

Reformed mission in Southern Africa

The way forward



26 Contributions by 24 authors

Edited by Rob van der Kooy

Published by the GKSA Evangelisation Publications Fund

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Acknowledgements

In this book, 24 contributors, all of whom are in one way or another deeply involved in mission work, attempt to take stock, evaluate past work done in the light of the Scriptures and reflect on the way evangelisation is done and should be done in future.

Time and circumstances are changing in such a way that many congregations are finding it increasingly difficult to give mission work the priority it should have. But God's commands remain unchanged. He still provides his children with plenty of opportunities to execute the Great Commission. And where He provides opportunities, He also opens possibilities. We must never underestimate our Almighty Lord!

The contributors are members of the GKSA or members of various other Reformed and some other denominations. They write from different perspectives and contexts. All perspectives, including those with which one might not necessarily agree, are worth taking note of for the sake of promoting effective evangelisation.

This book is not an academic treatise. The purpose is to give readers the benefit of the knowledge and insight of the contributors and the lessons they have learned over many years. The result is that contributions vary between some of a more academic nature and others very practical, all to promote the Lord's glory in Southern Africa and beyond.

I sincerely thank all the contributors for their work, which was done in an abnormal time and in between heavy schedules. Details of the authors appear on pp 305-309. Our appreciation for the foreword goes to Professor Emeritus David Engelsma of the Protestant Reformed Seminary, Grand Rapids, USA, who contributed an incisive Biblical analysis of the importance and method of mission work.

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Rob van der Kooy
Editor



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Foreword

Evangelism and the Reformed Faith

Strange to say, some suppose that the relationship between the Reformed Faith and evangelism is uneasy and uncomfortable. Stranger still, some charge that the Reformed Faith and evangelism are incompatible. Many outside of Reformed churches contend that the Reformed Faith makes evangelism (or "soul-winning", as they like to call it) impossible. Many who profess to be Reformed are now echoing this charge. What is worse, they are radically revising the Reformed Faith in the interests (they say) of evangelism.

Read the studies that set forth the foundations, the messages and the methods of missions: universal love; universal atonement; salvation dependent upon the free, sovereign choice of the sinner. Listen to the evangelists: "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life"; "Christ died for you"; "You can have this wonderful salvation and be born again, if only you will accept Jesus".

It is the duty of those to whom God has given the inheritance and responsibility of the Reformed Faith to show the perfect harmony of this Faith and evangelism. To do this, we must ourselves see clearly that they are compatible.

What evangelism is

Speak of evangelism and one probably thinks of an elaborate, expensive campaign to gather many people to a meeting that will be conducted by a specialist, the "evangelist". Or a specific kind of religious meeting in which the music, the message, and the other elements are carefully geared to get men to make a decision for Christ. Or of reports on how many hundreds, or thousands, "got saved" or "came forward".

Take, for example, the element so important to modern evangelism, and so prominent: the invitation, coming forward, or altar call. The altar call is thoroughly unbiblical, apart now from the perverse theology which underlies it — the theology of the goodness and freedom of the will of the sinner and the sovereignty of his will in salvation, what Paul repudiates in Romans 9:16 as the teaching that salvation is of him that *willeth*. It is unbiblical, grievously so, to obtain this result by the psychological, emotional pressures that are exerted.

For the answer to our question, "What is evangelism?" we do not look to popular notions, but to Holy Scripture.

In reality, evangelism is the preaching of the gospel. This is the meaning of the word, *evangelism* — a Biblical word in the Greek of the New Testament. Evangelism is the activity of publishing, or announcing, the "*evangel*", the gospel, i.e. the glad tidings of Jesus the Christ, crucified and risen.

This answers the question whether a Reformed church believes in evangelism and whether Reformed saints are to be zealous for evangelism. The gospel must be preached! This must be done within the established church, among the saints already called out of the world; for their constant comfort and edification, they are continually to hear the good news. This is why we come to church every Lord's Day.

But the gospel must also be preached outside of the church already established in the truth; this is necessary for the saving of the as yet unconverted and the straying. This is what we mean when we speak of evangelism: the activity of proclaiming the good news to those outside the congregation. Evangelism, then, is the same as missions. Evangelism is the activity of preaching the gospel to those outside the congregation already established in the truth, in order to bring them to Christ, by missionaries who are ordained for this purpose.

Evangelism is not only work done with heathens, to work with those who make no profession of faith in Jesus the Saviour. On the contrary, it includes the work of the church with those who profess Christianity and belong to a church, but who are either ignorant of the truth of the gospel or have departed from it. To bring them the gospel is not "sheep-stealing", but sheep-gathering; it is not "fishing in troubled waters", but fishing for men.

When Jesus in Matthew 9:37, 38 instructed His disciples that the harvest is plenteous, but the labours few, and that they, therefore, must pray the Lord of the harvest to send forth labourers into his harvest, his reference was not,

primarily, to the heathens, but to the multitudes of fainting, scattered Israelites, the Old Testament people of God, under the care of the priests and scribes. By false doctrine, apostasy, and simple lack of the Word of God, these people were spiritually sore distressed and, therefore, proper objects of evangelism.

Paul's ministry shows that the work of evangelism is not exclusively with admitted unbelievers. He brought the Word to the Jews first; and when confessing Christians strayed, as they did in Galatia, the apostle urgently evangelised them.

Many believers in Christ have so inadequate a knowledge of the gospel, and so impoverished a conception of the Christian life, that a considerable part of the work of the church can be properly regarded as evangelism. The evangelism that the true church of Christ undertakes must therefore contemplate the bringing of the gospel in its full import and demands to those who, though believers, are nevertheless the victims of ignorance, unfaithfulness and compromising associations.

