus of Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary in USA, observes that baptism is portrayed as new birth by the Holy Spirit and a gift from the Spirit.⁴⁹

Therefore, our new life in Christ is attained at baptism as we are buried with him in the practice of baptism. Thus, according to Calvin, just as Christ died, we must die to our lusts, and as he rose, we shall rise to righteousness and be engrafted into him.⁵⁰ Those who truly receive baptism with

⁴⁶ John Calvin, p. 861.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 861.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 861.

⁴⁹ Daniel Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding. An Introduction to Christian Theology*, p. 295.

⁵⁰ John Calvin, p. 861.

faith, feel the efficacy of Christ's death in the mortification of their human bodies and of Christ's resurrection in the quickening of the Spirit. Calvin uses the word lust to refer to human gratification which works against God out of egocentrism, and thereby lacks the knowledge of the reign of God. On this basis in Calvin's theoretical framework, Christian believers must be dead to their lust and be alive unto righteousness. Hugo Lundhaug, professor of Biblical Reception and Early Christian Literature at the University of Oslo, presents baptism as an important turning point in the history of the soul, putting a premium on conversion, purification and repentance as important factors for regeneration.⁵¹ The union with Christ has the characteristic dynamic of dying to the self and living to the divine life, according to Calvin. The salvific will of the Father embraces all, and therefore baptism as a sign becomes necessary for being united once again with Christ and becoming a link to all persons of good will to God in their act of worship and living to the best of their knowledge.

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have looked at Calvin's theological interpretation of the sacrament of baptism by focusing on specific notions, namely: baptism as a sign, sanctification, purification and justification, regeneration and repentance, and dying and rising with Christ in union. In the views espoused by Calvin, baptism takes on the meaning of a sign and ushers believers of Christ with confidence into the community of God. Through baptism Christian believers are engrafted and are privileged to be called the Children of God with the right and the inheritance to become part of the community of Christian believers. Calvin's theological emphasis on baptism as a sign indicates that baptism has no meaning in itself, but is only the means of Grace. Secondly, baptism as a sign puts forward Christ as the atoning sacrifice who takes away the sins and sinful nature of the old person so that he becomes a person after God's mind and heart.

The other important aspects to consider from Calvin's views on baptism are sanctification and justification. Here Calvin theologizes that sinners receive forgiveness of their sins from God. Calvin argues further that through sanctification as a process, Christian believers are continuously cleansed, while justification is definitive. Yet both are aspects of faith that largely are

⁵¹ Hugo Lundhaug, *Images of Rebirth. Cognitive Poetics and Transformational Soteriology in the Gospel of Philip and the Exegesis on the Soul*, p. 127.

interdependent. Baptism acts as the evidence that Christian believers are purified and washed from sins. The Holy Spirit is the chief witness who convinces people and confirms the assurance of the testimony of their purification from their iniquities. Furthermore, Calvin teaches that baptism comes with the mercy of God for humanity, and saves as a sign of unity in the Holy Catholic Church as Christian believers worship one God. However, there is a contrast in the argument of Calvin when he argues that baptism does not take away sins of the body, but does believe that baptism subjects the desires of the flesh defeats sin without it ever having dominion over men again. However, I agree with Calvin's viewpoint that the remains of sin in the body are like shells and are powerless to reign when a believer holds on to the promises of God in baptism.

Calvin perceives repentance and regeneration as products of faith in God; that is to say, one has to be rooted in the gospel to experience it. This involves total submission whereby the old person is subjected to death, and the new person is filled and empowered by the Spirit. Additionally, for Calvin, repentance and regeneration are a process and synonymous with each other but yet slightly different. Here, Calvin does not treat repentance separately from regeneration, but as co-partners in the lives of Christian believers. Repentance is essentially washing, cleansing and removing of all evil and its corruption, and being able to practice the good. The believer must choose to love God and deny the desires of the flesh unto righteousness in order to act righteously. For one to be considered to have received regeneration according to Calvin, such a one must firstly have sins forgiven and be clothed in the righteousness of God, and secondly receive the Holy Spirit who brings about newness of life. The following chapter looks at transformation as a diaconal concept.

CHAPTER THREE

TRANSFORMATION AS DIACONAL THEORY

3.1 Introduction

The concept of diaconia has evolved over time and space within the social, economic and political context of humankind. The term diaconia comes from the Greek verb ‘diakonein’, which means to serve people including the poor, marginalized and oppressed.⁵² In this chapter, I will respond to the second sub-question: What is transformation as a diaconal theory? How is this theory unique as a diaconal approach? To do this, I will explore what others scholars in the field of diaconia have said about transformation as a concept. I have provided a brief historical overview to follow through and understand the development leading to the formulation of transformational diaconia as a concept within the scope of this study. I will explain the notion of transformational diaconia and describe its characteristics. However, it needs to be asked whether transformative action safeguards the promotion of human dignity for all and the creation. Further, does faith include human rights in its motivation as an element for transformative diaconia? These questions will help to understand what transformational diaconia means.

3.2 Transformation as a Holistic Model

Transformational diaconia is a relatively new concept in diaconal studies which has only come up since the 1990s.⁵³ The World Council of Churches in its report of 2012 refers to the shift towards transformational diaconal concept as a “transformative period” which took off from the 1990s.⁵⁴ I agree with the observation noted by the World Council of Church on diaconia for transformation as being a valid case to consider. Carlos Emilio Ham Stanard, diaconal theologian and director of

⁵² Willbrod Mastai, *The role of Diaconia from the African (Tanzanian) perspective and how it contributes to the global situation*, p. 139.

⁵³ World Council of Churches, “Theological Perspective on Diaconia in 21st Century (Diaconia for Transformation)”, [Theological Perspectives on Diaconia in 21st Century | World Council of Churches \(oikoumene.org\)](http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/publications/theological-perspectives-on-diaconia-in-21st-century).

⁵⁴ Ibid..

the Evangelic Seminar in Cuba, argues for transformational diaconia by alluding to the fact that “diaconia is not to be seen as an end in itself, rather seeking a transformation of society that leads to building inclusive and just societies, in other words, building Koinonia.”⁵⁵ The Faith World Conference on ‘Faith and Order’ held in Santiago de Compostela argued for transformative diaconia as an alternative by connecting diaconia to fellowship with the community of believers: “the Church as koinonia is called to share not in only the suffering of its own community but in the suffering of all; by advocacy and care for the poor, needy and marginalized; by joining in the efforts for justice and peace within societies; by exercising and promoting responsible stewardship of creation, and by keeping alive hope in the heart of humanity. Diaconia to the whole world and Koinonia cannot be separate.”⁵⁶

The World Council of Churches, in the document titled ‘Theological Perspectives on Diaconia in 21st Century: Diaconia for Transformation’, also argues that diaconia for transformation is commitment to social service to make the celebration of life possible for all.⁵⁷ This suggests that through diaconal action, faith may transform lives of people and their life situations as God’s reign. The marginalized, poor, and needy in society witness the reign of God in the form of transformative diaconia to transform abusive social structures. The World Council of Churches conference of 2012 on diaconia for transformation noted that “the God of the Bible seeks and effects change in concrete situations of life and more especially to those who are denied the same.”⁵⁸ This is indicative, therefore, that diaconia is an agent of change, and an action in God’s love seeking to transform people, political systems and to some extent the culture of the people that undermine respect for human dignity. Jesus Christ rebuked those who abuse power and deny justice to the poor. He encouraged the folks to repent and be transformed by the values of love, sharing, truthfulness and humility towards others and the entire creation.

