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**TOWARDS A CHRISTIAN
INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
IMAGINARY**

General Description

The dissertation “Towards A Christian International Development Imaginary” introduces “Levelment” as a pluralistic and context-sensitive theological and socio-technical framework for international and community development from a Christian perspective.

This imaginary contrasts with the most commonly ones held in the field of Development and Christian Development which the dissertation argues inadequately address the deepening crises in ecology, economy, and politics. The dominant paradigms of secular development are presented as unidirectional and overly focused on economic growth while neglecting to attend to issues of sustainability, wealth, the colonial past, and the current world system, which transcends the nation state. These models often exacerbate global inequalities and contribute to environmental degradation, failing to promote holistic human flourishing.

Meanwhile, current models of Christian development are found lacking in its acritical adoption of secular methodologies, by failing to root themselves deeply enough in the normative Biblical themes of justice, shalom and modest dependence on God’s provision that could shape a transnational project, by resigning instead to the power of the state or the market or by relying too heavily on the NGO sector to achieve technocratic solutions. The dissertation asserts that Christian development must transcend the traditional models of aid and charity, which often fail to achieve sacrificial relationships, and instead pursue practices that encourage

mutuality, solidarity, and empowerment. Arguing that Christian development efforts often focus too narrowly on the poor and on poverty alleviation, without addressing the broader systemic issues that create and perpetuate inequality, the work outlines three guiding principles for Christian Levelment:

1. Ecological justice, recognizing the interconnectedness of all life and the need to care for creation.
2. Economic equity, challenging structures that perpetuate wealth accumulation, advocating for practices such as wealth redistribution and debt forgiveness.
3. Theological reframing of political engagement, offering a critique of populism and authoritarianism, while promoting democratic values in line with Biblical teachings on justice.

Methodological Framework

This dissertation contributes to the field of Public Theology, utilizing an interdisciplinary approach which draws on theology, economics, political science, sociology, and development studies, and situating theological reflection within the public sphere, addressing issues of social, political, economic, and environmental concern. This interdisciplinary method allows for a comprehensive examination of development paradigms from multiple perspectives, bridging the gap between theory and practice. The examination is realized by deploying the analytical tools of a Social Technical Imaginary, which constitute as a critical lens for evaluating

existing secular and Christian development paradigms. Sociotechnical imaginaries, as derived from Science and Technology Studies (STS), refer to the collectively held visions of desirable futures that shape societal practices and institutions. In addition to its interdisciplinary methodology, the dissertation incorporates autoethnographic reflections, which enrich the theoretical discussion by grounding it in the author's personal experiences in international development work, particularly in Central America. These reflections provide a lived experience context for the theoretical discussions, demonstrating the applicability of Christian Levelment in real-world settings.

The case study of Casa Adobe, an intentional Christian community in Costa Rica, is a central component of the dissertation's methodology. Casa Adobe is presented as an example of Christian Levelment in action, illustrating how a Christian community can embody the principles of ecological sustainability, economic equity, and mutual solidarity. The case study offers a practical demonstration of how Christian Levelment can address global challenges while remaining rooted in local contexts.

Theological Foundations

The theological foundations for Christian Levelment are deeply rooted in Biblical concepts of justice, righteousness, and Shalom. Central to the vision of Christian Levelment is the metaphor of "leveling," as described in Isaiah 40:3-5, which calls for making the way for the Lord by leveling the ground, raising up valleys, and lowering mountains. This leveling

metaphor suggests a balancing of social, economic, and ecological systems in alignment with God's justice, care for the marginalized, and respect for creation.

The dissertation extensively engages with key Biblical texts, examining how themes of justice, jubilee, and ecological balance can inform a renewed theological framework for development. In contrast to the secular development paradigm, which often prioritizes economic growth, the Christian Levelment paradigm emphasizes sustainability and balance, advocating for a just distribution of resources, care for creation, and mutual flourishing.

Case Study: Casa Adobe

Casa Adobe serves as a living laboratory for the principles of Christian Levelment. The dissertation details how the community embodies practices of shared living, ecological stewardship, and economic solidarity. The daily practices of Casa Adobe—such as communal meals, environmental care, avoidance of single-use plastics, and the creation of a safe and welcoming space for both residents and visitors—exemplify the principles of Christian Levelment in a tangible, lived context.

The dissertation emphasizes that Casa Adobe is not presented as a prescriptive model for other communities to follow, but rather as a "provocation" or an invitation for other communities to experiment with similar practices. The case study is framed as an example of how Christian communities can reimagine their engagement with the world, embodying the

values of justice, Shalom, and care for creation in ways that are contextually appropriate and responsive to local needs.

Contents and Contributions

The dissertation is composed of 8 chapters. Chapter 1 is introductory. Chapter 2 exposes the methodology employed along with limitations, theoretical postures, theological commitments and the methodological stance inherent in Public Theology. Chapter 3 presents an overview of the literature in the field of development, both secular and Christian, while Chapter 4 explores the existing forms of development, its myths and mistakes, as well as Christian development, its gaps and misfocus. Chapter 5 lays out the theological foundations for an alternative vision. Chapter 6 sums up the dissertation's core proposal, the Christian Levelment paradigm, while Chapter 7 offers a case study that demonstrates the feasibility of this proposal. Chapter 8 serves as a conclusion.

The dissertation makes several key contributions to the field of Christian Public Theology. First, it introduces the concept of Christian Levelment as a new theological framework for engaging with global challenges. This framework is rooted in Biblical principles and offers a distinctively Christian response to issues of inequality, climate change, and political instability. Second, the dissertation advances the field of Public Theology by integrating theological reflection with insights from social science, economics, and environmental studies. It demonstrates the value of interdisciplinary approaches in addressing complex

global issues, and it highlights the importance of grounding theological reflection in practical, lived experiences.

Finally, the dissertation contributes to the growing body of literature on ecological justice within Christian theology. By emphasizing the interconnectedness of human and ecological flourishing, it challenges Christian communities to take seriously their responsibility to care for creation and to engage in practices that promote environmental sustainability.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The dissertation concludes by outlining several practical recommendations for Christian communities, churches, and development practitioners. These include:

1. Engaging more deeply with issues of economic justice, advocating for wealth redistribution and debt forgiveness as central components of Christian development.
2. Prioritizing ecological sustainability in both local and global contexts, recognizing the interconnectedness of human and ecological flourishing.
3. Fostering global partnerships that prioritize mutuality and solidarity, rather than paternalistic relationships, and that encourage the sharing of resources and knowledge across cultural and national boundaries.

In addition to these practical recommendations, the dissertation calls for further research into the applications of Christian Levelment, particularly in diverse global contexts. It suggests that future research should explore how Christian Levelment can be adapted and applied in various cultural and ecological

settings, and how it can contribute to the broader global conversation on sustainable development.

In summary, this dissertation offers a bold and innovative proposal for rethinking Christian engagement with global challenges in the 21st century. By integrating theological principles with practical case studies and interdisciplinary insights, it presents a new vision for Christian development that is both theologically grounded and practically feasible. Christian Levelment, as articulated in this dissertation, provides a framework for addressing issues of inequality, climate change, and political instability in ways that reflect the core values of justice, Shalom, and care for creation.