This is why the Reformation was an evangelistic enterprise, a missionary activity. Reformers note that Calvin once sent several missionaries to Brazil. The Reformation itself was missions – a gigantic, energetic, worldwide mission work, with abundant and enduring fruits. The gospel was proclaimed to multitudes in many nations, perishing in the ignorance and lie of Roman Catholicism.

What the Reformed Faith is

Why, then, is it charged upon the Reformed Faith, and sometimes feared, that it is incompatible with evangelism? This is because of what the Reformed Faith is. It is the teaching that salvation is the free gift and sovereign work of God in Jesus Christ, wholly without the slightest merit or work of man. The message of the Reformed Faith is "Salvation by Grace Alone".

This message consists of several outstanding truths. God has eternally loved and predestinated unto eternal life some persons out of the human race, in distinction from others whom, in the same degree, He predestinated unto perdition. This is the gracious source and foundation of all salvation.

God gave His only begotten Son to die for all those, and those only, whom He had given to Christ as His people, effectually to redeem them, by atoning for their sins. This is the gracious ground of all our salvation.

God now efficaciously calls, by the gospel and the Holy Spirit, into saving fellowship with Jesus, all those, but only those, whom He chose and re-

deemed. This is the gracious accomplishment of salvation. This work continues, as preservation, until all the elect, redeemed, and renewed people of God are perfected in glory.

With these doctrines, the Reformed Faith holds that all men alike are, by the fall of Adam, dead in sin and slaves to Satan, having wills that are not free, so as to be able to choose Christ and salvation, but bound, so as to be incapable of doing ought else, save to reject the Christ presented in the gospel.

The Reformed Faith preaches an almighty, gracious God and a powerless, totally depraved mankind. Such a faith, men charge, cannot evangelise. Indeed, such a faith must be unevangelistic in its very spirit. It cannot be motivated to be zealous in evangelism. Even if it were so motivated, it would have no message to bring.

Note well, however, that this charge, or fear, as the case may be, arises from certain preconceived notions about evangelism – notions that are unbiblical. There is the notion that the motivation of evangelism is God's love for all men and desire to save all men. And that the message of evangelism is a universal love of God, a universal atonement, and a universal grace in the preaching, all dependent upon the free will of sinners, who, it is thought, are able to choose for Christ. There is the notion that the efficacy of evangelism is the persuasiveness of the evangelist and the decision of the sinner's wooed will.

Raving these notions of evangelism, men proceed to corrupt the Reformed Faith in the interests of evangelism. Reprobation is denied, and men proclaim a universal saving love of God. The evangelist preaches to all and sundry, "God loves you".

Limited atonement hampers missions; and, therefore, men preach a universal atonement, the evangelist assures all and sundry, "Christ died for you". An efficacious call of the gospel to some only restricts mission work; and, therefore, men teach that God is gracious to all men. The evangelist announces to all his hearers, "God desires your salvation and is now sincerely offering salvation to you".

Total depravity does not square with such evangelism (for what good is all this love, atonement, and grace, if the sinner cannot avail himself of it?); and, therefore, it is suggested to the sinner that he has the ability to open up his heart to let Jesus in, or he is told outright that the new birth depends upon his believing.

True, with this kind of evangelism, the Reformed Faith is incompatible; of such an evangelism, it is the sworn foe. A Reformed preacher would not dare to engage in evangelism of this kind. He would not, because he fears to stand in the Judgment, having preached a message that robbed God of His glory in the salvation of sinners and that taught sinners to trust for salvation in their own ability and activity.

But this is not Biblical evangelism. With Biblical evangelism, the Reformed Faith is perfectly compatible. It is false, it is absurd to suppose that the Reformed Faith cannot do evangelism, because of the doctrines of grace that it espouses. These truths, assailed as detrimental to evangelism, are truths that set forth salvation as God's gracious gift. They constitute the gospel, the "*evangel*", the good news.

The message of Reformed evangelism

The message of the Reformed Faith in evangelism will be the whole counsel of God, as was the message of Paul, according to Acts 20:27. The Reformed preacher knows the entire Scripture; and he knows it as the inspired Word of God. He comes with Scripture, not with a little list of spiritual laws or some gospel on a thumbnail.

Essentially, the message is always the same, but the preacher applies it differently to different audiences. Christ's evangelism of the rich young ruler (Mark 10:17-22) differed from His evangelism of the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:1-42). Paul's approach to the Jews of the synagogue differed from his approach to the Greek philosophers of Areopagus (compare Acts 17:1-3 with Acts 17:16-34).

Thorough doctrinal instruction is required in evangelism as the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20 plainly shows. It calls the church to baptize the converts in the Name of the Triune God, implying that the missionary has taught the converts the doctrine of the Trinity. In order to do this, the preacher must himself have thorough knowledge of the Word of God and must possess the wisdom to address the Word to every audience. He must be called and qualified by Christ through the Holy Spirit; no uncalled and unqualified "evangelists", no matter how well-intentioned.

Although our message is the whole counsel of God, there are certain crucial elements in the message of evangelism. What they are, our Lord pointed out in His mandate to the apostles, and to the church, in Luke 24:45-47 (ESV¹). Immediately upon His resurrection from the dead, Christ opened the minds

¹ All references from the Bible are from the English Standard Version (ESV)

of the disciples ". . . to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer, and on the third day rise from the dead . . ." Then, He commissioned them (and in them the church down through the ages): ". . . that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name among all nations, beginning from Jerusalem".

Similar was the later commission of the apostle born out of due time, Paul, in Acts 26:18, ". . . to open their eyes, so that may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins 'and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me' . . . performing deeds in keeping with their repentance". (Acts 26:20)

Evangelism must preach the sin of the people, the sin of the people as guilt – liability to the punishment of the offended God. Therefore, it is to proclaim the holy and righteous God, Whom the sinner has offended. This implies the preaching of God's Law, which the sinner has transgressed and which he cannot keep.

