

Romans 12: 1-2 Vis-à-vis God's Mission: Revitalizing Church's Participation and Stimulating Transformation

Kabiro wa Gatumu
St. Paul's University

Abstract

The object of God's mission, to which the church is called to participate, is to redeem, reconcile and transform humanity and their world. However, disunity and ethnic tension in Rome houses churches could have impeded her participation. Furthermore, negative ethnicity, ethnic hostility, ethnic profiling and corruption in Africa seem to have silently and steadily networked to deny humanity a place to feel at home, serve, and be served as well as to lead. Yet through missional hermeneutical reading of Romans 12: 1-2, the text can be applied so as to revitalize participation and stimulate transformation of the African church. Besides, the church can be inspired to use the text as an instruction manual for lifelong reformation. Additionally, varied denominations can be inspired to jointly participate in God's mission without exalting themselves and always making sober judgements not based on gender, class, status or ethnic bias.

Key Words: God's Mission, Missional Hermeneutics, Church Participation, African Church, Transformation, Redeem and Reconcile

Introduction

God's gracious vision and actions toward humanity through Christ's death and resurrection are clearly identifiable in Romans, which illuminates the mission of God and how the church should participate and implement it. According to Kevin DeYoung and Gregory D. Gilbert (2011, pp. 15-28), the mission of the church is to partner with God in his mission, to redeem and to remake the world, but without negating cultural engagements. However, the church, as several scholars have shown, has habitually conformed to the world since the early years of her inception to the present time (Tierney, 1988; Stark, 1996; Magesa, 2004; Cone, 2011; McGrath, 2012; Adogame, 2013; Chidester, 2014; Duncan, 2015; Naidoo, 2017).

This objective of this paper is to read Romans 12: 1-2 as a missional text using missional hermeneutics. It first clarifies what missional hermeneutics entails, unveils God's mission in the

light of Romans and explains why and how the church should participate in God's mission. Secondly, it unfolds the state of house churches in Rome and offers an exegetical analysis of the text through the lens of missional hermeneutics. Besides, it reviews the situation of the church in African and finally relates Romans 12: 1-2 to God's mission in the context of the African church.

Methodology

Missional hermeneutics, which seems to be built on David J. Hesselgrave article that understands Scripture in the light of world mission, was used as its methodology (Hesselgrave, 1993, pp. 17-20). Yet as G. McKinzie (2014, <https://missiodeijournal.com>) maintains, the scholarly pursuit of missional hermeneutics is confined by the opacity of the term *missional*. How different scholars use the term makes its meaning obscure, yet missional should refer to anything that deals with mission. Naicker (2013, p. 218) and Redford (2012, pp. 1-6, 8-289) agree that any attempt to detach terms pointing to the same reality is elusive and suspicious. However, while it has been noted above in this paragraph that missional should refer to anything that deals with mission, this paper uses missional to specifically revitalize the participation of the church in the mission of God and to stimulate transformation.

Missional hermeneutics was intentionally used to inform and shape the exegesis of Romans 12: 1-2 since it locates God's mission at the centre of biblical interpretation. The method certainly reads Scripture in the light of God's mission to redeem humanity and creation. While it analyses God's nature and intention in a text vis-à-vis its immediate context and the entire Scripture, it also reflects on biblical texts as God's mission metanarrative. Furthermore, it evaluates missional sides of the narratives and how they inspire the church's participation in God's mission through submitting to God's voice. Niemandt (2019), Van Aarde and Li-M (2017) and Hunsberger (2016, p. 45) have identified four pillars of God's mission. These include *Missio Dei*, the Bible's goal to equip the church for witness, the church's contextual and missional trait and her encounter with culture. They further assert that these pillars make it a relevant, reliable and dynamic method. Besides, their synthesis speeds the purpose of the gospel, which is to transform diverse cultures and social contexts.

