



# THINKING THEOLOGICALLY

## THINKING THEOLOGICALLY BURKINA FASO

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### CONFERENCE REPORT

**tearfund**

in COLLABORATION WITH



# Contents

1. Overview .....	2
2. Conference content	
2.1 Devotions	
2.1.1 What is the major challenge for the church today? .....	4
2.2 Plenary sessions	
2.2.1 Why 'Thinking Theologically'? .....	4
2.2.2 What does it mean to be salt and light? .....	4
2.2.3 Integral mission and the church: being 'in the world' .....	5
2.2.4 In the world but not of it: the church and local community .....	5
2.2.5 Being salt in the nations: the church and the country .....	6
2.2.6 What does a flourishing life look like? .....	6
2.2.7 Introduction to the LIGHT Wheel .....	7
2.2.8 What does the LIGHT Wheel tell us about human flourishing? .....	7
2.2.9 How can we keep Christ at the centre? .....	8
2.2.10 What have I learnt? .....	8
2.2.11 Continuing conversations: information session .....	8
2.3 Workshops	
2.3.1 What does it mean to be blessed? .....	9
2.3.2 Responding to common cultural practices .....	10
2.3.3 Empowering girls and women .....	10
2.3.4 Teaching an integral mission curriculum .....	11
2.3.5 Engaging in politics .....	11
2.3.6 Creation care .....	12
2.3.7 Social connections .....	13
2.3.8 Personal relationships .....	14
2.3.9 Living faith .....	14
2.3.10 Emotional and mental health .....	15
2.3.11 Physical health .....	15
2.3.12 Stewardship of the environment .....	16
2.3.13 Material resources .....	16
2.3.14 Capabilities .....	17
2.3.15 Participation and influence .....	17
3. Delegate learning .....	19
4. Conference assessment	
4.1 Overall quality of speakers .....	20
4.2 Plenary sessions .....	20
4.3 Workshops .....	20
4.4 Application of learning .....	20
5. Conference commitments .....	21
6. Summary statement .....	22
7. Next steps	
7.1 Tearfund UK initiatives .....	23
7.2 Tearfund Burkina Faso initiatives .....	23
7.3 Tearfund Niger initiatives .....	23
7.4 Tearfund Chad initiatives .....	24
8. Acknowledgements .....	25

# 1. Overview

Thinking Theologically was organised by Tearfund, in collaboration with ODE (Office de Développement des Eglises Evangéliques – Evangelical Churches Development Office) and CITAF (Conseil des Institutions Théologiques d’Afrique Francophone – Council of Theological Institutions in French-speaking Africa). Its aim was to envision and equip theologians, church leaders and other Christian leaders working in relief and development for integral mission. The conference gave delegates the chance to deepen their understanding of integral mission and to share ideas about what this really looks like in practice. It was also a wonderful time of building new friendships and networks. The three-day conference brought together 123 delegates from 11 different countries and featured plenary sessions, workshops and group discussions.

## *Countries of origin of conference participants*

COUNTRY	NUMBER OF DELEGATES	COUNTRY	NUMBER OF DELEGATES
BENIN	1	LIBERIA	1
BURKINA FASO	68	MALI	8
CHAD	5	NIGER	13
DRC	4	TOGO	3
FRANCE	2	UNITED KINGDOM	6
IVORY COAST	12		

The conference received extremely positive feedback from delegates:

- 24 per cent rated it excellent
- 56 per cent rated it very good
- 89 per cent said it fully met their expectations
- 9 per cent said it somewhat met their expectations
- 36 per cent reported that their understanding of integral mission changed very significantly as a result
- 58 per cent reported a significant change



## Testimonials:

*'The speakers mastered the theme. I felt the presence of God because this teaching touched me a lot.'*

*'The reflection was refreshingly inspiring and it has awakened a burden or concern in me about integral mission. I have taught "A Theology of Development" before and the reflection challenged me to get more involved.'*





## 2. Conference content

Throughout the conference we thought about the nature of mission, what the Bible has to say about issues connected to poverty, and what being disciples of Jesus means for our lives and work. We reflected on the Bible passage where Jesus declared: 'You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again?' (Matthew 5:13–16). We considered what it means to be the salt of the earth and how we can maintain and live out our Christian distinctiveness.

The conference was highly engaging and created space for active participation through the workshops, group discussions and plenary question-and-answer sessions. This ensured that delegates were able to share their own reflections, learning and experiences, providing a rich, cross-cultural learning experience.

At the end of the conference, delegates made commitments as to how they were going to implement what they had learnt (*see page 21 for an overview of these*).

### 2.1 Devotions

Each morning a devotional session took place. Below are the key reflections from one of these devotional sessions.

#### 2.1.1 What is the major challenge for the church today?

Pastor Etienne Bazie

- Luke 24:47–49 – The church must not just preach repentance and forgiveness but must also demonstrate Christ's compassion. At the same time, the church must not just demonstrate Christ's compassion but must also preach repentance and forgiveness. Both of these things matter.
- Key Bible passages: Matthew 4:17; Matthew 4:23–25; Matthew 5:13–14; Luke 7:12–17; Luke 13:2–3; James 2:15–17; Romans 1:16.

### 2.2 Plenary sessions

Eleven plenary sessions were hosted during the conference.

#### 2.2.1 Why 'Thinking Theologically'?

Mbairrodbbee Njegollmi, Lonfo Clément, Pastor Samuel Yameogo and Pastor Etienne Bazie

This session introduced the importance of thinking about theology in Christian development work and provided an introduction to the conference.

#### 2.2.2 What does it mean to be salt and light?

Pastor Etienne Bazie

This session looked at Matthew 5:13–16. Pastor Etienne Bazie helped delegates to consider what being God's salt and light in the world might look like and how we can prepare ourselves for this work. Key learning included:

- **The church as salt.** In the same way that salt has to have contact with the meal for it to have any effect, so Christians (the church) have to voluntarily leave their comfort zone to bring the change and transformation needed. To give flavour, salt has to completely dissolve in the meal. The role of the church (Christians) is to influence the community through actions that are inconspicuous but effective (quiet and unobtrusive).