The Reformed Faith does this sharply, pointedly, concretely! In contrast, much present-day evangelism says little or nothing about a holy God, his righteous Law, sin, guilt, and punishment. If sin comes up at all, it is only the aspect of sin that consists of the sinner's temporal troubles because of his wickedness. How different was the evangelism of Christ and of his apostles! Think of Jesus' deliberate exposure of the adultery of the Samaritan woman at the well. Think of Peter's searing condemnation of the Jews in Acts 3:14: "But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you..."

Evangelism proclaims the remission, or forgiveness, of sins for every sinner who repents. This is the removal of the sinner's guilt and the imputation to him of the righteousness of Jesus Christ by faith alone. The forgiveness of sins is the blessing of salvation that is to be preached in evangelism: the great, glorious concern of the Reformation: justification by faith only.

If this is who Jesus is and what His cross is, the love of God is preached when remission of sins is preached. For it was God who gave His Son on behalf of sinners - not all sinners, but sinners, just the same. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son ..." (John 3:16)

Yet another crucial element of the message of evangelism is repentance: heartfelt, godly sorrow over one's sins. In Luke 24:47, Jesus charges that ". . . repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed . . .". In obedience to the Lord's mandate to him, Paul showed all men ". . . that they

should repent . . . " Then, he called them to " . . . performing deeds in keeping with their repentance". (Acts 26:20). Repentance is the way, the only way, in which sinners receive and enjoy forgiveness. This is exactly Jesus' meaning in Luke 24:47: the apostles are to preach repentance as the way to have forgiveness.

It is true that the Reformed Faith cannot and will not extend a well-meant offer to all hearers, that is an offer of salvation supposedly made by God to all hearers in love for them, with a sincere desire to save them, and on the acceptance of which by the sinner's salvation depends. For the well-meant offer is nothing but a variation of the Pelagian-Arminian "whosoever will gospel." How, where, can we obtain the will? Only a "God will" will suffice.

But the Reformed Faith can and does call, with authority and urgency, in the Name of Jesus the Christ, all who hear, to repent and believe; and it can and does proclaim that everyone who does repent and believe shall be forgiven and saved eternally. It preaches repentance.

The repentance which it preaches includes a life of godliness. Repentance, on the Reformed view, is a radical change of mind about sin and, therefore, a radical change of life – a spiritual turning, a conversion. Reformed preaching outside the congregation does not hide from the hearers that the gospel-call is a call to discipleship, to cross-bearing, to self-denial, to Jesus as Lord as well as Saviour.

It is sometimes overlooked that in the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus told the apostles to disciple the nations and that conversion and baptism are followed by instruction " . . . to observe all things all that I have commanded you". Evangelism does not end with "getting someone saved", but continues in their being taught to confess the truth in the true church; to love one another; to honour marriage; to submit to civil government; to live in separation from the world and its works; and to keep all the commandments of King Jesus. Reformed evangelism will do this. Much of evangelism leaves this completely out of sight. For this reason, it is also essential in the work of evangelism that those brought to the saving knowledge of the truth be directed to join a true church, a soundly Reformed church. No Reformed missionary could say to a convert, "now join the church of your choice".

But what of the distinctive truths of the Reformed Faith, the "doctrines of Calvinism", on account of which men charge that the Reformed Faith is unable to evangelise? Granted that the Reformed Faith can preach repentance unto remission, does it leave the great doctrines of grace in the pulpit

of the established church? God forbid!

The Reformed Faith preaches the misery of men to be sin; and it preaches the extent of that misery to be total depravity. It passes upon every sinner the judgment of the gospel, that he is dead in sin (Ephesians 2:1), incapable of any good, and guilty before God (Romans 3:9-18). Specifically, it judges the sinner to be unable to repent, believe, and come to Christ, as the gospel commands him to do.

The Reformed Faith preaches this in evangelism. To the man who objects to this as poor evangelism, it responds by pointing out to him that this was the evangelistic message of the Chief Evangelist Himself. In John 6:44, Jesus cries out to His audience, "No man can come to me, unless the Father who sent me draws him". Thus, the sinner is made to know his great need and utter helplessness.

The Reformed Faith preaches that the coming to Christ required in the gospel-call, as the only way of salvation, is God's drawing of a man. We come, but our coming is the work of God in us to draw us efficaciously. Repentance and faith are divine gifts, not human works. The grace of God is irresistible by the power of the Holy Spirit.

In addition, the Reformed Faith preaches, in evangelism, that all such coming is grounded in the eternal, gracious election of God. That one comes to Christ is due to God's gracious election of him in eternity. Election is preached on the mission field, election involving and accompanied by reprobation – the only election that Scripture knows. Sinners being drawn to Christ are not left in doubt whence all this springs.

Penitent and believing hearts must be assured of the eternal purpose of God's love for them and must glorify God with the confession that salvation, their salvation, is of the Lord. This was the evangelistic preaching of Jesus. As He preached Himself to the Jewish multitudes and called them to come to Him, He exclaims "All that the Father gives me will come to me; and whoever comes to me I will never cast out". (John 6:37)

It is only in almighty grace that a sinner can hope; for it is only almighty grace that can raise the dead. What boots it to send the trumpeter crying amid the serried ranks of the dead: "The gates of heaven stand open: whosoever will may enter in"? The real question which presses is, who will make these dry bones live? It is God alone who saves, and that in every element of the saving process.