⁵⁵ Carlos Emilio Ham Stanard, *Empowering Diaconia: A Model for Service and Transformation in the Ecumenical Movement and Local Congregations*, p. 144.

⁵⁶ World Council of Churches, “Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry”, Faith and Order Paper No. 111, p. 233.

⁵⁷ World Council of Churches,

[Theological Perspectives on Diaconia in 21st Century | World Council of Churches \(oikoumene.org\)](http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/publications/theological-perspectives-on-diaconia-in-the-21st-century)

⁵⁸ Ibid.

3.3 Characteristics of Transformational Diaconia

3.3.1 Holistic Model

Transformative diaconal theory accommodates communal and individual aspects of social transformation by transforming the power abusers, and those who increase inequality in the distribution of wealth and resources meant for the people. Smith Tettey and Malan Nel argue that self-understanding of persons in the social machinery is cardinal for the transformation of every society.⁵⁹ This means that a transformed people are those empowered to stand on their own and able through their personal experiences to help others to experience transformation. As Christians, the empowerment we receive from God is salvation of the soul and the ability to lead victorious lives over sin and against its pollution. Jürgen Moltmann, a German systematic theologian, known from his theology of hope, refers to Christian conversion as not limited to only the private and religious spaces, but as all-embracing of holistic salvation.⁶⁰ Therefore transformative diaconia is not limited in space, but inclusive of all people.

3.3.2 Self-Critical Reflection and Learning

Transformational diaconia starts with self-critical reflection by the actors, and its implementation in relation to society. This is an internal personal reflection and introspection that takes place before one tries to change others. However, change is not manipulation but an open and honest engagement, therefore it becomes constant and yet responsible and reformative.⁶¹ Human and cultural change in identity is sustainable if it begins from within to touch on the operating procedures of an organization. It is striking to note that self-critical introspection drives people to identify their competing commitments, leading to assumptions that prompt them to take immediate actions to overcome their immunity.⁶² This is a long-term process which fully requires critical

⁵⁹ Tettey Smith and Malan Nel, "Transformational diaconia as educative praxis in care within the present poverty-stricken South African context", p. 9.

⁶⁰ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, p. 103.

⁶¹ Nel Malan, "Identity driven Churches: Who we are and where are we going?", pp. 208-210.

⁶² Kegan and Lahey, *Immunity to Change: How to Overcome It and Unlock Potential in Yourself and Your Congregation*, p. 57.

thinking to attain change and consequently reach the desired and recognizable transformational results. Boshart adds that to transform is to improve people from the inside out as a matching enterprise with the Churches' mission and salvific action and with Christ's nature and purpose in society.⁶³ The concept of diaconia for transformation may highlight aspects that are crucial and need to be explored for validation such as self-critical reflection and learning. The Church's participation in transformative diaconia involves the people of God giving service to people in difficult circumstances. Transformation as a diaconal theory in the face of poverty and uncertainty recognizes the urgency and the participation of those who have been side-lined and marginalized by the oppressive social systems.

Through diaconia for transformation, marginalized people are carried along. In this way, the local people become actively involved as equal participants in a sustainable and transformative initiative. Hannes Knoetze, an associate professor of Practical Theology and Mission Studies at the University of Pretoria, South Africa, observes that the Church is better placed than institutions outside its mandate and with organized structures to be involved in development and the reduction of poverty in society.⁶⁴ Knoetze's observation is valid, though many times the Church may choose to side with the rich and powerful people in society for its specific gains. This, however, does not take away the Church's strategic position at the center of poverty and its transformative role. For Knoetze, the reason for the Church to be actively involved in transformative diaconia is to uplift the experiences of people and bring about hopeful local solutions that speak to transforming aspects of the social fabrics.

3.3.3 Advocacy and Political Action

Transformational diaconia is also about acting out so that people's intrinsic human rights are respected. In the context of numerous calamities and other factors that pose a threat to human dignity, advocacy speaks for transformation against abuse. Rudelmar Bueno de Faria, general secretary for ACT Alliance, Geneva, Switzerland, an organization responsible for providing humanitarian aid to poor and marginalized people, argues that "transformational development

⁶³ David Boshart, *Re-visioning Mission in Post-Christendom: Story, Hospitality and New Humanity*, p. 27.

⁶⁴ Hannes Knoetze, "Diaconia Trinitatis Dei as/and Transformational Development. A South African Perspective", p. 159.

involves change for those with power, wealth, and influence; those who control and use more than their share of resources, and those most adversely affected by oppressive structures and systems.”⁶⁵ Bueno de Faria further observes that social transformation is a radical process that must be done with love for oneself as a starting point, and this love must be translated into tangible and actionable effects on society and confront the oppressive structures and systems that adversely affect human happiness and well-being. Bueno de Faria further suggests that transformative diaconia may take the role of prophetic action, thus speaking against abusive social-political structures and speaking truth to the powers that be. This means that transformative diaconia may, when necessary, imply political action where there is abuse, corruption and dictatorial authority including confronting unjust military and economic leaders. To demonstrate the prophetic role against economic injustice, the Church has the role not just to critique governments but also to suggest solutions to the political problems.

In agreement with this, Cornie Groenewald puts three constructions of social transformation into perspective, human relationships, communities and living conditions, arguing that “Social transformation refers to change in human relationships, communities, and the living conditions of people. It is the process of change in the conditions of the lifestyle of people and the qualitative change in the nature and character of human societies.”⁶⁶ Groenewald emphasizes the role of people as part of the development to attain total life transformation. Nadine Bowers du Toit, professor of Diaconal Studies, referred to as Development Studies at Stellenbosch University, South Africa, suggests that development should be defined in terms of “transformation of existing economic, social and political structures, and relationships at the level of interpersonal, societal and international relationships.”⁶⁷ Thus, transformative diaconia questions abusive and tyrannical state policies in order for people to be able to access basic necessities. This action would be prompted as a result of advocacy for the fundamental universal human rights of the people who may have been made vulnerable by the process of injustice through endemic social, political and economic structures.

⁶⁵ Rudelmar Bueno de Faria, “Ethics for life: Religion, Development and Ecumenical Diaconia. The Significance of Religion and Development and the Critical Revision of the Development Concept”, p. 23.

⁶⁶ Cornie Groenewald, p. 18.

⁶⁷ Nadine Bowers du Toit, *Moving from Development to Social Transformation - Developments in the Context of Christian Mission*, p. 261.