- **Each grain of salt has a flavour.** In the same way, each Christian has received the ability to make a difference around him or her and in the world.
- **We need enough salt to considerably change the flavour of a large amount of food.** Working in unity, the whole church (as the body of Christ) can have a greater impact than one Christian alone.
- **Salt can lose its flavour.** An example of this is when the church stops having an impact on its immediate community. This can happen when the church is no longer different from the rest of the world.
- **Light is the opposite of darkness.**
- **The church (Christians) as the light of the world.** As light, the church should show the way to follow (the good that should be done and the bad that should not be done). The church can be the light of the world by, for example, fighting the corruption that plagues our society and enters the church or by proclaiming and demonstrating the gospel through our works (both individual and collective).
- **While salt acts in an invisible way, light can be seen by everyone.** 'Let your light shine before others [everyone], that they may see your good deeds' (Matthew 5:16). This relates to 'works' that the church does for the community around it.
- **The church can remain a hidden light.** For example, it may not sufficiently fulfil its holistic mission or fight adequately against institutionalised corruption.

### 2.2.3 Integral mission and the church: being 'in the world'

Slanwa Gaston

This session looked in more depth at what being 'salt and light' means for the mission of the church. It helped delegates to consider how churches should engage with their local, national and international communities. Key learning included:

- Being salt and light is the mission of the church.
- Biblical examples of individuals who were salt and light in their communities include Joseph, Daniel, Nehemiah and Esther.
- Being salt and light requires us not just to proclaim the gospel - our mission should be holistic.
- Being salt and light is something that the church should do locally, nationally and internationally. Below are some ways we can do this:
  - living with integrity
  - speaking out against corruption, and fighting this both within and outside of our churches
  - being peacemakers
  - being role models in helping vulnerable people
  - promoting solidarity at the community level
  - being filled with the Holy Spirit so as to demonstrate his gifts
  - not displaying indifference when it comes to injustices in society
  - advocating for the needs of poor and marginalised individuals and communities.

### 2.2.4 In the world but not of it: the church and the local community

Moïse Napon

This session explored how we can live both in the kingdom of God and 'in the world'. It then considered ways in which our life in God's kingdom can transform our communities. It looked at some of the customs in our communities that the Bible challenges and discussed ways of engaging with them. Key learning included:

- There are various definitions of, and references to, 'the world' in the Bible. Key Bible passages include: Hebrews 1:2; Hebrews 11:13; Luke 20:35; Romans 12:2; Luke 2:1; Acts 11:28; Revelation 3:10; John 1:10; John 3:16; 1 John 2:15.

- The distinction must be made between being 'in the world' and being 'of the world'. In both cases, people engage in the world, enjoying its generosity and the benefits that can be reaped from it, and also suffering the pitfalls. However, the first phrase suggests being merely 'in' the world and the second implies the state of belonging to it or being owned by it. Logically, 'in the world' implies that I am physically present, I enjoy its benefits and accept that I will also suffer the drawbacks that the environment or context throws at me. But spiritually, legally and emotionally I do not belong to the world: in other words, my way of thinking, my values, my identity, my affiliation and my belonging are not of this world.
- Being 'in the world' but not 'of the world' does not mean that we should exclude, isolate or withdraw ourselves. We are also not in a position of opposition, animosity, conflict, contempt or discrimination with the world. We must remember that God loves the world (John 3:16).
- The church is in the community with the following mandate:
  - a. Practical demonstration of Christ's love, both within and outside the church.
  - b. An appropriate and relevant proclamation of his word, and testimony of his grace (he is the Saviour of the world).
  - c. Ethics and practices consistent with his word.

## 2.2..5 Being salt in the nations: the church and the country

Mbairoddbbee Njegollmi

This session looked at what the Bible has to say about the church's involvement with the political life of our countries. It explored what it means to be salt in civic life. The session featured a recent example from Burkina Faso that illustrated how we can play a part. Key learning from the session included:

- **Definition:** The word 'politics' derives from the Greek 'polis', meaning city-state, and 'techne', meaning craft. Politics is therefore defined as the art or science of government.
- **Aim of politics:** The well-being (of the inhabitants) of the city/town (Romans 13:1–7).
- **Examples from the Bible of people's engagement with politics:**
  - Joseph in Egypt (Genesis 38–42).
  - Daniel in Babylon (Daniel 1–2; Daniel 6).
  - John the Baptist in the gospels (Luke 1, 3 and 7; Mark 6:14ff; John 3).
- Many key biblical figures had a desire to obey God's word whatever the cost.
- **Examples of how the church can have positive involvement in the political life of our countries:**
  - In Burkina Faso, Christian organisations such as FEME (Fédérations des Églises et Missions Évangéliques) and CCRP (Conseil Consultatif sur les Réformes Politiques) were able to write to the authorities to give their views on Article 37 and the issue of the senate. They were able to exhort Christians not to indulge in pillaging after the uprising of 30–31 October 2015.
- **Link between political engagement and integral mission:**
  - The church (group/individuals) is called on by God's word to seek the nation's peace and prosperity (Jeremiah 29:7).
  - We are called to uphold justice and truth, just as John the Baptist did (Luke 3: 7–15).
  - Jesus Christ's earthly ministry was integral in its nature (Matthew 11:4–5; Luke 4:18–19; John 20:21–22).
  - The gospel of Christ is also integral in its nature.
  - Matthew 28:19–20: 'everything I have commanded you' covers all areas of life.
- **The distinction between the role of the church and the role of the government:**
  - In ancient Israel the functions of priest and king were separate. This must also be the same nowadays to avoid any possibility of confusion in the life of the church.

- The church's role will be to educate its members politically to perform their civic duty and to support those brothers and sisters who have a political vocation.

### 2.2.6 What does a flourishing life look like?

Richard Yao

This session provided the space for groups to discuss what it might mean to flourish, and what the Bible has to say about this. Key learning from the session included:

- The expression 'flourishing life' or 'abundant life' is frequently used in Christian evangelical circles and those of development practitioners. Apart from being an expression, an 'abundant life' is above all a state of being (thinking, acting) and possessing all you need to live.
- Key Bible verse: John 10:10.
- Our definition of flourishing may vary according to the cultural and linguistic community we are from.