Our objection to the free-will preachers is not so much that they offer salva-

tion, as it is that they have no salvation to offer. We have a message, the like of which there is not in all the world: not a new requirement for man to do something for his salvation, but the announcement of God's gift of salvation. True, we call men to repent and believe; but this repentance and faith are not works of man that accomplish salvation, but the way of receiving salvation. They are not human effort, but the renunciation of all human effort, not man's contribution to salvation, but the gift of God to men. True, we call repentant sinners to a life of good works, a life on a "narrow way"; but this life, the life of holiness, is itself part of God's deliverance of us from sin, His work of sanctification. Besides, our holy life is not meritorious, but thankfulness.

The message of the Reformed Faith is the message of grace. It is the good news, the gospel.

The method of Reformed evangelism

Just as it has its own message of evangelism, the Reformed Faith has its own method of evangelism: the Biblical method of preaching and teaching. The proper, effective method of evangelism is prescribed by Holy Scripture. No more than the church may invent her own message. She is bound by the commandment of the Bible. Christ determined the method in Luke 24:47 when He told the disciples ". . . repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name among all nations". According to Mark 16:15, the Lord charged His church in these words, "Go into all the world, and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation".

To this method, and this method only, is attached the promise that there will be the fruit of those who believe and is baptised will be saved (v.16). This is the pattern of the ministry of the apostles, set forth by Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:1: "And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom."

The method of evangelism is not stirring music; puppet-shows; testimonies by worldly celebrities; performances by worldly artists; or dramatic productions. Nor is it the eloquence, charisma, dynamic personality, flamboyance, persuasiveness, or enticing words of the evangelist. Jesus Christ is disgraced today by the gospel-rock (sic!), immodest Hollywood starlets, and Sabbath-desecrating athletes that are used to promote the gospel. Jesus Christ is all but lost sight of behind the big-name ecclesiastical showmen who claim to preach Him.

It has pleased God to call His people to salvation by the foolishness of preaching (1 Corinthians 1:21). Preaching is the announcing of the gospel

by a man (I use the masculine gender deliberately here) called and sent by Christ through the church; it is official, authoritative proclamation. In Luke 24, Jesus sends the apostles out; and He sends them "in his name" (v. 47). Romans 10:15 lays down the rule when it asks, "And how are they to preach unless they are sent?"

Evangelism is done today by ordained ministers set apart for the work of going with the gospel to those outside the established church: our missionaries. The reason for this is that Christ Himself gathers the church. He has revealed in Scripture that He does His work through the preaching of God's Word, which preaching belongs to the office in the church.

Evangelism, or missions, therefore, is the work of the church. It is the church, the instituted church, that preaches the Word. This is the Biblical pattern: the congregation at Antioch, Syria, sent out Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey and supervised their work (cf. Acts 13:4; 14:26, 27). Evangelism is not to be done by societies and para-ecclesiastical organisations. They have no authority. They have no power – they lack the office of preaching.

But does not every saint have the duty to evangelise? Is not every child of God a missionary? Emphatically not! It is unbiblical to hold that every believer may and must evangelise. This is to maintain that every saint can and must preach the gospel. Where in Scripture is this authority given to every believer? Where in the practical parts of the New Testament epistles is this made the responsibility of every Christian?

The notion that every member of the church is a missionary destroys the fundamental truth of the office in the church. Most pernicious of all is the utterly reckless act of putting this awesome burden on the shoulders of our teenage children who, altogether apart from the matter of office, ought not to be teaching, but learning the Word of God.

This is not to say that the believer should not witness to the truth as he has opportunity; he should — this belongs to the office of believer. (1 Peter 3: 15). Let us not forget, however, that we witness, not only with our mouths, but also — and very powerfully — with our behaviour. By our godly conduct, others may be gained to Christ (Heidelberg Catechism, Q & A 86).

Nor do we intend, by denying that every believer is an evangelist, to exclude the saints from the great work of evangelism. How could this be? Evangelism is the work of the church; and the saints are the church. Although the instrument of evangelism is the man called to be missionary, it is the church,

the body of believers and their children instituted in the offices of elder and deacon, that is doing the work through him. Just as the body speaks by means of its tongue (you do not say, "my tongue is speaking", but you say, "I am speaking"), so does the congregation of saints evangelise through the missionary. Missions is not the work of the missionary; it is the work of the people of God.

The saints are active in this labour of the church. They pray for the work of missions. This is the co-operation Paul asked of the believers: ". . . brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honoured . . ." (2 Thessalonians 3:1). They support the work financially. Paul praises the Philippians for helping him in his material need: "Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble." (Philippians 4:14)

Not least, the people of God are to live with each other in the church in such a way that the Spirit will bless their witness outside the church. It is striking, in the book of Acts, that the church grew as it lived in faithfulness to the doctrine of the apostles; in zealous worship of God; and in peace among themselves. Where there is heresy, disinterest in spiritual things, carnality, worldliness, immorality, hatred, strife, and division, evangelism cannot be expected to prosper.

The power of evangelism is the Holy Spirit. He sends forth the labourers into the harvest; He opens doors; He opens the hearts of men and women to receive the Word; He unites the elect to Christ; He places men in the body of the church as it pleases Him.

There is great concern today over methods of evangelism. Men try to discover what will make evangelism effective. The danger is, not only that they resort to unbiblical methods, but also that they fall back, in the matter of missions, upon their own resources – their own wisdom, their own strength, their own inventions.