God's mission, church's participation and the epistle to the Romans

God's mission, which is transformative, empowering and holistic, is to redeem, reconcile and transform humanity and the world to himself through Christ. Deriving from God's act of creation, it focuses on seeking and saving fallen humanity and redeeming creation. So, it not only shapes the church's 'proclamation service, advocacy for justice and care of creation,' but also defines her existence (Rasolondraibe, 2004, p. 32). The church thus participates in 'God's mission' as an agent of 'reconciliation, redemption and transformation,' which are also 'the criteria' by which her participation must be adjudicated (Flemming, 2013, p. 17). Yet 'God's mission' and 'church's participation' are unmistakable in Romans. According to M. J. Gorman (2015, pp. 261-262), the epistle's central theme is *theosis*, i.e., "becoming like God by participating in the life of God." He avers that *theosis* is inherently missional, the starting point of mission and its right theological framework. It ushers Spirit-enabled transformational participation through the "existence and nature of God revealed in the crucified and resurrected Messiah." Besides, Christ became human so that humanity can share and become what he is, i.e., the true image of God.

Traditionally, Romans has been seen "as the place where Paul sets his theology systematically" (Sumney. 2012, pp. 1-2) perhaps because as Childs (2008, p. 173) maintains, the epistle "shifts primarily from doctrinal discourse to ethical and practical exhortations." He further insists that "Paul central argument that the gospel is a revelation of God's righteousness assumes that doctrinal exposition is integrally joined with its moral implication". Such conclusions irrefutably support the assertion that the epistle to the Romans has been largely read from doctrinal and ethical perspective, though its irrefutable missiological trajectory is given trivial attention (Lee, 2022, pp. 200-215; Patel, 2020, 30-45; Green. 2021, pp. 85-102).

According to W. G. Kümmel (1975, p. 312), reading Romans only as a doctrinal and ethical treatise is weak since it does not handle doctrines like 'eschatology,' 'Christology,' 'the Lord's Supper' and 'church order.' Besides, the epistle is missional in nature since its doctrinal and ethical teachings are inclined towards God's mission. Indeed, Romans highlights obedience and holiness as unique virtues that humanity must have to participate in God's mission. The epistle

also holds unique distinguishing marks and principles on which church's mission plan should echo. Land (2018, pp. 7-9) and Panjikaran (2009, p. 55) assert that the epistle underlines how the church must always disclose invisible qualities of God to the world through their action. Others (Keown, 2021, pp. 1-2, 53; Gorman, 2015, p. 24) show that the epistle validates why obedience of faith among nations (1: 5; 15: 15-28; 16: 26) is essential to the church's participation.

Constantineanu (2010, p. 101) maintains that Paul, who wrote Romans to empower believers to apply the gospel's inferences, was a mission theologian. While not denying that Paul articulated in the epistle to the Romans doctrinal instructions and ethical exhortation, the view that he was a mission theologian due to the missional implications arising from his doctrines and ethics are instantly recognizable. For that reason, God's mission, which is the inner logics of preaching the gospel, must be prioritized in reading Romans if the epistle revitalizes mission, broadens the church's mission horizons and rekindles the church's mission exuberance. Besides, it discloses that God's mission is the window that illumines the church's participation (Keown, 2021, p. 155; Timmins, 2018, pp. 387-404; Kruse, 2012, pp. 6-11). Nevertheless, the epistle's context of production was not conducive for the participation of Rome house churches.

The situation of house churches in Rome

The epistle's context was full of religio-cultural and socio-political/economic oppression and many people were either poor, slaves or captives. Low life expectancy, food insecurity and high orphan mortality were very high. Social, racial and ethnic hatred, prejudice and disunity as well as sexual abuse, loss of dignity, property and displacement were not only extremely high, but also they revitalized tyranny (Rosenfeld and Perlmutter, 2020, pp. 51-52; Hin, 2013, pp. 101-104; Harris, 2011, pp. 27-56; Wu, 2011, pp. 64-65). Paul therefore sought to unite the ethnically divided house churches, yet Sampley (1995, pp. 40-52) rejects this view, insisting that Paul never addressed disunity in Rome directly as he did in Corinth and Galatia. However, several ancient texts such as *Sirach*, 15: 11-21; *Testament of Asher* 1: 3; *Wisdom of Solomon*, 11: 15; *1 Maccabees*, 5: 1-9; 4: 54; *2 Maccabees*, 8: 9; 14: 14; *3 Maccabees*, 3: 1-4 disclose that each ethnic group sought to destroy the other. Besides, several scholars show that ethnic division, disrespect based on ethnicity and polemics on lifestyle and the rightful place of Mosaic Law on

food and holy days (14: 1–15: 7) between Jews and Gentile glaringly epitomized house churches in Rome (Vaughn, 2019, p. 181; Timmins, 2018, p. 393). They carried with them heavy loads of ethnic prejudice, which undermined the effort to assert Christ as Lord to all nations (Kujanpää, 2018, pp. 65-92; Thiessen, 2016, pp. 13-15, 84, 105-128). Therefore, as W. B. Russell III (1980, p. 180) insists, Paul wrote Romans to address relations between Jews and Gentiles. He was urging them to “participate fully in God’s present harvest of all people.”