3.3.4 Empowerment

Transformational diaconia is an expression beyond binding the wounds of the victims and doing acts of compassion. Rather it is an expression of love and care working towards the efforts of confronting and transforming the forces and factors which cause suffering and depression among people. Transformative diaconal ministry involves two aspects: “Comforting the victim and confronting the powers and principalities.”⁶⁸ The aim here is to heal the victim as well as the perpetrator of victimization. In the pastoral perspectives for care ministry, transformative diaconia also evokes a radical spirituality of struggles and commitment for transformation of wicked and sinful social structures, and for liberation of victims and the well-being of the entire creation. Therefore, diaconia is emphatically seen to be operating in tandem with transformative work as an expression of service out of love and in the anticipation of serving the interests of humanity in general, the oppressors as well as those exploited. The World Council of Churches, through the arm of its Central Committee on Ecumenical Diaconia of June 2018, promulgated the idea that transformational diaconia without challenging injustice and abuse of power ceases to be authentic diaconia.⁶⁹

According to the description given above and from my observations, transformative diaconia is about empowerment rather than power. Hannes Knoetze observes that the Holy Spirit has the character of empowering the Church just as Jesus Christ was empowered for ministry, and similarly the Church is empowered for ministry.⁷⁰ Furthermore, Knoetz defines empowerment as the process of helping one other to recognize strengths and potentials within oneself and be able to encourage and guide the development of qualities.⁷¹ Consequently, transformative diaconia demands substantial and legitimate social action with positive impetus to dismantle racism, oppressive cultures and as well all forms of discriminatory and exclusionary practices. Transformative diaconia works towards confronting evil and assuming a priestly role and

⁶⁸ World Council of Churches, “Theological Perspective on Diaconia in 21st Century”.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Hannes Knoetze, “Diaconia Trinitatis Dei as/and Transformational Development. A South African Perspective”, p. 158.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 158.

proposing alternatives that promote relationships with one another and with nature. Romans 12:12 speaks to the extent of diaconia as transformative. The followers of Jesus become the real agents of change, empowered by the Holy Spirit. In the context of transformation, diaconia is essentially an expression of pastoral support and help to those in need, and therefore creates an action meant to bring about a peaceful and fair society for all as intended by God.

3.3.5 *Non-Discrimination*

Transformative diaconia honors intrinsic and God-given dignity and the charter of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. People and communities are brought together from different life situations. In common with social aspects, advocacy and political action and empowerment, non-discriminative transformative diaconia goes beyond religious and denominational bonds that may look at the interest of Church members only. Non-discriminative transformative diaconia looks at humanity as the creation of God in need of service for well-being without attaching religious affiliation as a qualification in exchange for service. The Church is ideally an equal participant in the provision of non-discriminatory service with no bias towards gender, religion, culture, ethnicity, and sexual identity or otherwise. Gender equality is another aspect of concern in social transformation by the Church which requires the participation of both men and women in the promotion of gender justice. The patriarchal society uses gender domination as a tool for intimidation, suppression and oppression of womenfolk. Anuli and Lawrence argue that “the cause for gender domination is patriarchal organizational structure.”⁷² Sadly, this arrangement is so entrenched even in the Church today, especially in Africa, that the biblical text is rationalized against women. However, with sound theological inclusive interpretation of Scripture, the abuse of biblical texts against women can be corrected. The Church would therefore become an agent to bring about awareness to people and oppose this evil. Christ’s transformative salvation as projected through the written text is inclusive of every gender, race and language. In line with the above projection of thoughts on the role of the Church in the provision of diaconal services without discrimination, the Church is engaged and encouraged to be open enough to ensure the equality of men and women so that both have access to non-discriminatory control of resources. Hence it is

⁷² Anuli Okoli and Lawrence Okwuosa, *The Role of Christianity in Gender Issues and Development in Nigeria*, p. 3.

paramount that cultural and spiritual sensitivity be incorporated in this process leading towards social transformation.

3.3.6 *Peace and Justice Seeking*

Bueno de Faria observes that the notion of peace and reconciliation is vital for the Church to engage in social transformation ministry.⁷³ In this process, effective communication begins by listening that leads to respecting and uplifting the voices of those who are violated and marginalized.⁷⁴ Effective communication becomes a vital ingredient to invite people to the table for the development of all people. Therefore, the Church through effective communication is called to participate in inclusive preservation and environmental sustainability by raising voices to support societal change for the good of humanity and the creation in general. The Church's mission is fundamental towards activities leading to social transformation and promotion of corrective and sustainable peace and justice for all.

Graham Taylor, professor of Christian Sociology in the Chicago Theological Seminary and resident warden, Chicago Commons Social Settlement, observes that the function of the Church in society is more formative than reformatory.⁷⁵ In this case, justice is not a human achievement, but a gift from God. From the biblical perspective, the commitment of God is to provide justice to the people. The prophets of the Old Testament time proclaimed the message of justice and spoke against abuse of political power. However, promoting justice is a vital dimension for active discipleship and for building strong relationships between people in relation to God's creation and God himself. It is further argued, "Justice and peace belong together."⁷⁶ The Hebrew term for peace is "shalom", which has a broader meaning than just the absence of war. The term Shalom is comprehensive and the fundamental meaning refers to physical well-being and health, justice, completeness and undivided community.⁷⁷ On this argument, peace is an inseparable partner of justice, and therefore the absence of justice is the absence of peace.

⁷³ Rudelma Bueno Faria, p. 23.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 23.

⁷⁵ Graham Taylor, *The Social Function of the Church*, p. 305.

⁷⁶ World Council of Churches, p. 56.

⁷⁷ <https://zeroen-space.umosaic.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/The-Meaning-of-Shalom>.

3.3.7 Transformative Diaconia a Godly Action

Taylor's argument is that prayer and transformative diaconia in human society are inseparable⁷⁸. To back Taylor's argument, Saale Lazarus Baribiae at the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Niger Delta University in Nigeria, adds, "Transformation of any kind is initiated by God."⁷⁹ This indicates that God uses men and women, whom he created in God's image, to transform societies. These could be men and women found both within the walls of Church and outside. This is so because God is not a dictator and brings to pass the ultimate purpose of earth through men and women. Baribiae argues that when God wants to bring his purpose to pass here on earth, "God touches the hearts of praying people", placing a burden of transformation on their hearts.⁸⁰ The challenge is perhaps often seen when man refuses the mandate given by God to provide legal stewardship of the earth's domain.

Although the mandate and authority given to both man and the Christian community by Christ himself is delegated, and dependent on God, it is clear that nothing will happen without the active and passive involvement of man who has the legal authority to perform diaconal action. Therefore, transformative diaconia feeds into the image of God as loving and caring, who desires for the good of humanity that they live in community with each other and God himself as a community of love, peace and freedom. Theologically, as opposed to the narrow view presented by social analysts, both faith and human rights are beneficial notions to motivate diaconal actors to create their ethos and working style. It suffices to note that the role of the Spirit in diaconia is to bring new life and energy for liberating action.

3.4 Conclusion

As earlier indicated, transformational diaconia is a relatively new concept in diaconal studies. In this chapter, I have described transformation as a diaconal concept. Transformative diaconia is a

⁷⁸ Graham Taylor, p. 305.