The method of evangelism is preaching Jesus Christ and Him crucified; and that which makes this effective is the Holy Spirit. This is the profound, gripping doctrine of Paul in 1 Corinthians 2: "The natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned" (v.14). But ". . . God has revealed to us through the Spirit." (v. 10)

Christ pointed out the indispensable place of the Holy Spirit in missions when, immediately after He had charged the apostles with the duty of going out to preach in his Name, He instructed them: "And behold, I am sending

the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.” (Luke 24:49)

We must beware lest we suppose that for effective evangelism we need millions of dollars; far-flung radio networks; catchy radio formats; professional television productions; and handsome, eloquent speakers. The Holy Spirit is the power of missions. We must depend upon Him. We must always be beseeching Him to make our work fruitful. We must consciously be labouring in His might.

The motivation of Reformed evangelism

The motivation of the Reformed Faith in evangelism, generally, is that God, by his eternal election of grace, has a church to be gathered at all times and among all peoples, and He wills to gather this church by the gospel.

Specifically, our motivation is obedience, obedience to the command of our Lord, Jesus. He has said to us "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations"; and this settles the matter. Is there any obedience like the obedience of the Reformed Faith with its knowledge of the sovereignty of Christ?

Second, we have the fervent desire that God be glorified in all His creation. We are grieved and angry that the name of God is hidden and profaned everywhere. We share something of the spirit of Paul in Athens, whose spirit was stirred within him when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry, so that he could not but speak on behalf of the one, true God, the Father of Jesus. (Acts 17:16ff). In love for God, we bring his Name everywhere and labour for the establishing of churches that will be light in the darkness.

Third, we love the people of God who are to be restored or converted. Jesus had compassion on the fainting, scattered sheep who, without the Word, were as sheep without a shepherd (Matthew 9:36-38). Do we? Should we not? Should any love be stronger than that of the Reformed Faith which knows the people of God to be eternally loved of God, redeemed by the precious blood of God's own Son, and destined for the bliss of glory?

The Reformed Faith can engage in this work with the confidence of victory. The difficulties and enemies are many and great. There are materialism and pleasure madness. There are communism and humanism. There are the heathen religions and the cults. There is dreadful apostasy in the Christian churches. At bottom, there is the spiritual death of every human heart, the blindness of every mind, and the bondage of every will – and the energetic work of Satan to keep it so.

But the Reformed church is not discouraged, is not pessimistic. For the Son of God has come, has died, has risen again, has been seated on the right hand of God. All power in heaven and on earth is His. We preach in His Name. He shall certainly gather his church.

The way forward

For the Reformed Faith, there is only one way forward. “How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?” (Romans 10:14-15)

Reformed evangelists must be beware of all the worldly ways of evangelism, even if they look and sound attractive. Evangelists can only expect God’s blessing if evangelism is taking place in line with the faith as He has taught us, according to his will and way, his method and with Him as motivation.

May this book offer all who are in one way or another involved with mission work much food for thought and be a useful and helpful tool. It is written from an African perspective, which I cannot do living as I am in North America. But the Great Commission remains the same. So does God’s Word and Christ’s deliverance. For those in Southern Africa and the whole of Africa God has given a great challenge in rather unique circumstances. May He bless those who continue to spread the Reformed Faith, because it will please Him.



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Introduction

A broad perspective

*As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me,
and every tongue shall confess to God*

Romans 14:11. Also Isaiah 45:23, Philippians 2:10-11

No one can predict the future, but a Christian certainly knows what God commands him to do, now and in the future, regardless of circumstances. The Great Commission announced in Matthew 28: 18-20 – to teach every person in the world about the great and almighty God – is an imperative command of paramount importance because eventually every individual's knee shall have to bow to God and every tongue shall have to confess Him as supreme Lord.

In acknowledgement of the importance of the Great Commission and in obedience to God over many years, Reformed churches have done much mission/evangelisation work in South Africa and in other Southern African countries, also being involved in Bible translation, training of evangelists and ministers of indigenous churches as well as poverty alleviation and community development.

Not without results. According to the latest edition of the Almanak, the 2022 yearbook of the Reformed Churches in South Africa (RCSA= GKSA), about a third of this denomination's 384 congregations can be called church plants, the result of mission work. (No data is easily available regarding the number of church plants and mission work of the several other Reformed churches in Southern Africa.)

The need

One thing that is not debatable, a *sine qua non*, is the need for far more trained missionaries and pastors to become active in the mission field and in newly planted churches. According to the 2022 edition of the Almanak nearly half of the church plant congregations are “vacant”, without pastors. And that most of them have too few members and are too poor to be able to support a pastor, to say nothing of supporting a missionary or mission worker. There are numerous communities who want to hear God’s Word, but have nobody to teach them.

In addition, the membership of most GKSA churches has been declining year after year for some decades now, and many of these congregations find it increasingly difficult to support their own pastors honourably. The result is that the number of Reformed trained missionaries and mission workers is very small and also seems to be shrinking.

So what does all this imply for Reformed mission work in South Africa and beyond her borders? How should the way forward be approached? Do we have to accept that mission work has become a second priority? To do so would be very wrong indeed! As John Piper writes in his book on missions, *Let The Nations Be Glad, The supremacy of God in missions* (Inter-Varsity, 2010, p 259): “It is the unspeakable privilege of the church to be caught up with the Lord in the greatest movement in history – the ingathering of the elect from every tribe and language and people and nation until the full number of Gentiles comes in and all Israel is saved and the Son of Man descends with power and great glory as King of kings and Lord of lords, and the earth is full of the knowledge of his glory.”

On p 71 Piper puts his finger on a sore point, applicable to many Reformed churches in South Africa, as he underlines a statement of mission leaders who are crying out: “Where is the church’s concept of militancy, of a mighty army willing to suffer, moving ahead with exultant determination to take the world by storm? Where is the risk-taking, the launching out on God alone? The answer is that it has been swallowed up in a peacetime mentality.” One can add from a South African perspective: swallowed up in political and social differences and turmoil.