Misional reading of Romans 12: 1-2

Despite to the trivial attention given to the missional reading of Romans, Longenecker (2011, pp. 110, 148-160) asserts that Romans is a missional document “soliciting support for Paul’s mission to Spain.” Irrefutably, Paul wrote Romans to solicit support for his mission to Spain as noted above. Yet the view that he was writing the epistle to revitalizes the church to participate in God’s mission is perhaps one of reasons why he wrote the epistle. This is immensely probable since doctrinal and ethical teachings in Romans are not only missional, but also linked to God’s mission (Wright, 2013, p. 102; Gorman, 2004, p. 155). The reading of the epistle should thus integrate readings from the panorama of God’s mission and as a missional text.

The epistles first eleven chapters define and explain God’s mission and validate that redemption and reconciliation are not built on ethnicity. As M. Melendez (2020, p. 63) avers, “Justification of the Jews and the Gentiles by grace through faith in Jesus Christ is the missional-theological singularity of Romans.” Besides, chapters 9–11 contain credible and logical argumentation on Jews’ future salvation and Gentile’s integration into Jewish heritage. However, Jews must not reason that they belong to God due to their ethnicity since their being re-grafted into the olive tree depends on God’s grace and altruistic authority. While a remnant of believing Jews exists, Gentiles were grafted into Israel’s heritage through God’s grace. Precisely, since God grafted Gentiles through the disobedience of Jews, their obedience should provoke Jews to envy, leading them to submit to Christ’s Lordship. For that reason, there is hope that they too shall submit to Jesus hence Jews and Gentile believers would participate in the mission of God by not only serving one another practically (12: 9-25), but also loving each other. Since the heart of the law

is love (13: 8-10), they should abidingly love each other due to the fact they are now reconciled with each other (Keener, 2020, pp. 89-90).

Essentially, while chapter 12–16 provide practical advice on how believers should live in the world, it also discloses how the church participates in God’s mission. The ‘image of the body’ (Rom 12: 3-8) not only exemplifies the church and her members, but also invites participation in God’s mission. It teaches how the church participates through different gifts and skills given to her ethnically diverse members. Their identity and essence are entwined despite their gender or ethnicity. God, who is the originator of their transformed Holy Spirit-led life, forms them not as individuals but as a fellowship of believers (12: 5). Besides, God does not give spiritual gifts for personal benefits but for members to serve one another. Therefore, when believers use their gifts irrespective of their ethnicity, gender, class or status, the inclusive participation of the church in God’s mission becomes clearly identifiable (DeBorst, 2012, p. 45).

Chapters 12–16 recaps and recalls the vertical dimension of God’s mission recorded in 1–11. These chapters also unveil the horizontal dimension of God’s mission (12: 5) and simultaneously restate the universal missional mandate (15: 14-33) featured in 11: 1-36. Practical hints of living according to the Spirit, discarding the life of flesh and not living according to the world (8: 1-13) are clear in 12–15. According to Constantineanu (2010, p. 145), Romans 12: 1-2 displays the social significance of reconciliation and shows what being reconciled with God means for believers daily life within and outside their ethnic group. Yet the verses cannot be studied in isolation as they link the reader with earlier chapters, which narrate the source of faith and the call to living righteousness and faithfulness life.

Noticeably, the conjunction οὖν – *oun* (therefore) (12: 1) infers that what follows must be read and understood in view of Romans 1: 18–11: 36 since it concludes what is explained earlier. The verse also initiates what comes after by urging believers to respond to God’s mercy by presenting their bodies as a living sacrifice. The conjunction recalls Romans 8: 6-9 and urges believers to fix their minds not on flesh but on the Spirit so as to discern the deeds that please God. It denotes strong motivation and responsibility of believers to faithfully obey the plea to ‘present their bodies as a living sacrifice.’ Besides, “therefore” insinuates that worship is a

thankful response to God's salvific gift, and which inspires the church to participate in God's mission.