⁷⁹ Saale Lazarus Baribiae, *Prayer and Social Transformation in Nigeria: A Christian Perspective*, p. 117.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

holistic approach for diaconal work. This includes transforming social structures by acting out alternatives to bring about well-being of life and creation. I have argued that transformative diaconia aims to provide service that brings about celebration of life and better possibilities in its inclusivity. This theory is targeted at responding to crisis through action that upholds human dignity by respecting the universal human rights of people when threatened by adverse factors. Thus, this reflective action involves two aspects: “Comforting the victim and confronting the powers and principalities”, as argued in the report on diaconal transformation of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches.⁸¹

Theologically, transformative diaconia is an important phenomenon for tackling today’s socio-economic and political challenges as well as a tool for transforming society with action proceeding out of love towards a distressful society. Essentially, transformative diaconia promotes good governance and social transformation. From a theological point of view, the concept helps in building structures that will add quality to the diaconal mandate for a proper execution responding to social challenges. Therefore, transformative diaconia feeds into the image of God as loving and caring. Furthermore, diaconal actors create their ethos and working style from the faith tradition based on the Bible and theology. I have demonstrated that transformative diaconia cannot be separated from being human rights based and as well as faith based. However, what looks like two aspects of diaconia go together very well in meeting the holistic mandate to bring about social transformation. Hence, transformative diaconia is aimed at engaging both faith and human rights as active ingredients in a transformative model.

Social transformation is a process of change which involves change in people’s living conditions. This includes the way in which people interact with each other in the community. Therefore, social transformation in transformative diaconia is holistic as opposed to taking a fragmented and segmented approach. I have further argued that social transformation is a process which involves love as a starting point. In this case, love must be translated into actionable assets to confront the oppressive social ills faced by people. Another noticeable dimension of my argument is education and development of new ways to empower people with the capacity to confront oneself with the truth. Here, transformative diaconia is prophetic action against social political structures, and

⁸¹ World Council of Churches, “Theological Perspectives on Diaconia in 21st Century”.

functions in priestly fashion by providing alternatives aimed at promoting relationships with one another and with created nature. In the next chapter, I will be answering the question, how does baptism relate to transformative diaconia in Christian life?

CHAPTER FOUR

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN DIACONIA AND BAPTISM

4.1 Introduction

The preceding chapters focused on the interpretation of baptism according to Calvin and on transformation as a diaconal theory. In Chapter Two, I discussed specific notions of Calvin's views in the debate on baptism in the 16th century. For Calvin, baptism is a "sign and means of grace of God". In Chapter Three, I explored transformation as a diaconal theory which is relatively new. In this chapter, I seek to respond to the main research question: What is the connection between baptism and transformation as a diaconal theory? This chapter specifically looks at this question to bring out voices concerning diaconia and baptism as a necessary relationship to be considered for diaconal theological discourse. The historical diaconal background in this research provides the basis for gaining insightful understanding for the purpose of diaconal theological inspiration.

Therefore, to understand the relationship between baptism as conceptualized by Calvin and transformation as a diaconal theory, it is important to look closely at how Calvin's understanding of baptism could help to generate a clearer view on transformation as a diaconal concept, and hence on the relationship between the two concepts. Therefore, it is worth investigating how Calvin's interpretation of baptism helps to project theological insights on transformation as a prototype of diaconia. This chapter seeks to provide answers to this and other related questions regarding the relationship between the concept of baptism according to Calvin and transformational diaconia as a concept.

4.2 Transformational Diaconia and Baptism in the View of Calvin

4.2.1 Transformational Diaconia in Relation to Regeneration

God in his mercies and provisions for humankind can be described rightly in relation to all types of spiritual goods such as regeneration. Calvin believed that God alone by his grace converts the Christian believer, God alone turns the evil in man to good. To a certain extent, Christian spirituality tends to lean towards impactful life-giving and transformative engagement in the world. Jerry Pillay, a South African theologian and minister in the Uniting Presbyterian Church of South Africa, argues that spirituality which is built in community builds communities.⁸² Surprisingly, I have noted with dismay that many commentators generally use the term regeneration to mean a simplistic change of position.⁸³ However, Calvin used the term regeneration in a broader sense to imply the wholesome change of a sinful person. Calvin recognized that a believer receives Christ by faith and hence gains the privilege to access sanctification.⁸⁴ For Calvin, regeneration involves man reflecting on the image of God and thus it is closely linked to repentance and sanctification.⁸⁵

As earlier noted, Calvin did not refer to regeneration as a spontaneous instantaneous event; instead, he recognized transformation as a kind of a process over time. Calvin's concept of regeneration in baptism gives way to a broader unique perspective, given the status of regeneration for a continuous transformation of believers in the image of God and manifesting in faith and in the unity with Christ. Transformational diaconia is achieved through a process that transforms the social structures of society, changes ideologies, and influences how people conduct themselves. Like regeneration in baptism, transformational diaconia applies the principles of reflecting on the image of God. The image of God is a proto-model of Christian transformation as initiated by God and empowered by the Spirit.

Furthermore, regeneration happens not in a moment, "sometimes it takes a day or indeed a year, uninterrupted, even as a slow progress; God abolishes the remains of carnal corruption in his elect, cleanses them from pollution, and consecrates them as his temples, restoring all their inclinations to real purity so that during their whole lives they may practice repentance."⁸⁶ Transformational

⁸² Jerry Pillay, "Reformation and Transformation Today: Essentials of Reformation Tradition and Theology as Seen from the Perspective of South Africa", p. 6.

⁸³ Olumuyiwa Olusesan Familusi, *Christian Conversion as a Tool for Social Transformation in Nigeria*, p. 50.

⁸⁴ John Calvin, *Commentary on John - Volume 1*, trans. Rev. William Pringle, pp. 12-13.

⁸⁵ John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge, p. 860.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 860

diaconia is a constant and continuous process to become better and renews the experiences of people so that they may attain dignified lives. Just as regeneration faces a slow progress, so transformational diaconia struggles with marginalized persons trapped in abusive cultural situations. Thus, transformational diaconia introduces fresh air into the fabric of society that brings about regeneration and new meaning of life. Transformational diaconia as an ongoing process rejects threatening circumstances to human life and affirms the sanctity of every life and the promotion of peace and justice in society. Additionally, transformational diaconia as an alternative direction for diaconal work seeks to address the dependence syndrome, practices and relations that have the potential to create a dividing line between the providers and receivers of diaconal action.⁸⁷ As a step towards deepening the understanding of transformational diaconia, the concept of regeneration in baptism provides relatable insights for transformational diaconia such as rebirth to give new experiences of life from pain and social abuse. The creation in general is suffering pain from the effects of sin and constantly shows us pictures of distress requiring transformation.