Transformation

How to change this mentality? Do we in the Reformed churches in South Africa fully realise how almighty the only God is, as seen in his creation, in his Word and also in the world's history, as the Creator, Preserver and Governor² as well from the authority of his Word?³ And how He loves his creation?⁴ How unimaginably powerful and almighty He is, fully able to reform and transform this mentality? Are his children in this country and beyond fully aware of the numerous opportunities He gives his children to preach and spread the Word?

God has created man⁵ as ruler, crown of His creation, in his image.⁶ And He saw that it was all very good.⁷ But God's enemy, Satan⁸, who fell from heaven⁹, seduced Adam and Eve to disobey God's command to not eat from the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.¹⁰ Sin had entered God's creation. (Sin being everything which is against the will of God.¹¹)

God decided that there would be a new beginning,¹² but first He had to defeat Satan to pave the way for every knee to bow and every tongue to confess allegiance to Him.¹³ His Son defeated Satan on the cross by ending the authority of Satan and his demons. But today the devil still prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking to devour.¹⁴

² E.g. *Psalm 8*, see *Heidelberg Confession Lord's Day 9 and 10*, *Belgic Confession Article 1 & 2* (All references are from the *English Standard Version*)

³ E.g. *2 Timothy 3:15-17*, *2 Peter 1:21*, *Belgic Confession Article 3-7*

⁴ E.g. *Genesis 1:31*, *Psalm 136*, *John 3:16*

⁵ *Belgic Confession Article 14*

⁶ E.g. *Genesis 1:26-28*, *5:1*, *9:6*, *1 Corinthians 11:7*, *James 3:9*, *Psalm 8*, *Hebrews 2:6-9*

⁷ *Genesis 1:31*

⁸ E.g. *Matthew 13:39*, *Luke 9:42*, *1 Peter 5:8*

⁹ E.g. *Luke 10:18*, *Revelations 12 & 20*, *Romans 16:20*, *2 Pet 2:4*, *Jude 1:6 & 9*, *Isaiah 14:12-14*

¹⁰ *Genesis 2:17*, *3:1-7*, *11*, *14-19*

¹¹ E.g. *Numbers 15:30*, *Psalm 5:5-6*, *Galatians 3:10*, *2 Thessalonians 2:9*

¹² *Genesis 3:15*

¹³ *Isaiah 45:23*, *Romans 14:11*, *Philippians 2:10,11*

¹⁴ E.g. *1 Peter 5:8*

This “guerrilla war” still continues between God and Satan, drawing in mankind.¹⁵ This is by far the main issue in the world today. Not what we hear and see on TV, the social media, the newspapers or whatever, although Satan wants us to believe otherwise and keeps us occupied with so many worldly issues that we forget God and this war and our role in it. So Satan succeeds in making us often to concern ourselves with the wrong (worldly) issues.¹⁶

The great purpose

What is the purpose of all this? Satan wants man to honour and glorify him instead of God and so rob God of His honour and glory. But God never surrenders His honour or glory to anyone. He created all things, including especially mankind to his honour and glory. The primary purpose of mankind is to glorify Him and live in joy with Him forever.¹⁷ In Isaiah 48:9-11 God says “For my name’s sake I defer my anger, for the sake of my praise I restrain it for you, that I may not cut you off. Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver, I have tried you in the furnace of affliction. For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for how should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another.” One can list numerous Bible texts that say the same thing.¹⁸

He saved us because He loves not only his children, but all mankind and He want them to love Him and be his witnesses in the world. This is why his children must tell all people on earth about God’s greatness and almightiness, his creation, his deeds and his being in complete control here and now and always. He wants all people to know that He does not want a single one to be lost. He, through Paul in 1 Timothy 2:1-6, commands all

¹⁵ *Romans 16:20, 1 Corinthians 5:5, 7:5, 2 Corinthians 2:10, 1 Thessalonians 2:18, 1 Timothy 5:15, 1 Peter 5:8*

¹⁶ *Psalm 112:7, Luke 21:34, Matthew 6:25-34, 13:22, Romans 12:2, 1 John 2:15-17, Colossians 3:2, James 4:4*

¹⁷ *Westminster Catechism answer 1, see also Calvin’s catechism answer 2*

¹⁸ *To list a few texts: Ephesians 1:4-6, 12, 14, Exodus 14:4, 17, 18, 1 Samuel 12:20, 22, 2 Samuel 7:23, 2 Kings 19:34, 20:6, Psalm 50:15, 106:7-8, Isaiah 43:6-7, 25, 49:3, Jeremiah 13:11, Ezekiel 20:14, 36:22-23, 32, Habakkuk 2:14, Matthew 5:16, John 5:44, 12:27-28, 14:13, 16:14, 17:24, Acts 12:23, Romans 1:22-23, 3:25-26, 9:17, 22-23, 11:36, 15:7, 1, Corinthians 6:20, 10:31, 2 Thessalonians 1:9-10, Philippians 1:9, 11, 1 Peter 2:12, 13, 4:11, Revelation 21:23*

Christians to pray for all people because God “wants ALL people to be saved and to come to a full knowledge of the truth”. Should His children pray only, or should they not also honour their Father by enthusiastically working together in the gathering of the unknown millions of his lost sheep scattered throughout the world?

All this (and much more) comes together in texts such as Matthew 28:19 and 6:9,10 & 33, 2 Corinthians 4:3-4, Romans 2:12, the Ten Commandments, and also outlined in the Apostolic Creed and other confessions such as the Belgic Confession (BC), the Heidelberg Catechism (HC), the Canons of Dordt and the Westminster Confession of Faith.