Richard led the group through a reflection looking at a flourishing life in terms of the following:

- **Transformed identities:** Culture, education and community life structure and shape the identity of individuals in a given community. However, when we repent and believe in Jesus Christ we are 'born again' by the Holy Spirit, receive the gift of eternal life and become children of God.
- **Vision of a transformed world:** 'Transformation involves changing the world's vision, the dismantling of complexes and webs of lies maintained by the community throughout its history, the acceptance and appropriation of the biblical story of salvation' (Bryant Myers).
- **Just and fair relationships:** The biblical story of salvation is also about repairing broken relationships between God and our perverted humanity, between us and our neighbour and within ourselves. Jesus Christ came to restore broken relationships between God and humanity.
- **Shalom:** Peace is not just about relationships between men and women; it is also 'the state of a person not disturbed by anything'. *Shalom* can also mean more than peace: it incorporates ideas of wholeness, completeness, balance, healing, well-being, tranquillity, prosperity, security and justice. It is the state of truly restored relationships between God, humanity and creation.
- **State of being and possessing certain qualities:** Living a life of honesty, integrity and love as an added value to the community.
- **Suffering for Jesus:** Showing faithfulness to Jesus Christ in hard times as well as in times of peace to demonstrate consistency in our faith and in our new identity of being Christian as opposed to people with no hope.
- **Physical and mental integrity:** Feeling good in our mind, emotions and body so as to play our role in our community, our family and our workplace.
- **Safeguarding creation:** Being involved in protecting our physical environment from greed, pollution and exploitation.
- **Sufficient harvest:** Having enough food for our community at all times, without waste.
- **Communion:** Living a life that is in full harmony with God, our neighbour, ourselves and our environment.

### 2.2.7 Introduction to the LIGHT Wheel

Levourne Passiri

This session introduced the LIGHT Wheel, a tool for examining and assessing community transformation (LIGHT stands for the Learning and Impact Guide for Holistic Transformation). Passiri explained the tool, outlining each of the spokes of the LIGHT Wheel: social connections;



personal relationships; living faith; emotional and mental health; physical health; stewardship of the environment; material resources; capabilities; participation and influence. Passiri also helped delegates to reflect on why it is important for us to think about the impact our work is having on communities. Below are some of the reasons he gave:

- To understand whether or not we have achieved our desired outcomes.
- To understand how we can achieve the best outcomes possible for the people we serve.
- To enable us to learn about what is working well so we can identify opportunities to scale up.
- To help us understand what is not working well and identify how we can improve our programmes.
- So that we can learn to steward our resources well.
- So that we can be accountable to our beneficiaries and donors.

## 2.2.8 What does the LIGHT Wheel tell us about human flourishing?

Feedback session – facilitated by Levourne Passiri

The LIGHT Wheel workshop groups each gave a ten-minute presentation about their spoke of the LIGHT Wheel. They explained how each spoke relates to biblical teaching and its importance for human flourishing. This was followed by a time of questions and answers. *(To find out more about the key learning from the LIGHT Wheel workshops, please refer to the 'Workshops' section.)*

## 2.2.9 How can we keep Christ at the centre?

Slanwa Gaston and Anne de Leyser

In this session we reflected on the importance of continuing to think about theology as we live and work. Gaston and Anne shared some reasons as to why our leadership culture and mission may drift and how we can overcome these.

- **Familiarity:** We may need to ask hard questions, such as: 'Are we still shaped by Jesus or have we become like any other organisation?'
- **Professionalism:** To have integrity we need to ensure we display professional excellence and spiritual passion.
- **Growth:** To make sure we are inclusive of new people and maintain organisational unity, we need to ensure everyone understands our history and values. We need to communicate these well and include people in our organisational culture.
- **Public pressure:** Christianity is viewed with suspicion in the public square. We are therefore often under pressure to hide Christ.
- **Donors:** When we rely for money on those who do not know Christ, we are vulnerable to pressures to hide Christ.

Gaston and Anne then shared some commitments we can make that can help us keep Christ at the centre of our lives and ministries.

- **Commitment to Jesus:** Make a commitment to Jesus and be filled with his Holy Spirit. Jesus cares more about our availability than our ability (Exodus 3:11–12).
- **Commitment to character:** We need to prioritise character over skills and ability. We need to have humility, resolve (Luke 9:51), perseverance and faith. We should be carriers of hope and be willing to lay things down (Exodus 4:2–3).
- **Commitment to service:** Jesus turned power and hierarchy on their heads. Too often we mimic the power structures and approaches of the non-Christian world. For Christians, empowerment and service are essential aspects of Christian living.
- **Commitment to church and 'his kingdom come':** 'If you want to go fast, go alone... If you want to go far, go together' (Bill Hybels). We need to stand together in unity (Psalm 133) and collaborate sincerely as the body of Christ.

- **Commitment to prayer:** Prayer can help us to revive our work (Habakuk 3:2). We need to ask two questions : 'What have I got in my hand?' (see Exodus 4:2) and 'Where is my army?' (see Ezekiel 37:10).

Anne then shared about the work of Local Houses of Prayer as an example of how prayer can shape our lives and our communities. *(To find out more about Local Houses of Prayer, please visit [www.ffald-y-brenin.org/ministries](http://www.ffald-y-brenin.org/ministries). You can also read the book The Grace Outpouring by Roy Godwin and Dave Roberts.)*

#### 2.2.10 What have I learnt?

Group discussion – facilitated by Inès Bonkougou and Hannah Swithinbank

This session provided space for delegates to discuss in small groups the learning outcomes from the conference and how we can apply these in our daily lives. Time was then spent praying for one another and for the commitments being made by individuals. *(Please see pages 19 and 21 for more information on the learning outcomes and commitments made by delegates.)*

#### 2.2.11 Continuing conversations: information session

Inès Bonkougou and Stephanie Haydock

During this session Inès and Stephanie shared information on ways delegates can stay in contact with one another after the conference. Levourne Passiri, Mbairodbbee Njegollmi and Gaston Slanwa were all invited to share information about relevant regional initiatives. Inès and Stephanie also shared details of Tearfund's online communities of practice and the Tearfund International Learning Zone ([www.tearfund.org/tilz](http://www.tearfund.org/tilz)), which hosts a range of resources that can help delegates to continue reflecting theologically and also to practically apply their learning.

## 2.3 Workshops

Four different workshop sessions were held during the conference. Within each of these sessions, delegates were able to choose which workshop to attend.

### Day 2: Workshop session 1

#### 2.3.1 What does it mean to be blessed?

Pastor Elie Koumbem with Hannah Swithinbank

This workshop explored what it means to be blessed by God and what it means to be a blessing in our communities. In particular, we focused on the idea of prosperity and what this means. Delegates also discussed some ways in which we can have fruitful conversations with other Christians who think differently about these ideas.