4.2.2 Transformational Diaconia in Relation to Justification

The doctrine of justification as understood by Calvin in his baptismal theology is of primary importance to transformational diaconia. Calvin's explanation of justification under baptism brings the character of salvation into the diaconal discussion. Therefore, this understanding creates a focal point in which transformational diaconia has its deeper meaning. Here, I will factor in the dynamics of justification as discussed by L.R.L. Mpho Ntoane. Ntoane is a South African theologian with a special interest in Calvin. He looks at justification from two movements, namely: God's way to the lost and dead, and the sharing and possession of life offered to them in justification.⁸⁸ These two aspects are important to a deeper understanding of transformational diaconia. The first movement of justification indicates the involvement of God in the affairs of the people; God moves towards the suffering community and transformational diaconia is the hand of God moving among the people to provide empowerment and present relationship. In this case transformational diaconia can be seen as mediation between God and people, and through diaconia God is fully involved in the affairs of people for transformative goals. The second movement of

⁸⁷ Lutheran World Federation, *Diaconia in Context: Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment. An LWF Contribution to the Understanding and Practice of Diaconia*, p. 43.

⁸⁸ Mpho Lekula Ntoane, *A Cry for Life. An Interpretation of "Calvinism" and Calvin*, p. 194.

justification is the progression of life from God through Christ in justification which liberates people. Here, the people of God experience freedom and abundant life wrested from the jaws of the oppressor. Paulo Freire, a Brazilian liberationist and educationist, notes, “the oppressed, having internalized the image of the oppressor and adopted his guidelines, are fearful of freedom.”⁸⁹ In the same manner transformational diaconia is aimed at helping to bring about progression of human life with dignity taken out of the hands of the oppressor with love inspired by God.

In his treatise on justification by faith in Book Three of the *Institutes*, Calvin speaks of double grace that Christian believers receive. This is in reference to sanctification and justification as benefits of being in Christ. Additionally, both justification and sanctification are two aspects of one benefit through faith by grace. Transformational diaconia is grounded in Christ who opens the heart with grace towards the afflicted society. From the diaconal perspective, justification and sanctification from sin mean individual transformation from sin, which in turn has a wider effect on societies fallen and broken as a result of sin which defiled the original nature of the world and purpose of God for the universe. The concrete personal experience of salvation has a consequence of justice and peace for society. Through transformative diaconia, the creation is sanctified out of misery and justified by the diaconal action progressing from love. According to Augustine, “love is a central focus for Christian faith in God; love refers to both the nature of God and to the divinely ordered nature of relationships.”⁹⁰

Theologically, diaconal transformation in relation to justification can be viewed as a call of God to remind humanity to attain constant renewal of the whole creation.⁹¹ Every bright morning is a result of a transformed past darkness breaking into a new dawn with a promise of hope. Therefore, transformational diaconia is a gift from God to create new social change for human progress. In transformational diaconia, conformism to the same oppressive social structures is rejected and God’s will is expressed and perceived in the light of the resurrected Christ. This call is an ongoing work of the Spirit in societies that leads to the noble work of diaconia. Transformation as a prototype for diaconia is a call to find a deeper meaning and purpose of life obtained through God’s

⁸⁹ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 47.

⁹⁰ Jeanrond Werner, *A Theology of Love*, p. 25.

⁹¹ Lutheran World Federation, p. 44.

ongoing empowerment.⁹² This is a holistic spirituality that is sensitive to people's suffering by providing solidarity through bold action. Cornelia Coenen-Marx adds that "our society, strongly characterized by the wish for autonomy and self-optimization, needs a counterweight to the commodification of the social structures."⁹³ Coenen-Marx's emphasis is on discerning the signs of the times to provide transformative actions to humanity in distressful circumstances. This action, however, sometimes starts on a small scale with works of compassion in the hope of bringing about social transformation in our times.

4.2.3 *Transformational Diaconia in Relation to Sanctification*

Essentially, baptism for Reformed Christian believers is more than a confirmation of their identity in Christ. One moves from the position of being outside Christ to becoming a child of God. In effect, Christian life is a journey of union with Christ in the Father and the reconciliation of all else in Christ. Susan Wood, a professor at Marquette University, USA, calls baptism a daily walk in the newness of Christian life in which the Christian undertakes a Christian ethics.⁹⁴ Wood argues that Christian ethics connects the new creature in Christ with the goal of humanity revealed in Christ. Wood's argument links up with transformational diaconia, which envisions new creation of life in its practice for all humanity. With the above argument, Wood may be talking about sacrificial service to others both in Christ and outside Christ and the general creation. Here, I agree with the reasoning that suggests that by faith Christian believers receive baptism as an expression of love which in turn impels them to mission. As Christ was sent on a mission, so the followers of Christ are equally sent on a mission to establish the city of God here on earth. The connection between diaconia and missiology is not on the basis of conversion but is a move to serve humanity and the creation to experience God's love and goodness. Therefore, baptism establishes persons to become members of the community and ministry, lay and ordained, and all other forms of discipleship to practice transformational diaconia.

The baptized community lives to witness to the world and declare the salvation brought by Christ to humanity and the creation in general. Tracey Mark Stout, associate professor of Christian

⁹² Ignatius Swart, "The Transformative Power of Diaconia - Theological Reflections from South Africa", p. 67.

⁹³ Cornelia Coenen-Marx, *The Transformative Power of Diaconia - An Eight-Headed Hydra*, p. 71.

⁹⁴ Susan Wood, *Return to your Baptism Daily: Baptism and Christian Life*, p. 202.

Studies at Bluefield College, USA, observes that “Christian Life is mission from baptism forward.”⁹⁵ According to him, this mission is to witness in the world the grace of God. In my view, this mission is meant for the active members of a baptismal community who mediate the covenant in the ongoing process and daily engagement of living. Out of obedience, baptism is the initial step for Christian life which models the convictions and actions of one’s whole life.

4.3 Baptism as Christian Life for Diaconia

Baptism, just like the Eucharist, offers basic models for Christian life that are enriching and captivating. In Calvin’s conceptual view on baptism, the notion of a sign of the forgiveness of one’s sins, renewal, adoption and entrance into the Church and separation from the world is an important theological position in the Reformed tradition of Christian life. Thus, baptism as a sign implies participation of a Christian believer in the victory of Christ over the dark world. Peter Schuler notes that baptized candidates are members of Christ, uprooted and separated from the corrupt source of life.⁹⁶ Baptized Christian believers are introduced to a transformed and sanctified life through baptism, a development of individual human personality, and are able to meet the needs of others. In diaconal work, all people are equal beneficiaries of diaconal empowerment. Calvin also looks at baptism as a sign of separation for Christian believers from the corruption and wickedness of the flesh into the eternity of God. However, this separation is not aimed at excluding or pushing away believers from being involved to address the ills affecting humanity in the world. In baptism, believers are therefore separated and called to live up to the godly expectation of the rich calling in baptism. This calling signifies forsaking of idolatry and confesses allegiance to Christ alone as the lord worthy to be served.

Wood argues that baptism is the criterion for membership in the community and for being recognized by the Church where both lay and ordained ministers are repositioned in accordance with the specific character of each calling.⁹⁷ The importance of living out baptism in everyday life follows from the resurrection of Christ which comes with renewal of life as well as a form of

⁹⁵ Tracey Stout, *A Fellowship of Baptism: Karl Barth’s Ecclesiology in Light of His Understanding of Baptism*, p. 339.