All this underlines the enormous importance of telling every person in the whole world of the almighty God and what makes mission work so vital. If the goal of evangelisation is to let, not merely all nations, but every person on earth, know who this almighty God is and how to love and satisfy Him, then what follows in this book are reflections on what is being done through Reformed churches to achieve this goal to the glory of God and what the challenges are here in South Africa and beyond in our peculiar and unique circumstances.

Much evangelistic work is taking place not only formally through churches and so-called para-church organisations, but also through independent and often informal initiatives by individuals and groups. There is much to be thankful for. But the fact remains that far more needs to be done and can be done. Reformed churches and all their members must realise not only the urgent need and the enormous potential, but also their sacred obligation.

The way forward

What is our mission duty forward? Some of the aspects discussed in this book include the following. These and other topics in this book are worth considering and discussion.

Preach the full Word; don't try gimmicks.

Ensure that existing and newly planted congregations are true churches according to the Reformed confessions.

Ensure that existing and newly planted congregations understand the critical importance of involvement in mission work as an essential part of being a church, the body of Christ.

Stimulate interest and involvement with mission work in congregations.

Ensure that the training of missionaries and pastors are a high priority. *Mission Dei* must be a priority in all theological training.

Try to understand the different cultures and perceptions locally and keep it in mind when communicating – valid contextualisation.

Look anew at South Africa's political and social past, acknowledge also today's racism and other shortcomings, and make a real attempt never to make the same mistakes again.

Bible teaching and preaching are priorities. But to what extent must churches as institutions become involved in supporting functions such as community development, medical services, education, etcetera?

It is often said that in times of crises such as the present one, Jesus Christ gives his children new opportunities to spread his word. After all is said and done, let's identify such opportunities and grasp them !

May our heavenly Father use this book to assist in promoting a white-hot passion and inner urge in all his children to proclaim to the world that God is eternal, incomprehensible invisible, immutable, infinite, almighty, perfectly wise, just, good, and the overflowing fountain of all good (Belgic Confession Article 1). Every knee must bow to Him, and every tongue shall confess to Him. This is a Christian's highest priority. And never think small of our Father in heaven. He is almighty!

Finally, to read a book is becoming increasingly "not done". Let us hope that especially the younger Reformed generation can still benefit from this book which hopefully not only instructs, but also motivates Christians to become far more active in the mission field. May God Almighty change hearts and minds towards a mentality of outreaching and telling the world that He is the only Way.

Theological reflections



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1. Another *kairos* time in the history of God's people

A *kairos*¹ - turning point in history

The whole world is at this very moment experiencing a complete and irreversible global 'reset'. Within just a few months the Covid-19 pandemic has exploded onto the world scene unexpectedly and it is now busy changing life on earth as we knew it. Undoubtedly it will also impact the global Christian Church that is already experiencing an adaptive challenge for the past few decades.

This article wants to focus on an explanation of this adaptive challenge that, with the world-altering effects of Covid-19, must bring the Christian church to realise that it is experiencing a real *Kairos* moment in the history of the world.

The apostle Paul (2 Corinthians 6:2) is calling upon the Church of Jesus Christ to comprehend the signs of the times. Like the tribe of Issachar in the Old Testament times the church should not only be able to see God's turning points in history but should also act upon this Spirit-enlightening knowledge received from God.

The aged Jacob had to lament the fact that despite Issachar's knowledge of the signs of the times, they were like a strong donkey, "between the sheep-

¹ *Mark 1:14-15 — Kairos is a time that requires a conversion from people. Romans 13:11-13 — Kairos time is here, not only to take note of, but for an urgent response. It calls for action, conversion, and transformation—a change of life. 2 Corinthians 6:1-2 — Kairos is not just crisis but opportunity and favour. God assists us in discerning the kairos—a moment of grace.*

folds” (Genesis 49:14²). Although they had this revealed knowledge of the signs of the times, they did not act obediently on it.

May God grant us the mercy that their inability to act correctly in response to the privileged knowledge they received will not be repeated in our time.

What was revealed when Jesus Christ left the temple in Jerusalem?

When Jesus Christ left the temple in Jerusalem (for the last time) the disciple’s realised that something significant had changed (Matthew 24: 1-3). Jesus’s posture, after everything that happened at the Temple previously, may have hinted that it was the end of an era and that it would never be the same again.

The disciples however did not fully understand what was happening. They desperately needed some comfort and reassurance. They urgently focused His attention on the temple buildings. Surely – the Temple was the symbol of God’s lasting presence amid his chosen people? They were convinced that Gods relationship with the Jewish people would never end. They presumed that these buildings were not only a monument of historic significance but also an assurance of God’s continued favour towards the Jewish people for generations to come.

But it was not to be. Jesus’s words about the eventual destruction of the Temple must have been a shock. His shocking prophecy became a historic reality some 40 years later.

The disciple’s nostalgic expectations surely reflected the mindset of the people that Jesus left inside and around the temple on that day. The Jewish religious fraternity continued with their formal daily activities as they had done for hundreds of years. For them it was merely “business as usual.” They were oblivious to the fact that the long-awaited Messiah had now turned away from them.

It was, indeed, an end. It was a significant turning point in the history of the world and the history of God’s people on earth. God had left the emptiness of the formalised and stagnant religion of Judaism. From here on Jesus Christ, through a remnant of the Jewish people, would launch the New

² Issachar appreciated the portion of the land that was assigned to him. He did not accompany the other tribes during their military endeavours but chose to remain self-satisfied within his own tents and between his own sheepfolds. His focus was on self-indulgence and self-preservation (just like a donkey that will only move when it becomes uncomfortable to remain still).

Testament church.

While Judaism continued to this present day as if nothing had happened – Christianity arose, and everything changed. Those who were busy with themselves were left behind as Jesus Christ started a new movement that focused on the continuance of the *missio Dei*, the proclamation of Gods kingdom to the ends of the earth.