*What does blessing mean?*

- Many people believe that blessing means to have many nice material possessions.
- For Israel, what mattered more than material possessions were things such as length of life and family.
- Biblically, success is the fulfilment of the plan that God has for you.

*Ideas of wealth in the Bible*

- There are 2,084 Bible verses about wealth, 215 about faith and 208 about salvation. This suggests that money and dealing with money is important in the Bible.
- Wealth is not something bad. It is not a curse, and poverty is not a blessing. Being poor

does not make you more spiritual; many good people in the Bible were rich, eg Abraham. The problem is not wealth, but what your attitude is to wealth. If we recognise that the wealth we have is God's, then it is easier to give (1 Corinthians 4:7). To God, our attitude towards giving is more important than how much we give; people ask, 'How much did they give?' whereas God asks, 'Why did they give?'

- Key Bible passages: Mark 12, Isaiah (desire for land takes God's place), 1 Timothy 6:9–10, 1 Corinthians 4:7.

#### *Prosperity gospel*

- The 'prosperity gospel' promotes the idea that God gives to the one who has submitted to him – God as a utilitarian God.
- It is popular because hearing that God is going to make you rich is appealing when people are poor. Also, the healing element prevents you from having to pay for medicine.
- To a certain African mindset, God is not to be worshipped, but is a superior divinity who can be useful. In some forms of African worship, God is more to be feared than loved.
- We need to remember that even some Christians still hold traditional beliefs, eg animism.
- We also need to remember that work brings wealth – we need to build an understanding of work that is a kind of worship.
- We live in Afro-pessimism: I have nothing, I can do nothing, I am nothing. But let the poor say, 'I am rich' (Joel 3:10); 'For when I am weak, then I am strong' (2 Corinthians 12:10).
- God is our provider, not our servant.

#### *Q. How can we challenge 'Faith theology'?*

- We need to go back to the word of God and draw our thinking from there. We need to deepen our knowledge of God's word and help others to do the same. In particular, we need to help people understand that God's promises and gifts of blessing are not just for us but are only truly blessings to us as we share them with our communities.

### **2.3.2 Responding to common cultural practices**

#### **Rubin Pohor**

This workshop looked at some of the local cultural practices that Christians do not think belong in the kingdom of God, such as polygamy. Delegates spent time discussing ways of responding to these practices and challenging them without isolating the church from the community.

#### *Polygamy*

- Marriage desired by God is monogamous.
- Marriage is an image of Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:30, 32).
- Men or women who are converted in a polygamous home remain in their home (1 Corinthians 7:12–15).
- The church can by no means authorise polygamy because of celibacy.

#### *Prohibitions*

- We need to understand the context of the prohibitions.
- Examples of prohibitions: consumption of alcohol, ban on women pastors, wearing of headscarves at church.
- Some prohibitions have value and some good points.
- Some prohibitions are self-seeking.

- How can we challenge socially accepted prohibitions that are not consistent with biblical teaching? We need to affirm our Christian identity and communicate it to those around us.

### 2.3.3 Empowering girls and women

Joanna Ilboudo

This workshop discussed the biblical understanding of gender relations. Delegates explored ways in which this theology can be used to encourage our own churches and communities to empower women and girls.

*How can we recognise and reinforce the potential of young girls and women?*

- Teach young girls to value and support each other, to feel good about themselves and value their potential, and to grow in confidence.
- Encourage men and women to work together on the subject of women.
- Encourage people to rely on God's word.
- Teach equality between men and women. This should start in families, eg with the head of the family. Parents should encourage boys to do the same work as girls.
- Visit nursery, primary and secondary schools and Sunday schools in churches to teach equality to boys and girls.
- Visit biblical and theological institutions to teach the ministry of women in the church.
- Highlight the skills of women and encourage them to stand up for their potential.
- Involve religious leaders (pastors) in teaching equality between men and women.
- Encourage pastors to lead by example and sit with their wives during services or other ceremonies (this speaks to the practice of men and women sitting separately in churches).
- Organise awareness conferences or forums on issues of equality between men and women in accordance with the Bible.
- Encourage women to develop their confidence in themselves and to speak out in meetings.
- Train female leaders and provide training on female leadership, especially in rural locations.

## Day 2: Workshop session 2

### 2.3.4 Teaching an integral mission curriculum

Mbairoddbbee Njegollmi, Rubin Pohor and Rosalee Velloso Ewell

This workshop briefly presented a new integral mission curriculum. Delegates and facilitators discussed together ways in which the curriculum can be taught effectively to students at a number of different levels. There was great enthusiasm for the curriculum. The new integral mission curriculum is under a period of review and will then be made more widely available. Mbairoddbbee Njegollmi remains the point of contact in the region for this work.

### 2.3.5 Engaging in politics

Daniel Kambou

This workshop discussed the opportunities and challenges that the church may encounter as it participates in political matters. It explored ways of offering a distinctively Christian point of view. The session focused on what we can learn from the recent experiences of Burkina Faso's churches in participating in national politics, and how delegates might apply these lessons in their own countries. Key learning points from the session were:



### *The role of the church*

- The role of the church is not to position itself away from politics but to get involved in good governance, legislation, good community management etc.

### *Ways that the church can positively address issues in our different communities*

- Promote social justice.
- Tackle corruption.
- Provide support to orphans and vulnerable children.
- Promote and demonstrate good governance.
- Address verbal violence, discrimination, ethnocentrism, regionalism, nepotism.
- Help to manage environmental resources (ecology).
- Promote peace.
- Provide or advocate for health services.
- Provide or advocate for educational services.

### *How can we prepare Christians for engaging in politics?*

- Explain that politics is not bad in itself.
- Raise awareness through preaching.
- Teach Christian values to believing Christians.
- Teach political virtues.
- Christians must learn about the political systems that exist in their country.
- Think prophetically about things (instead of throwing cold water on an idea).
- Support Christians engaged in politics through prayer.
- Identify and empower Christians who have a political vocation.
- Encourage Christians to play their role in development.
- Teach God's word.
- Prepare the next generation in our organisations and churches/teach youth leadership within our communities.
- Set a good example of good management.
- Encourage Christians to engage in politics.
- Demonstrate our Christian identity and live out Jesus' teachings.

## **2.3.6 Creation care**

### **Dr Issiaka Coulibaly**

This workshop discussed what the Bible says about our responsibility towards God's creation. It then explored some ways we can share this message with churches and students to inspire them to look after the world in which we live. Key learnings from the session is outlined below.