⁹⁶ Peter Schuler, *A Critical and Comprehensive Analysis of John Calvin’s and the Early Friends’ Doctrine of the Word of God*, p. 63.

⁹⁷ Susan Wood, p. 204.

spirituality. Baptism is crucial and holds the foundational attributes of Christian life such as service and sacrifice to others in need of transformation. Among the attributes of Christian life are selfless service with love and sacrifice for the other in society, as Christ commanded to serve the poor. What is more, baptism is representative of a journey of hope in which Christian believers deepen their communion with God the creator and enjoy fellowship with other believers in the body of Christ and in the world. Therefore, diaconia is an expression of the life that proceeds from baptism to the world with selfless service and love.

4.3.1 Personal Dimension of Baptism and Transformational Diaconal Experience

We can now look at the connection that personal experience of baptism has with transformational diaconia. First and foremost, baptism, as a sign of the grace of God, grants to Christian believers joy and gratitude for the saving grace and communion with God. Baptism as participation in Christ's death presents benefits to those who receive it as diaconal players. The benefits thereof include: sins washed away, which is transformation, "new birth by the spirit, enlightenment by Christ and re-clothing in Christ, renewal by the spirit and liberation into a new humanity in which barriers of division through gender and social status are transcended."⁹⁸ The personal dimension of living out baptism involves a transformed life as a process of repentance, conversion and transformation. Theologically, baptism is obedience to the words of Christ and commitment to identify with the poor and the weak. Here, the point lies not only in baptism itself but collectively both in his life and in his death in suffering love. This becomes one practical example of a clear commitment to follow Jesus Christ in submitting one's life for personal service to others. The second part of the personal dimension of baptism is 'baptism as a form of diaconia'. Through diaconia Christian believers are called to provide selfless service on behalf of Christ. Transformational diaconia as a form of baptism seeks to bring about renewal of life experience, and liberation to the entire creation through the empowerment of the Spirit of God that effects regeneration in baptism.

4.3.2 Ecclesial Dimension of Baptism and Transformational Diaconal Experience

⁹⁸ The World Council of Churches, "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry", p. 1.

To explain unity in Christ, the functions of the different body parts are often used as an analogy. The body is one with many body parts, and so in baptism Christ is the one head of the Church. In Christ, divinity is recognized and both the slaves and the free are one and united in Christ. 1 Corinthians 12:12-13 relates baptism to being united in the one body of Christ conjoined by one spirit. The ecclesial dimension of living out baptism emphasizes the unity in Christ and inclusivity of all. In this spirit, the table of Christ's salvation is open for the liberation of souls through the power of inclusion and unity. Therefore, transformational diaconia does not look at what disqualifies people for help, but sees an opportunity to serve people as a critical dimension for service. For the Reformed faith tradition, the promises of God conveyed in baptism are an indication of God's call and assurance of the promises. Both the vertical and the horizontal dimension of relationships do not happen independently from each other. In transformational diaconia, peace with God means the well-being of the other, there is no fellowship with God without sharing possessions, and there is no divine forgiveness without willingness to reach out to everyone. The ecclesial dimension of baptism emphasizes the ecclesiological unity and the willingness to be involved in diaconal work as a form of baptism to the community of faith.

4.3.3 Public Dimension of Baptism and Transformational Diaconal Experience

The public dimension of Christian discipleship implies participation in the mission of reconciliation, justice, empowerment and peace. Therefore, baptism as inaugurated by Christ embraces aspects of justice from sin, empowerment and peace with God and with the other. The question of public dimensions of living out baptism in relation to transformational diaconia refers to how Christians can witness to their faith in society and asks about the relationship and shared responsibilities with the state. Here, I want to focus on three things concerning baptized Christian believers, namely: family, Church and government. It is my considered view that the three entities complement each other in constituting a public space for practical Christian life. Practical Christian life includes diaconal activities such as addressing all abuses of human rights, inequalities and injustices.

4.4 Transformational Diaconia as Dying and Rising with Christ

Humanity seems to have deviated from the diaconal call and must continually be reminded of and called to transformation as a prototype for diaconal work. The concept of dying and rising with Christ can be linked to ‘metanoia’ in reference to transformation in the sense of re-creation towards a new creation centered on God and concerned with the well-being of others.⁹⁹ In transformational diaconia, dying with Christ means being with people as they experience pain and suffering, just as Christ suffered pain unto death. Transformational diaconia is typological, it hopes for new life arising from hopelessness. Here the focus is put upon Christ who is the giver of new life experiences, and upon God the initial creator of human life. Basic to the understanding of the movement from death to life as both historical and existential reality is the role and function of Christ as recreator.¹⁰⁰ Christ’s recreatorship is a foundational notion in both transformational diaconia and baptism as envisioned by Calvin. Through regeneration and sanctification, human experiences meet the true reality of change in Christ. The human spectacle remains human, but with a transformed perspective and change of mindset. Just as there is no life outside Christ, diaconia becomes charity work if it is not grounded in the biblical union with Christ.

In baptism, Christ is portrayed as “the embodiment of life”.¹⁰¹ Therefore, Christ’s creatorship means Christ is the origin of life and its beginning. Transformational diaconia brings out new life experiences from suffering, and sustains the life of hope emanating from the resurrection of Christ. Furthermore, transformational diaconia goes beyond binding the wounds of victims and performing acts of compassion. Rather it is an expression of love and care working towards the efforts of confronting and transforming the forces and factors which cause suffering and depression among people. Transformative diaconal ministry in the hope of rising with Christ is a vital reality which involves two aspects: “Comforting the victim and confronting the powers and principalities”.¹⁰²

4.5 Conclusion

⁹⁹ Wanda Deifelt and Beate Hofmann, “Towards a Comprehensive Concept of Diaconia: Care, Transformation, Empowerment, Advocacy and Conviviality”, p. 56

¹⁰⁰ Mpho Lekula Ntoane, p. 205.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 205.

¹⁰² World Council of Churches, [Theological Perspectives on Diakonia in 21st Century \(oikoumene.org\)](http://oikoumene.org).

In this chapter I looked at the connection between baptism and transformational diaconia and vice versa. This relational movement is entrenched in ecumenical spirituality which seeks to address human needs through holistic approaches such as transformational diaconia. The usage of the term transformation is thought in the perspective of Calvin in reference to the wholesome change of a sinful person. Regeneration for Calvin involves man reflecting on the image of God and is thus closely linked to repentance and sanctification. Calvin also holds that transformation is a process and does not happen as one-off incident. Transformational diaconia in relation to baptism has the attributes and characteristics of transforming social structures as a process over time aimed at changing ideologies and influencing the behavior and conduct of people. The principle of reflecting on the image of God forms the lens through which transformational diaconia looks at people with the image of God imprinted in them and leading to renewal of people's experiences for a dignified life. Transformational diaconia as an ongoing process rejects circumstances threatening human life and affirms the sanctity of every life and the promotion of peace and justice in society.