The emphasis "to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God" captures the purpose and impetus of living a righteous and faithful life. The phrase "by the mercies of God" shows God's gracious dealings with humanity, albeit not deserving his favour. However presenting the body as a living sacrifice contrasts Moses' Law, which required a sacrifice of animals without blemish as atonement for human sin (Lev. 23: 18). "The mercies of God" hints that in the new era of God's grace, animal sacrifice is not necessary. Perhaps Romans 12: 1, as Wright (2002, p. 704) insists, "irretrievably invalidates animal sacrifice as a means of atonement just as Romans 2: 25-29 by-passed the Jewish rite of circumcision as the mark of the covenant between God and his people." Believers' sacrificial obligation therefore exceeds that of animal sacrifice since they are to "present their bodies as a living sacrifice," which is not limited to, or by time and place. It is required of them to daily offer their entire life sacrificially as they participate in God's mission through serving God and humanity. Keown (2021, p. 155) and Wu, (2011, p. 68) hold that believers are called to mimic Christ who, due to humility, self-emptying, service and obedience, offered his body once and for all to redeem humanity (Phil 2: 5; Rom. 3: 21-24; Heb 7: 27; 9: 12, 26; 10: 10). Besides, "the mercies of God" recalls believers' union with Christ (Rom 6: 1-23; 8: 1-13), discourages them from presenting their bodies to sin as tools of unrighteousness (6: 13) and empowers them to present their bodies as a living sacrifice (12: 1) in the service of God and humanity, which is their missional obligation.

The phrase, "which is your spiritual worship" reinforces "to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God." Yet, "your spiritual worship," does not refer to a mystical experience, but to the Jewish temple worship (Rom. 9: 4). As such, Paul was redefining worship to signify the response to God's mercy, which is not effected through an animal offering. Furthermore, the Greek term λογικὴν (*logiken*), which is translated as spiritual, refers to what is sensible or rational. So, their spiritual worship must be reasonable and associated with sound moral behaviour. The text thus inspires worship, which is both physical and spiritual, yet defined through the integrity and character of believers. It is a form of worship, which does not foresee strife between body and spirit since they network to achieve faithful discipleship. Mutual love,

service to others and fostering an affectionate relationship with God are the main ingredients that symbolize the church's worship (Rom. 12: 6-21). This however recalls Romans 2: 8-29 and 9: 25-26, which disclose that faith in Jesus Christ and God's mercy, are basic for cordial relations with God and each other, whether one is a Jew or a Gentile.

The words "do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind" (Rom. 12: 2) contains essential imperatives for the church's participation in God's mission. The action words of this phrase are second person plural middle imperative *suschmatizesqe* – *suschēmatizesthe* – (be conformed) and second person passive imperative *metamorfousqe* – *metamorphousthe* – (be transformed). The former suggests a continuous commitment to avoid conforming to the world through fluctuating behaviour at all times and in every situation. Since it is a verb in the middle voice, it suggests that avoiding being conformed to the world is for the benefit of believers. The latter refers to conversion of humanity's critical aspects like thinking, feeling and acting. Since it is a verb in the passive voice, it hints that God initiates transformation and empowers believers to live righteously and faithfully. Yet the requirements of *metamorfousqe* are best understood through metamorphosis, the process that nurtures a butterfly to maturity. Each stage of the process unveils an object distinct to that of the next stage. Naturally, the egg is not like the caterpillar, which is not like the cocoon. The cocoon is different from a fully matured butterfly. The idea derived from this process is that transformation creates a different person from the earlier one. Therefore, Romans 12: 2 implies that God's mission is to transform people, making them godly and holy, hence distinct from what they were before (Boaheng, 2023, pp. 23-40; Parker, 2020, pp. 100-115). Yet being transformed is not to replace one individual with another but to empower the one that exists already. In fact, transformation through the renewal of the mind initiates the modification of human behaviour, attitude, lifestyle, structure, values and priorities (Kruse, 2012, pp. 463-466).