The theme 'creation care' immediately brings to mind the responsibility of humans, and Christians in particular, in caring for creation. This sense of responsibility has prevailed in the declaration of evangelical Christians in Cape Town, following in the footsteps of Lausanne. An extract from this document takes account of the balanced approach to this responsibility with its two aspects:

- the evangelisation of the world
- the care for God's creation, within the scope of God's love.

Considering the above, the group asked themselves two basic questions that served to guide the discussions:

1) *What is the biblical foundation for creation care in the context of integral mission?*

2) *What are the theological presuppositions concerning creation care in the context of integral mission?*

Both these questions led the group to ask themselves three further questions to help them respond to the first two. They were on these themes:

1) *The theology of creation: understanding of our place in space and time.*

Why did God choose to create humankind last after he created everything else? God wanted to create the framework within which the life of humans might be possible. Having created people, God gave them the mandate for caring for creation, which consisted of:

- transforming the environment
- creating living conditions that were possible in this environment
- developing their talents concerning the environment and the environment in which God had placed them.

The statement 'God is the creator' indicates the permanent fatherhood of God over creation and the support he continually provides to his creation. Furthermore, in John 8:12 Jesus says, 'I am the light of the world,' and in Matthew 5:16 he says to the disciples, 'You are the light of the world.' This prerogative that is transferred to human beings cannot be effective until they live a life that is faithful to Christ, the source of light.

2) *The theology of salvation*

The expression 'the salvation of souls' is only mentioned in 1 Peter 1:9. Our contemporary understanding of 'salvation of souls' brings with it the neglect of the body where the soul lives and the environment where human beings are called to flourish. However, in the apostle Paul's theology, God's creation remains the object of the care of his creator. Creation waits for the adoption and redemption of the children of God. At present, creation is subject to corruption. It will be liberated on the day that the children of God are liberated. That is to say that the salvation of God's creation is never independent of that of human beings (1 Peter 3:13).

3) *The theology of the end times*

Creation is the object of God's care. In the scriptures, some texts describe the way in which the earth and all that is in it will be destroyed. We also read that the New Jerusalem will descend to the earth from heaven. This truth supports the principle of taking care of the earth – the model that God himself gives to people. In reality, Christians are called to translate this mandate into their context.

### **Day 3: LIGHT Wheel discussions**

For these two workshops, delegates divided into nine groups, each with one facilitator. Each group spent the two workshops looking at one spoke of the LIGHT Wheel, identifying biblical themes and passages that help us to understand and explain why the idea represented by the spoke matters for human flourishing. The groups also spent time discussing any risks that churches need to consider when seeking transformation in this area. Feedback on the LIGHT Wheel workshops was generally positive. The different LIGHT Wheel spoke groups and the key biblical themes and passages that emerged are outlined below.

#### **2.3.7 Social connections**

This spoke looks at how unified or fractured the community is. It asks whether the community is

formed of cliques or groups that keep themselves separate and look with distrust at others, or whether the community is inclusive, working together across social boundaries. It considers issues such as prejudice and exclusion, as well as attitudes towards social groups and whether these are based on ethnicity, tribe, faith or wealth. The spoke does not just look at relationships within the community, but also asks how well the community is connected externally. It explores the community's ability to access wider government services and resources, expertise and knowledge.

During the two workshops the delegates discussing this LIGHT Wheel spoke considered the relationships between the individual and society, and how individuals integrate and interact in society. They reflected on the biblical themes and passages below and what they tell us about how social connections impact human flourishing.

- Genesis 2:18 – 'It is not good for man to be alone.' But in some societies individualism is destroying social links. How can we challenge this?
- Revelation 7:9 – note the different groups.
- Galatians 3 – mentions some groups. Is the society inclusive or do we find barriers?
- Acts 2:41–45 – the disciples live in harmony.
- Romans 15 – the church as a body.
- John 17:20 – Jesus prays for unity.
- Positive attitudes: love, community of assets, solidarity, common decisions, supporting one another with mutual assistance.
- Negative attitudes: despising others, divisions, complaining, discrimination and rejection.
- Christians have opportunities – to be salt and light, to develop relationships that bring real and sustainable transformation.
- There are internal challenges, eg 1 Corinthians 5 – the preservation of identity within the Christian community. We must persevere – there are traps, such as conformity to the world.
- *Question: What does the Bible have to say about how we maintain these relationships?*

### **2.3.8 Personal relationships**

This spoke considers the existence and quality of personal relationships as opposed to the more communal and outward connections covered by the 'social connections' spoke. These relationships are generally fewer, deeper and more private.

During the two workshops the delegates discussing this LIGHT wheel spoke considered the relationships between an individual and society, and how individuals integrate and interact in society. They reflected on the biblical themes and passages below and what they tell us about how social connections impact human flourishing.

#### *Successful relationships:*

- 1 Kings 19 – The group looked for indicators of the successful relationship of Abraham and Eliezer, and Elijah and Elisha. The indicators they identified were: tolerance and generosity, communication, service, love and humility.
- Joshua 1:1 – The group looked for indicators of the successful relationship between Moses and Joshua. The indicators they identified were: love, positivity, humility, tolerance, generosity and service.
- Ruth 1 – The group looked for indicators of the successful relationship between Ruth and Naomi. The indicators they identified were: love, consideration, confidence, loyalty and service.

- 1 and 2 Timothy – The group looked for indicators of the successful relationship between Paul and Timothy. The indicators they identified were: love humility, confidence, consideration and service.

#### *Unsuccessful relationships:*

- Abraham and Lot – no humility, no consideration or confidence, no communication and no service – so their relationship fails.
- Cain and Abel – no love, no humility or consideration, no tolerance and generosity, no communication, no service – and they also fail.
- Joseph and his brothers – no love, no service.
- Paul and Demas – no love or humility, no consideration, communication, tolerance or service (2 Timothy 4:10)
- *Question: What other qualities do these people have in their failed relationships? As well as thinking about what is missing, consider what else is present, eg anger or jealousy?*

*Summary thought:* There are deep needs in personal relationships, such as security and the need to be loved and valued.

### **2.3.9 Living faith**

This spoke considers the importance of faith (of any type) within the community, but focuses primarily on those who profess a Christian faith. It explores whether Christians are *living out their faith* both as individuals and also as a broader church. It asks whether they are putting their faith into practice in their daily lives in a way that impacts the wider community.