Calvin's explanation of justification under baptism brings the character of salvation into the diaconal discussion. The salvational aspect of transformational diaconia has been observed in twofold: firstly, as mediation between God and people, and secondly, as God being fully involved in the affairs of people for transformative goals. Here, transformational diaconia is aimed at helping to bring about progression of human life with dignity through the justification in Christ. In the riches out of justification, transformational diaconia opens the heart towards poor societies. The concept of dying and rising with Christ in baptism creates a diaconal way of thinking for the well-being of others in society. This is done through presence and relationship as foundational notions in baptism, and diaconia is enhanced by the vertical relationship with God and horizontal relationship with others.

Baptism is central to discipleship in the Reformed faith tradition. Baptism opens the door for people to become members of the faith community, with a recognized status to be part of the mission to establish the city of God here on earth. Baptism is crucial and holds the foundational attributes of Christian life such as selfless service with love and sacrifice to better the lives of others. Transformational diaconia as a form of baptism seeks to bring renewal of life experience

and liberation to the entire creation through the empowerment of the Spirit of God that effects regeneration in baptism. The ecclesial dimension of living out baptism emphasizes the unity in Christ and inclusivity of all. In this spirit, the table of Christ's salvation is open for the liberation of souls through the power of inclusion and unity. The public dimension of Christian discipleship implies participation in the mission of reconciliation, justice, empowerment and peace. Transformational diaconia, too, embraces these aspects for public mission. Therefore, transformative diaconal ministry in the hope of rising with Christ involves two aspects: comforting the victim and confronting the powers and principalities.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary

This study was divided into five chapters. Chapter One focused on giving the background to the study, identifying the gap between baptism and diaconia and stating the theoretical framework and relevance of the study. Chapter Two aimed at exploring baptism according to Calvin and the different layers that could be linked to transformational diaconia from Calvin's views on baptism. To achieve this, Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* on baptism was consulted in order to obtain a view of those specific notions of baptism relevant to the main question. Chapter Three of this study focused on defining and understanding transformation as a diaconal concept and brought out the characteristics of transformational diaconia. This was achieved by consulting the World Council of Churches' documents on transformational diaconia, diaconal scholars from South Africa and other scholars relevant to this study. Chapter Four addressed the relationship between baptism as understood by Calvin and transformational diaconia. This was done by linking the theological baptismal sacramental aspects to transformational diaconia and investigating how living out baptism relates to the character of diaconia. The last and final chapter gives a summary of the study. Also, given the gap between baptism and diaconia, this chapter gives a summary of the thesis and its recommendations, and my contribution to the body of knowledge of academia, church and society in as far as diaconal practice is concerned. As earlier noted, the dichotomy is a result of treating baptism separately and as a lone practice of the Church away from diaconia. In this study the transformational model as a diaconal concept has been used as a holistic approach to relate the spirituality of baptism and diaconia, and thereby deepen the understanding of the connections between baptism and diaconia. Discussing the link between baptism and transformation as a diaconal model, Calvin's views on baptism were used as a step to connect the Reformed spirituality and tradition to diaconia. A closer look at the views of Calvin in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* shows that baptism is an initiatory sign to become a member of the community of believers.

To explain baptism according to Calvin's baptismal sacramental theology, the following aspects were discovered: baptism as a sign, dying and rising with Christ unto the righteousness of God,

sanctification, purification and justification, and regeneration. In this research I established that the preceding baptismal aspects relate very well to the concept of transformation as diaconal theory. Further, it was discovered that for a person to become a member of the Church, she or he must be baptized in the name of the triune God (Father, Son and Spirit). The initiation into baptism comes with legal privileges for one to act in the name of the Church. Furthermore, baptism as a sign refers to the forgiveness of sins which happens together with regeneration. Therefore, baptism has an aspect of dying to the flesh and becoming alive unto the righteousness of God with the water element as a sign of purification and sanctification from sin. I also noted that baptism, when practiced with the notions of Calvin which include regeneration, justification, sanctification, purification, and dying with Christ and rising unto the righteousness of God, affirms the mercy of God as a gift received following the forgiveness of sins procured by Christ for humanity and the creation in general. Therefore, the theological implication for the mercy of God in baptism is that the Church should approach baptism with humility, dedication and an open heart towards Christian social services.

How can we now respond to the question, what is transformation as a diaconal theology? First and foremost, transformational diaconia is a relatively new study development for the practice of diaconia. The call for transformational diaconia goes beyond seeing diaconia as traditional diaconia, which looks at diaconia as an end in itself. Therefore, my observation while carrying out this study indicated that transformational diaconia seeks the transformation of society by building inclusive and just communities in which there is fellowship with one another and with God. In this vein the Church as fellowship, 'koinonia', is called to share not only in the suffering of its members but also in the suffering all others, to engage in advocacy and care for the poor, needy and marginalized by joint efforts for justice, equity and peace within societies. Additionally, it has been discovered that unlike other diaconal concepts, transformational diaconia strongly accommodates aspects of social transformation by changing the power abusers. Furthermore, theologically the empowerment to practice transformational diaconia is found in God as a gift of salvation, regeneration and repentance from sin and victorious life over its pollution. Transformational diaconia is also anchored in acting out so that peoples' intrinsic human rights are respected even by the oppressive structural systems. Transformation is a radical process, but must be done out of love as the starting point for change, and therefore love must be translated into tangible and actionable efforts. It was also discovered that transformation as diaconal theory goes beyond

binding the wounds of the victims; instead, it is an expression of love and care working towards confronting and transforming the forces and factors which cause suffering and depression among people in society.

The relationship between baptism and diaconia is an interesting interaction as observed in this research. From observation the two concepts share very specific and related theological baptismal sacramental aspects as seen in Calvin's baptismal theology. Calvin did not use the term transformation expressly, but his concept of regeneration shares many features with that of transformation. Both transformation and regeneration imply a capacity for changing something into a new model. In this case, it was observed that regeneration in baptism is aimed at transforming souls, whereas transformative diaconia brings change to societies. Justification and sanctification are other theological aspects which transformational diaconia and baptism share. The point of contact with diaconia in both justification and sanctification is their salvational character. It was discovered that transformational diaconia moves towards people as God's provision and act to seek and serve the lost, while at the same time sharing with others the possession of life. Here both justification and sanctification, and transformational diaconia seek to serve people and share the possession of life found in the riches of mercy of God's righteousness and good will for humanity and the general creation.