Romans 12: 1-2 thus provides direction on how believers should respond to the mercies of God and share in righteous living, which verifies their redemption, reconciliation and transformation. This manner of responding to God's mercy is an indicator of how the church participates in God's mission. T. Chester (2010: 47) rightly emphasizes that recognizing God's mercy compels the church to act in accordance with His love and justice, which is a vital aspect of participating

in God's mission. So, the entire existence of believers must always be a visible and rational worship as they serve God and humanity. Noticeably, Romans 13: 14, which exhorts believers to 'put on the Lord Jesus and not to make provision for the flesh to satisfy its desires,' reinforces Romans 12: 1-2. Besides, the text thus revitalizes the church's participation in God's mission by showing others love (Rom. 12: 13-21) so as to stimulate transformation. However, the context of the African church, which seems hostile, may hinder an appropriate application of the exegesis of Romans 12: 1-2 on how and why the church should participate in the mission of God.

Context of the African Church

According to Siu Fung Wu (2011, p. 64), Romans is immensely relevant to holistic mission since all sorts of injustices that the Christians in Rome experienced are too familiar in global south. Perhaps the epistle is more applicable to the African context due to ethnic disunity and rivalry, though widespread globally (Sanou, 2015, pp. 94-104; Williams, 1997, p. 24). Noticeably, an increasing phenomenon in some of Europe's largest cities is the flourishing of ethnic churches. Yet ethnic tension is familiar in US churches since ethnic majorities and minorities tend to have their own denominations that are basically composed of white members and black members. Putnam and Campbell (2010, pp. 123-125) indicate that these communities often provide a sense of belonging for individuals from various ethnic backgrounds. K. wa Gatumu (2019, p. 195) and E. Mombo (2010, pp. 42-44) have noticed long-lasting disunity, corruption, negative ethnicity and ethnic profiling in the African context, which may impede the African church's participation in God's mission. However, the origin of the problem has been traced to European missionaries-founded denominations, especially during the first decade of the 20th century, which were stereotypically ethnic. Yet effects of ethnicity endure in several denominations that constitute the present African church.

Lamentably, the African church has always empowered negative ethnicity and ethnic profiling rather than enabling ecumenism. This has not only delayed healing, but also denies people space and place to feel at home, serve, be served and lead (Smith, 2016, p. 220; wa Gatumu, 2013, pp. 32-76; Abogunrin, 2012, p. 57). Yet as expected, the rapid growth of Christianity in African requires the African church to play a key role in socio-political/economic transformation. Yet she

should be transformed and liberated from what depicts her in a bad right (Agbiji, 2015, p. 2). Certainly, the success of the African church depends on her ability to address ethnic related problems, although she seems unable to initiate cultural transformation (Michael, 2014, p. 82).

Revitalizing transformation and stimulating participation

According to Wu, the relevance of Romans to holistic mission in the global south is clear due to similar economic and social conditions to that of ancient Rome (Wu, 2011, pp. 62-69). E. Wan (2005, pp. 1-2) holds that the epistle contains missional strategy on how the church participates and effects God's mission to all ethnic groups. Yet, does the epistle influence the understanding of the African church's view of mission? M. Michael (2014, pp. 79-98) identified the partial understanding of mission that with regard to the African church. He noted a paradox of mission after evaluating the writings of some African scholars, which causes ambiguity and crisis. He noticed that while they are fully occupied with issues of missions, they do not offer practical and helpful insights in the mission field. Their works reveal a dialectical gap between 'intellectual space' and real mission practices. However, her understanding of God's mission is derived from sending, which limits participation to foreign and cross-border mission work. So, the African church has been lacking strategies that define the local church's transformative ministry in a specific location. Despite the fact that mission has no geographical border, it is vital for the African church to understand mission from the outlook of her local context (Mkwaila, 2017, 7-10).

Equipping people to become witnesses of Christ in their locality is as valid as sending people to cross-border mission. Currently, sending has negative implications since, despite the discernible division of denominations; sending agencies emphasize opening new ones. Thus, as Mugambi (1996, p. 239) maintains, a clarification of mission as an "essential responsibility of all ecclesial communities" is vital if the meaning given to mission inevitably impacts church's participation. The African church's understanding of mission thus needs a contextual paradigm shift, which must not contravene African epistemological values. While seeking to excite transformation of cultures and institutions that halt realization and celebration of life, the church's view of mission must be built on people's spiritual, physical and economic needs. It must also entwine personal

salvation with social responsibility to fight religio-cultural and socio-political/economic injustice, tyranny and corruption.