During the two workshops the delegates discussing this LIGHT Wheel spoke considered the importance of faith to individuals and to the church as a whole and the need for it to be deepened and expressed in the lives of both. They reflected on the biblical themes and passages below and what they tell us about the risks, opportunities and positive outcomes of living out our faith.

- Faith is important: Hebrews 11:6; Romans 1:17; 1 Corinthians 7:15; Romans 14:1; James 16:17.
- 'May your kingdom come' – faith in God, faith in action, faith that loves.
- Risks – if you try to live by faith there are risks, eg persecution, humiliation and gossip.
- The positive consequences – blessings, positive relationships, growth of the church, miracles.

### **2.3.10 Emotional and mental health**

This spoke considers the emotional and mental well-being of the people in the community.

During the two workshops the delegates discussing this LIGHT Wheel spoke considered the nature of emotional and mental health issues, both medically and spiritually. They looked at the World Health Organisation's definition of health, which is as follows:

*'Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.'*

They also considered 2 Corinthians 3:17 ('Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom') as another aspect of our health and flourishing.

They then reflected on the biblical themes and passages below and what they tell us about emotional and mental well-being.

- 1 Samuel 1:10-15 – internal suffering, or the suffering of the soul, affects our way of thinking.
- 1 Samuel 18:1 – the relationship between David and Jonathan.



- Proverbs 23:7 – the thinking and emotions of people determine their actions. The state of our soul determines our well-being.
- Things such as war and sickness are a challenge to our mental and spiritual health.
- Traditional spirits and rituals may also pose a risk.
- Jesus came to save, so we must turn our hearts and the hearts of human beings towards God.

*Summary thought:* Although spirituality is relevant, it is not the only factor that impacts our emotional and mental health. We must remember that mental illness is not a sign of not being saved.

### **2.3.11 Physical health**

This spoke considers the physical health of the people within the community. During the two workshops the delegates discussing this LIGHT Wheel spoke considered the importance of physical health in terms of suffering and the way that the church can help to improve the physical health of members of the community. They reflected on the biblical themes and passages below and what they tell us about physical health.

- Jeremiah 33:6, Genesis 17:12 – good functioning of the body.
- Luke 12 – God heals and has given us power to do likewise.
- God gives us things to observe to keep good health – our diet etc. We should respect our bodies.
- Obedience to the word of God is a source of good health.
- God wills that we be in good health.
- 3 John 1 – physical health. Love is the first remedy we can bring to any person.
- Matthew 19:19, 22:39 and the story of the Good Samaritan – love is what we can do before anything else.
- Church should be a place where people can come for healing, just as Naaman came to Israel with his leprosy and Elijah healed him.
- The church is called to help. Our lack of love is a risk and can stop us helping.

The group also discussed the points below:

- Do not promise what you cannot deliver (eg health centres). We need to make sure any help we provide is sustainable. If churches want to get involved in health in the community, they must do it along with community leaders and experts, and they need to be aware of the law.
- Natural hazards and catastrophes are also a risk to physical health, so it is important to think about disaster risk reduction

*Summary thought:* God's original plan was for people to be physically whole and healthy. Good health care is as important a part of this as miraculous healing.

### **2.3.12 Stewardship of the environment**

This spoke considers the relationship of the community with the natural environment. During the two workshops the delegates discussing this LIGHT Wheel spoke discussed the biblical themes and passages below. They reflected on what they tell us about creation care and the role of the church in stewarding the environment.

- The environment is a gift of God and Christians have a responsibility to manage it. God has given prescriptions for this, eg it was forbidden to cut down fruit trees. Deuteronomy discusses the management of waste.
- Exodus 22:6 – avoid polluting the environment.
- Romans 8 – creation is waiting for us to take responsibility.

- Genesis 1:22, Leviticus 11.
- We have to learn about challenges and solutions. The general population need to be made aware of the problem through advocacy and activities.

*Summary thought:* God gave people responsibility for looking after the creation he made. We are free to use it but not to abuse it. This is an area of public life that the church can lead on.

### **2.3.13 Material resources**

This spoke considers the material resources that people and communities can access. It focuses on actual assets or things that, when matched with 'capabilities' (*see 2.3.14 below*), allow people to do something.

During the two workshops the delegates thought about what the Bible has to say about material resources and assets and the distribution of these. The group reflected on the biblical themes, passages and ideas below:

- Think about your resources and assets, and help people to discover what they have, eg by making an inventory.
- Once we have an inventory, we can begin to be in solidarity.
- Psalm 24:1 – our assets belong to God.
- Philippians 4:19.
- Our assets and material resources must help others. When we practise liberality, we discover blessing.
- Luke 12:13-15 – the life of a person does not depend on their assets and material possessions. We must disengage from greed and the love of money.
- Psalm 12:1-3 – the fear of the Lord brings material wealth.

The group also considered the risk of focusing on material resources alone; this may cause the neglect of spiritual needs. It can cause confusion between salvation and material blessing. The group also considered the dangers of the prosperity gospel. People who are poor may be seen as 'not blessed', and may feel guilty and want wealth. Other people may think badly of the church if everyone is poor or if there is great inequality.

### **2.3.14 Capabilities**

This spoke considers the skills, expertise and knowledge that, when matched with physical (material) resources, enable the community to do something and bring about change. It includes issues such as levels of education and training, literacy and numeracy. While the skills, expertise and knowledge to sustain an income is an important part of this, it also includes the skills, expertise and knowledge to remain mentally and physically fit and healthy.

During the two workshops the delegates discussing this LIGHT Wheel spoke reflected on the biblical themes and passages below and what they tell us about human capability. They discussed how using our potential is a part of our flourishing.

- We need knowledge to bring transformation and be in good health.
- The good functioning of the other spokes depends on our ability to flourish in the other areas.
- Hosea 4:6 – 'My people are destroyed because of their ignorance.'
- Genesis – God gives skills to humans and gets them to use them, eg Adam has the skill to name the animals.
- The ability to invent is encouraged in the Bible, eg Exodus 35 – the construction of the tabernacle.
- Learning and skills - Apollos went to Paul to learn.