What has also been observed in this research is that transformational diaconia relates to the theological notion of dying and rising with Christ at baptism. Dying and rising with Christ is linked to 'metanoia' in reference to transformation in the sense of re-creation towards a new creation centered in God and concerned with the well-being of others. In transformational diaconia, dying with Christ means being with people in their low experiences of life, and rising with Christ means being able to rise with them towards hope. To realize this in transformational diaconia, Christ is the focus and giver of new life experiences, whilst God is the creator of human life. The other dimension of this relationship is when baptism is viewed as a model of Christian life for diaconia. This simply means that baptized Christians are introduced to a regenerated and sanctified life as a development of individual human personality to be able to help meet the needs of others. It has been discovered that at a personal level, baptism brings about new birth by the Spirit and enlightenment by Christ, and liberation into a new community without any social boundaries and discrimination. It has been discovered that to live out baptism means both obedience to God and a

form of diaconia where Christian believers seek to bring renewal of life's experiences and liberation to the entire creation through acts of mercy. Both the ecclesial and public dimensions of living out baptism foster unity and are conjoined by the Spirit to remain resilient. Transformational diaconia does not disqualify people but looks for an opportunity to serve humanity with dignity.

5.2 Recommendations

I want to specifically state that this study is especially helpful to the Reformed Church in Zambia. It is therefore aimed at bringing voices on board as far as the relationship between baptism and transformational diaconia is concerned in an environment where the gap between them is seen. More than ever, this study brings to the Church the voices and ideas of experts on diaconia, and is able to depict the gap that exists between baptism and diaconia within the practice in the Church. As a concerned congregational minister under the Reformed Church in Zambia, I realize the dichotomization between baptism and diaconia, and how baptism is more elevated than diaconia in the practice and minds of people. This remarkably implies that the Church's emphasis is more on baptism, and is thereby becoming more and more disconnected from the experiences of people and their physical needs.

Having worked for an institution which has little or no space for diaconal work to be given its rightful place of influence and prominence, I am challenged through this thesis to create a theological basis which will deepen the understanding of this relationship. I therefore treat the ideas of others discussed in this thesis as my own recommendations. By doing so, I believe the Church will realize this gap and embrace the theological discourse towards bridging the gap that has grown wider and deeper. Looking at the ideas of other scholars in this research gives a clear idea that there is truly a gap in the way the Church privileges baptism over diaconia. Carlos Emilio Ham Stanard, for instance, notes that "diaconia is not to be seen as an end in itself, rather seeking a transformation of society that leads to building inclusive and just societies, in other words, building Koinonia."¹⁰³

Arising from the above ideas, there is evidence for the need to deepen the understanding of transformational diaconia and its relationship with the Church through the mediation of baptism. I therefore recommend that the Church should link its baptismal theology to transformational

¹⁰³ Carlos Emilio Ham Stanard, p. 144.

diaconia to lessen the gap between the two resulting from a deficient theological basis. A commission should be set up to train ministers and deacons and prepare a change of curriculum at the universities and theological schools. The World Conference on Faith and Order held in Santiago de Compostela argues for transformative diaconia as an alternative for practicing diaconia: “the Church as koinonia is called to share not in only the suffering of its own community but in the suffering of all; by advocacy and care for the poor, needy and marginalized; by joining in the efforts for justice and peace within societies; by exercising and promoting responsible stewardship of creation and by keeping alive hope in the heart of humanity. Diaconia to the whole world and Koinonia cannot be separate.”¹⁰⁴ I concur with the position of the World Council of Churches on transformational diaconia that the Church should take it upon herself to develop theological interest to bring diaconia to its proper relevance by seeking to be with the poor, empower, and create relationships as an important aspect of the life of the Church and her significance in society. I further recommend that the Church carry out an empirical research to determine the extent of the gap, and how the general membership of the Church could contribute to finding specific homegrown solutions to this problem. The Church has the task of seeking to effect change in concrete situations of the lives of people, more especially of those who are denied the space and opportunities to thrive. Therefore, transformational diaconia as a form of baptism seeks to bring renewal of life experience in place of suffering, and liberation to the entire creation through the empowerment of the Spirit of God that effects regeneration in baptism.

Transformational diaconia is a newly developed concept, hence the field has little literature that provides theological links to baptism. I recommend to the academia in the field of diaconia to consider taking up the challenge by developing this concept further, and substantiate the argument with logical theological notions for the practice of diaconia. This research may not have brought out all the aspects of transformational diaconia. I therefore recommend further research which should focus on other aspects such as sanctification and justification, since the focus of this research was on transformation and only limited and necessary attention was given to explaining and understanding these other aspects in the light of transformation.

At the same time, transformative diaconia accommodates the aspects of social transformation to transform the power abusers, and those who increase inequality in the distribution of wealth and

¹⁰⁴ World Council of Churches. “Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry”, Faith and Order Paper No. 111, p. 233.

resources meant for people generally. Smith Tetley and Malan Nel argue that “self-understanding of persons in the social machinery is cardinal for the transformation of every society.”¹⁰⁵ I agree with Tatty and Nel on the need for the public to apply self-understanding, which is a pre-requisite for sustainable development. I recommend to the public/society to look at what transformative diaconia can offer to shape the sanctification of life of the baptized. This concept has advantages by embracing holistic social aspects, which makes it a receptive model for sustainable and people driven development. People are carried along in all the transforming processes aimed at improving the quality of life for people and the necessary social infrastructure for the good of life.

¹⁰⁵ Tetley Smith and Malan Nel, p. 9.

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DATA MANAGEMENT PLAN

1. General information

NAME OF STUDENT: Martin Mwale

NAMES OF THESIS SUPERVISORS: Dr Erica Meijers

DATE: June 12, 2022

VERSION:

2. General information about research and subject of the thesis

TITLE OF THE RESEARCH / THESIS:

The Relationship between Baptism according to John Calvin and Transformation as a Diaconal Concept.

SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT AND METHOD(S):

The nature of the research project requires theoretical/literature study to fully respond to the research question. The study requires a qualitative method of research where the researcher will engage in literature review relevant to the study. This will help in providing a sound and balanced theologically academic argument that will help in responding to the subject at hand. The researcher will consult both the secondary and tertiary sources, internet sources from authentic academic sites, articles and journals sharing the same interest.

TYPE OF RESEARCH DATA TO BE COLLECTED:

Theoretical/literature review from both the primary and secondary sources and other academic writings relevant to the study.

PERIOD IN WHICH THE DATA WILL BE COLLECTED: From 14th March 2022 to 20th May 2022.

3. Responsibilities

MANAGEMENT OF THE DATA DURING CONDUCTION OF THE RESEARCH:

Not applicable for theoretical literature study.

MANAGEMENT OF THE DATA AFTER COMPLETION OF THE RESEARCH:

Not applicable for theoretical literature study.

Appendix 1

4. Legal and ethical aspects

OWNER OF THE DATA:

Different books and articles reviews by different authors

IS THE DATA PRIVACY SENSITIVE?:

No.

IF YES: HOW WILL YOU ARRANGE SAFE STORAGE AND CONSENT OF THE PERSONS AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED IN YOUR RESEARCH?

5. Other aspects

=====

(The following has to be filled in by the thesis supervisor :)

Approved

Not approved, because: _____

Name _Erica Meijers_

Signature:



Date: June 14, 2022

Declaration Sheet Master's Thesis

Name student: Martin Mwale

Title master's thesis: The Relationship between Baptism According to John Calvin, and Transformation as a Diaconal Concept.

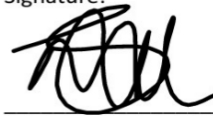
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