The African church must then understand mission holistically and entwine spiritual-material aspects of human existence into her missional activities. Besides, she must always embrace continuous reformation and transformation if she shall stimulate spiritual, moral, social, political and economic transformation (Baron, 2018, p. 2; Nkansah-Obrempong, 2017, pp. 280-294). It is necessary for the African church to always re-route the goals, ideologies, structures and values of her members. Besides, she is obligated to condemn whatever dehumanizes or violates life and to inspire growth of all that affirms sanctity of life. This means that she must endeavour to promote and illumine peace and justice in society as well as reviving mutual co-existence among her different members. As it were, the image of the body and its parts absolutely points to mutuality rather than individuality hence gifts of the Spirit bestowed on believers and how they are used benefit church members and stimulates church growth (Panjikaran, 2009, p. 55). Besides, the image of the body invites members to identify their deficiency and boost awareness that everyone is needed in the success of mission. Additionally, mission constitutes a real and concrete call for every believer to build with others rather than for others since the church participates in God's mission through involving all the members (DeYoung, 2015, p. 45).

The African church must create awareness that transformation comes from God's gracious will to call, justify and empower people through the Holy Spirit. The purpose of transformation is to enable beneficiaries of God's gracious gifts to conform to the image of his Son and to become instruments of righteousness (Rom 12: 2, 6:13, 8:29; 1 Pt. 1:14–25; Eph. 4:15–5:10; 2 Cor. 3:18; Col. 1:10–14; Titus 3:5). She needs to participate in God's mission, which defines her call and nature, to shape the entire life of God's people (Mkwaila, 2017, pp. 32-33). The apt application of Romans 12: 1-2 would therefore become the manual to instruct African Christians to publicly demonstrate their faith in daily life. This is basically a call to witness through sacrificial living, however not by the church's effort but by the mercies and grace of God (Rom. 12: 1).

It is crucial to note that religious sacrifices, which are a major element of African primal religion, sought to unite worshipers with the Supreme Being. It was thus indispensable for worshipers to

carefully select the sacrificial animal and offer acceptable sacrifices. Yet the concept of a living sacrifice seems contradictory since the sacrificial animal had to die. However, as Boaheng (2023, p. 23) maintains, since Jesus' self-sacrifice expiated human sin once and for all, believers must live a life analogous to Christ's sacrificial death by dying unto sin and walking in the newness of life (Rom 6: 1-23). Such living empowers the African church to convey God's redemption and reconciliation for transforming humanity and the world in which they live irrespective of their ethnicity. As a result, the African Church can enable humanity to live a life of obedience as they await the final cosmic salvation, through which humanity and the world shall experiences remarkable state of peace (Keown, 2021, pp. 169-170, 207; Constantineanu, 2010, pp. 64, 84, 130).

Romans 12: 1-2 thus demands African Christian to understand the mission of God holistically, to be socially responsible to other people and individually accountable to God (Kekana, 2020, pp. 18-33; Tite, 2019, pp. 18-33; Ngunyi, 2018, pp. 20-29). They should ardently and applicably bear the missional import of Christ's redemptive and reconciliatory death. This would empower the church to facilitate rebirth of people who value justice, peace and liberty since she would be vested with the ability purge all forms of tyranny. This would put her in a position to convey God's reconciling grace, though not by her own strength since her stimulus derives from God's mercies. However, God's grace is mediated through her union with the crucified and risen Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit (Gaventa, 2011, pp. 65-75; Constantineanu, 2010, p. 86). As such, the African Church must connect with God through obedience to Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit so as to transform the world. Essentially, the Holy Spirit works through people and helps them to regulate their community life, thereby playing a decisive role to the salvation of humanity (Moltmann, 1992, p. 45; Boff, 1997, p. 68).

Yet the depravity of African church noted above not only dents her existence, but also disrupts her participation in God's mission. Besides, when denominationalism is entwined with ethnicity, economic and tribal poison resulting from it is hard to calm. They network to relegate people into the dark world of futility, dehumanization and injustice, thus disrupting participation in God's mission (Kamudzandu, 2020, <https://www.workingpreacher.org>). It is hence desirable for the leadership of the African church to recognize that mission goes beyond denominationalism. As such, the church has no option but to intentionally seek unity in diversity (Rom 15: 4-33),

which transcends, and affirms the ethnicity of all believers. She must learn that ethnic variances should not hinder cordial and peaceful relations in the world (Du Toit, 2023, McKnight, 2019, pp. 13-14).