- Coaching – Moses coaches Joshua.
- Integrated knowledge – Acts 7:22 says that Moses had every kind of knowledge.
- Times of refreshing are important to keep up performance. Proverbs 27:17 – sharpen your knife to improve its performance.
- Basic training equips us for service (Mark 3:16–19). Daniel with the Persian king – the king asked people with skills to serve him, and he created a good environment for them to learn skills.
- The word of God – Joshua 1:8 says, ‘Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips.’ We must be rooted in the word of God.
- Risks – a lot of knowledge can destroy (Ecclesiastes). A gap between levels of knowledge can destroy. A lot of knowledge can deceive people.

### 2.3.15 Participation and influence

This spoke considers two basic ideas: first, the extent to which people are able to *express* their views to those in power and *be heard* by them, and second, the extent to which people can *take part* in the decision-making itself. The spoke looks at people’s ability to take control over their own futures.

During the two workshops the delegates discussing this LIGHT Wheel spoke reflected on the biblical themes and passages below. They considered what these ideas tell us about why our participation in community life is a mark of flourishing.

- Influence – eg Jethro’s influence on Moses is positive, and we see the way he learns to delegate power.
- Nehemiah and the rebuilding of the walls. Nehemiah 2:17–18 – conscious of the challenge, he triggered people to be involved.
- The Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:29).
- Mordecai and Esther – in Esther 4, Mordecai influenced Esther, and Esther then influenced the king.
- We also see Joseph influencing Pharaoh, which helped the Jewish people survive (Genesis 39).
- Participation: Rebekah positioned herself to participate, so that when she was consulted about her marriage she could answer.
- Jesus told his disciples to let children come to him – to participate.
- Elijah and the widow – she was willing to participate in Elijah’s life, which led to a miracle. The feeding of the 5,000 is also about participation – being willing to do your bit leads to results.
- The physically sick were often excluded from participation, eg lepers.
- Risks – people can deviate. The leaders should lead and facilitate the community to set priorities. There may be dysfunctions in the group, eg lack of agreement preventing people from moving forward. Making time to participate is hard.

### 3. Delegate learning

On the final day, delegates were given the opportunity to write down one significant thing they had learnt. Some of the frequently shared learning points included:

- How the church and community mobilisation process (CCMP) works and the transformation it can bring in communities.
- How Christians can engage in politics and not just be observers of the politics in their countries.
- The importance of keeping Christ at the centre of our ministries.
- God gave us a mandate to care for creation.
- God is interested in our character as much as our skills and abilities.
- Resources do not have to come from external donors; we already have resources within our churches and communities.

Below are some learning points from individual delegates:

- 'Christians must unite spiritually and professionally and do everything they can to keep Christ at the centre.'
- 'I must keep Christ at the centre of my life both professionally and in the community.'
- 'The importance of prayer and staying close to Jesus.'
- 'The salvation of people also depends on the salvation of the environment.'
- 'Make Christ known to non-believers by our actions – by helping them and not condemning them.'
- The principles of the LIGHT Wheel 'as a tool for monitoring and evaluating the impact of integral mission.'
- 'I have learnt that just preaching the gospel of Christ with no acts of love that give satisfaction and joy to communities and to the church means that the church fails in its mission.'
- 'I have learnt that you do not necessarily need a large number of people to have an impact on our environment if you depend on God and trust him completely.'
- 'The church will not be up to the challenges of the century if it refuses to be salt and light and show forth Christ without distinction.'
- 'God did not only so love the church, but also the world.'
- To 'be salt' in our world requires us to interact with other members of society. 'As long as salt is not mixed into the meal, you cannot know what it tastes like/its flavour.'
- 'The importance of putting Christ at the centre of the organisation.'
- 'The concept of a flourishing life.'
- 'Light is not made for light; it is made to dispel the darkness.'
- 'Prayer is the most important tool to use in doing our activities.'
- 'Make use of internal resources to promote the church and the community.'
- 'The context is a determining factor for all development work within the church and the community.'
- 'A flourishing life goes beyond the material – it takes account of the whole person.'
- 'The [relationship between the] church and the local community (the church must not remove itself from the problems of the city, but must get involved in all sectors of life).'
- 'The mission of the church is holistic.'
- 'Do everything for the glory of God.'
- 'Make the ministry a way of presenting Christ.'



## 4. Conference assessment

At the end of the conference, delegates completed evaluation forms. As mentioned in the overview section of this report, feedback was on the whole very positive.

### 4.1 Overall quality of speakers

The quality of the speakers was rated as excellent by 21 per cent of delegates, as very good by 64 per cent and as good by 13 per cent.

### 4.2 Plenary Sessions

The five most well received plenary sessions were:

- How can we keep Christ at the centre?
  - The quality of the session was rated as excellent by 55 per cent of delegates, as very good by 34 per cent and as good by 12 per cent.
- Introduction to the LIGHT Wheel
  - The quality of the session was rated as excellent by 18 per cent of delegates, as very good by 53 per cent and as good by 25 per cent.
- What does it mean to be salt and light?
  - The quality of the session was rated as excellent by 32 per cent of delegates, as very good by 47 per cent and as good by 14 per cent.
- Why 'Thinking Theologically'?
  - The quality of the session was rated as excellent by 27 per cent of delegates, as very good by 46 per cent and as good by 21 per cent.
- Being salt in the nations: the church and country
  - The quality of this session was rated as excellent by 28 per cent of delegates, as very good by 45 per cent and as good by 20 per cent.

On average, 89 per cent of delegates rated the plenary session topics as being of major interest and relevance to their organisation or church.

### 4.3 Workshops

The number and topics of workshops available were rated as excellent by 9 per cent of delegates, as very good by 51 per cent, as good by 30 per cent and as satisfactory by 10 per cent.

On average, the quality of the workshops was rated as excellent by 33 per cent of delegates, as very good by 44 per cent, as good by 16 per cent and as satisfactory by 7 per cent.

### 4.4 Application of learning

In total, 100 per cent of delegates said they expect to use the things they learnt during the conference in their work or church.

## 5. Conference commitments

At the end of the conference, delegates were given the opportunity make commitments as to how they were going to apply what they had learnt. Some of these commitments have been detailed below.

- 'Pray and meditate on the word before all professional activities.'
- 'I commit to teach my community and walk faithfully in the Lord's vision.'
- 'Share and bring more information about integral mission to the management committee of my organisation.'
- 'I pledge to work with my organisation from the perspective of integral mission to take into account the whole community.'
- 'Organise feedback on the reflection with the church leaders of Chad.'
- 'Put together a plan aiming to change the thinking of the communities with which we are working by using the tool of prayer, as learnt.'
- 'I will take into account the spiritual and professional dimensions of keep Christ at the centre of my life.'
- 'I pledge to be a tool through which integral mission will be a reality in my community.'
- 'I pledge to serve God with the aim of integral mission by seeking balance in all things – the spiritual and the physical, and the spiritual and excellence.'
- 'I have to pray more, meditate more and commit myself more to serving. This will require me to be more humble and available for serving the Lord Jesus.'
- 'Involve members of their church and other Christian denominations in the church and community mobilisation process (CCMP) and facilitate the establishment or set-up of a Local House of Prayer for DRC.'
- 'Share what I learnt with with national leaders.'
- 'Share what I learnt with pastors in my region.'
- 'Fully commit to CCMP.'
- 'I pledge to take church and community mobilisation (CCM), for which I was called, more seriously.'
- 'I will make more time for prayer.'
- 'I will teach the principles of integral mission among students and upper school pupils.'
- 'Pray for God to show us where to start.'
- 'Share my learning with other people, encouraging them to pursue integral mission.'
- 'Teach at the Bible institute and organise distance training for the pastors in the churches, particularly in rural areas.'
- 'Teach/feedback to other pastors to promote understanding and interest.'
- 'Approach the community together with specific actions to carry out in order to meet specific needs.'
- 'I will plant trees and cut them down less. I will speak of managing the environment with the church.'
- 'Encourage people to act together for lasting change.'
- 'Encourage people to pray.'
- 'Have a period of handover and feedback from the seminar to our colleagues so as to allow each one to understand the challenges of integral mission.'
- 'I will visit our non-Christian neighbours to make friends with them with a view to influencing them in how I live my life.'

## 6. Summary statement

At Thinking Theologically: Burkina Faso there was widespread appreciation and understanding that faith has to lead to action – both theology and praxis matter! We are called to be salt and light in our communities, helping to bring holistic transformation to individuals' lives and communities. The key challenge remains for us to be 'in the world but not of it' and to find ways to speak the truth and live out our calling to integral mission in a way that is relevant in our individual contexts. We need to consciously ensure that our development practice is based on biblical reflection. As Christians and churches we may not always agree with each other's theological positions and understanding, but we must be gracious and still find ways to unite as the body of Christ and outwardly demonstrate the love of Christ to the world around us.

## 7. Next steps

Different initiatives will be taking place to help delegates to continue to learn from, support and encourage one another as we seek to live out our calling to integral mission.

### 7.1 Tearfund UK initiatives

#### 7.1.1 Communities of practice

Thinking Theologically: Burkina Faso participants are invited to join one of Tearfund's communities of practice. You can find more about these communities of practice, and join one, by visiting the following webpage: [www.tearfund.org/communitiesofpractice](http://www.tearfund.org/communitiesofpractice).

#### 7.1.2 Tearfund International Learning Zone

Tearfund is a Christian relief and development agency working to see millions of people released from material and spiritual poverty through a network of local churches. For the last 40 years, Tearfund have been gathering knowledge and sharing it with those who want to see poverty reduced and justice restored across the world. All of the resources are available to download free of charge including training materials, case studies, our international magazine Footsteps and more. To browse and download the resources please visit [www.tilz.tearfund.org](http://www.tilz.tearfund.org).

### 7.2 Tearfund Burkina Faso initiatives



In Burkina Faso, the Tearfund country office and the evangelical umbrella organisation FEME (Fédérations des Églises et Missions Evangéliques) will be organising a national follow-up conference to share the key learning and outcomes of Thinking Theologically: Burkina Faso with the wider evangelical community. The aim is to see practical initiatives launched as outcomes of this national meeting. If you are interested in participating, please email [mbairodbbee.njegollmi@tearfund.org](mailto:mbairodbbee.njegollmi@tearfund.org).

Tearfund's Burkina Faso country office and FEME have also decided to engage Christians in politics to commit to speaking, behaving and acting politically in accordance with the biblical principles taught during the Thinking Theologically: Burkina Faso conference.

Tearfund's Country Representative for Burkina Faso, Mbaïrodbbee Njegollmi, is also committed to increasing the involvement of Bible and theological training institutions in teaching the integral mission curriculum developed by Mbaïrodbbee and CITAF (Conseil des Institutions Théologiques d'Afrique Francophone), along with the outworking of the church and community mobilisation process (CCMP).

### 7.3 Tearfund Niger initiatives



Since the conference, Tearfund's Country Representative for Niger and a member of the conference delegation made a presentation during a meeting of the Alliance of Evangelical Churches and Missions in Niger. One of the conference delegates has also shared at the Network Forum, a forum of Christian NGOs and ministries. Tearfund's Country Representative for Niger will be exploring the possibility of hosting a follow-up meeting with the delegation from Niger.

### 7.4 Tearfund Chad initiatives



Since the conference, the Chad delegation met to exchange ideas on how to take forward the key learning from the conference. The Chad delegation, alongside Tearfund's Country Representative for Chad, will be hosting a national integral mission/church and community mobilisation conference towards the end of June 2016. If you are interested in participating, please email [levourne.passiri@tearfund.org](mailto:levourne.passiri@tearfund.org).

## 8. Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the wonderful support and enthusiastic cooperation of the Tearfund staff in Burkina Faso. Thank you for your willingness to host a Thinking Theologically gathering in Burkina Faso and for all your effort in making the gathering possible.

We would also like to explicitly acknowledge the efforts of Pastor Koama from Office de Développement des Eglises Evangéliques (ODE). Pastor Koama helped to coordinate the complex planning and implementation of the gathering with patience and dedication.

Special mention must also go to the Thinking Theologically: Burkina Faso programme team. The programme team was made up by Mbairodbbbee Njegollmi (Tearfund Country Representative for Burkina Faso), Rubin Pohor (Directeur du DDH à la FATEAC), Hannah Swithinbank (Theological Development Manager, Tearfund UK), Richard Yao (Tearfund Country Representative for Ivory Coast) and Gaston Slanwa (Tearfund Country Representative for Niger). The programme team committed time and effort to ensure the gathering consisted of engaging and informative sessions and brought together some of the very best speakers on integral mission and the topics we engaged with.

Finally, we would like to express appreciation for all the individuals who attended the conference. Thank you for your interest in and passion for integral mission. We recognise that it is only through individuals, churches and organisations seeking to respond to the holistic needs of individuals and communities in a Christ-centered way that we will truly see people flourish and communities thrive.

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