As noted above, Paul desired to create an in-group social identity, which did not exclude some people from the household of God due to their ethnicity (Campbell, 2023, p. 236; Keown, 2021, pp. 20). Furthermore, Romans 12: 1-2 inflates the idea that participation in God's mission entails living in unity (cf. John 17: 20-21). This implies that participation of the African Church requires cooperating with a diversity of people, organisations of diverse structures, believers from other traditions, ecclesial communities and people of goodwill. Her participation requires renewed ecumenical thirst, which allows her to read and use the text as an instruction manual for mission and lifelong reformation. However, the African church is still in denial of negative ethnicity, which restrains her evangelistic resilience, growth and spirituality. Thus, despite her alleged rapid growth and rich spirituality, negative ethnicity cause doubt on her competence to participate in missional activities (Njoroge, 2017, pp. 30-45; Kobia, 2014, p. 122). To alleviate the situation, the African church, through her leadership, must embark on constant transformation due to her members' cultural diversity and inspire hospitable relationship among them. This has the potential to empower them to continue being God's agent of transforming society and the world's structures of human existence. As Isaac Boaheng (2023, p. 23) asserts, 'Paul's concept of the transformed life in 12:1 can correct delusions about Christianity and empower African Christians to engage the public sphere with their faith.'

By understanding that ethnic diversity and denominationalism are inferior, the African Church would create united people who have been reconciled with God and each other as they await the future and final salvation. Moreover, Romans 12: 1-2 aligns participation with Jesus's definition of his mission (Luke 4: 18-19). According to David Bosch (1991, pp. 411-412), 'God sets the church for the salvation of the world, especially in the context of evil, despair and lostness.' This implies that the African Church must embrace all activities that liberate people from slavery and economic oppression. Such activities relate with Romans 12: 1-2 since transformed life leads to renewed mind, which lightens God's presence in the world and inspires true worship built on loving and caring relations. So, the right application of the text can enabled the African church to

become agent and instrument of God's transformation. Furthermore, it can empower her not to exclude people from offering reasonable worship to God through their spiritual and physical self, due to ethnic and/or gender profiling. Rather, she shall empower members to serve each other because they belong to Christ's body. Through unity, humility, love and using their gifts to serve each other, they shall show what it means to offer the body as a living sacrifice (12: 3-8) (Baron, 2018, p. 2). As such, the African Church would be enabled to enter into a new order where people, whether *bona fide* members or not, are not "othered," hated and judged due to ethnicity (wa Gatumu, K. 2013, pp. 32-76). According to M. Maggay (2010, p. 181), the "new social order demands that its citizens cross borders of ethnicity, gender and economic status and demonstrate that in Christ, equality is possible."

The African church must therefore "participate in mission by sharing the gospel of redemption, reconciliation and transformation to all people locally and globally" (Sundermeire, 2006, p. 444). The best way through which she can impact society is by adopting a lifestyle that produce non-judgemental missional practices and not oppress people due to their race, gender or ethnicity. She must share all the value of living at peace at all time, including with those previously regarded as enemies. She must stimulate radical transformation, which creates unity in a diverse world and to enhance mutual reception of God's will and mission. Besides, the radical transformation she should engender must practically provoke repentance of the oppressor and oppressed (Gorman, 2015, pp. 288-291).

Conclusion

This paper read Romans 12: 1-2 using missional hermeneutics so as to revitalize participation and stimulate the transformation of the African church. Besides, it not only sought to inspire the church to use Romans 12: 1=2 as an instruction manual for lifelong reformation, but also to inspire varied denominations to jointly participate in God's mission. The findings were that the ethnic tension and conflicts in Rome house churches and ethnic rivalry and negative ethnicity in the African church were a potential hindrance to the church's participation in God's mission. Besides, the paper found that the epistle to the Romans has largely been read from doctrinal and ethical perspectives, while its missional perspective is given trivial attention. Yet Romans bear

witness to God's mission to redeem, reconcile and transform all people (Rom 1–11). Besides, the epistle discloses why and how the church is called to participate in the mission of God (Rom 12–15). So, reading the epistle from a missional perspective and as a missional text should be given equal priority as that given to the epistle's doctrinal and ethical readings. Although the social context of the African Church may circumvent or frustrate her participation in God's mission, an apt application of the exegesis of Romans 12: 1-2 can inspire and renew her participation. Due to the renewal of mind of her individual members, she would be empowered to avoid cataloguing humanity along contours of gender, ethnicity, race, class or status.

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