Why did Jesus leave the temple?

The Bible is a book of God's mission (*missio Dei*: Genesis 3: 9) on behalf of fallen man. God's work among man is redemptively woven into the history of fallen mankind. From the earliest accounts of human history, as recorded in the Bible, God involved a chosen people in his redemptive work when He called Abram (Genesis 12) who was destined to be a blessing to all people.

This was also the reason why God rescued Israel from Egypt. God wanted to use the Jewish people to redemptively reach all the people of this world. Israel was supposed to be a light to all nations (Isaiah 49). Biblical history in the Old Testament however reflects the tragedy that the Jewish people failed miserably in this higher calling.

Even the exile into which God eventually sent them confirmed and fulfilled Gods missionary purpose with them. Through the upheaval and turmoil within the history of that specific time wherein the people of Israel were exiled, God prepared the whole world for the first coming of the Messiah – his Son Jesus Christ. God (again) wanted to use the Jewish people when Jesus first focused his ministry on them, but again they failed.

Although they were very religious, they were still, even after the exile, introverted and self-serving in their religion. They were so self-absorbed that they did not even recognise the Messiah although they expected Him.

For the sake of the continuing mission of God (*missio Dei*), Jesus Christ used a small remnant of the Jewish people to launch the New Testament church. He focused them (again) on Gods redemptive purpose for His chosen people. Jesus left the temple in Jerusalem because He could not use the self-serving religion of the Jewish people anymore.

How is this relevant to our own times? Consider what is happening within Western Christianity.

The Western church in serious trouble

There can be no doubt that the Christian church within Western culture (traditionally known as Christendom) is in serious trouble. Statistics from the whole of the Western world confirms the fact that the Western Church is in rapid decline. Church attendance has dropped significantly in the Western world and more and more church members are leaving. The church is also aging rapidly as the loyal members are getting older and few young people are replacing them.

We are already defining our world as post-Christendom which confirms the perception that Christendom is already dead in many places while it is rapidly dying in the rest of the Western world. Some Western Christians may be unaware as to what is really happening while others may regard this as merely a demographic shift within our modern world. For them it is “business as usual”.

But there is much more than meets the eye. This is Biblical history repeating itself. Jesus Christ has left the temple in Jerusalem because the Jewish church has failed in their higher calling to be instruments of Gods *missio Dei*. What happened on several occasions in Biblical history is also happening in our own time.

We as Western Christians find ourselves according to Jenkins in one of the transforming moments in the history of religion worldwide (Jenkins 2002: 1). It is not business as usual for the Western Church. Western Christianity must urgently reflect on what is really happening in the world around us to respond appropriately. Christianity is today dealing with things that characterise an adaptive challenge.

As the Reformed Churches in South Africa (RCSA = GKSA) we are also painfully aware of our own denominational demise that continues despite all our efforts to implement a “turn-around strategy” over the past few decades. We should urgently become aware of the fact that we are experiencing a turning point in the history of the world and the Christian church. We should be attentive to the signs of the times – and be ready to obediently act upon this knowledge we receive from God. We should not be like Issachar: “a strong donkey crouching between the sheepfolds”. (Genesis 49:14)

How did it come to this?

The formative years of Christianity (100 – 300 AD) were very difficult because of the severe persecution the church had to face. But, despite this persecution the Christian church became a very strong and vibrant community on the margins of society.

These difficult times were good for the Christian church. However, everything changed when Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire in 325. Within a very short time everyone that was part of the Roman Empire: “automatically” was included and became part of the Christian community. The Christian church was suddenly shifted from the margins to the centre of Roman society.

This was bad for the Christian church. This shift re-engineered the DNA of the church in such a way that it became progressively alienated from the Christianity of the New Testament and pre-Christendom (Murray 2004:74). At this stage Christianity may have been doctrinally defined, but it became morally questionable. The church became a divided community with a formalised religion where the clergy were the educated and the laity the uneducated.

In this time theology also lost its missionary dimension. There was no need to evangelise people within a culture that was in theory already “Christian”. Nominal Christianity became the sad reality within Christendom. The Christian church and the “Christian” state became allies in the dynamic process of the formation and expansion of Western culture throughout the known world. Western culture and Christendom (Christianity expressed within Western culture) developed a very intimate relationship with each other.

Following the contours of the development of Western civilisation³ over the next few decades, it becomes evidently clear that the Western church was willingly involved in all the major developments that shaped the Western world.

This situation was however also due to change. Following the Enlightenment, the university became the engine room of Western culture and theology, and subsequently the church itself was slowly but surely being pushed from the centre back to the margins.

³ *The Enlightenment; industrialisation; the discovery of the unknown world; colonisation; the formation of different Western nationalities; two world wars and the ever-increasing dynamics of globalisation.*

The Enlightenment worldview brought great benefits to the world and it also introduced dramatic changes within Western culture, but it also facilitated a process within culture wherein Western culture became increasingly intolerant of religious ideas and institutions (Murray 2004:180). The Enlightenment did not deny religion a place in the sun, but it did however radically relativise the exclusive claims of Christianity (Bosch 2001:268).

The sad result is that a nominal Western Christianity (known as Christendom) – once the ally and companion of Western culture – found itself pushed to the outer fringes of a culture it helped to create. Western culture has become an enemy of Christianity – and it is not (yet) fully realised and dealt with within the Western church.

Take note

A transforming moment in the history of Christianity

There is another development confronting the Western church that should not be ignored. Over the past century the centre of gravity in the Christian world has shifted from Europe and North America to Africa, Asia, and Latin America. While Christendom is dying on the outer margins of Western culture, the world is experiencing the development and rapid growth of the so-called Third Church⁴ (Escobar 2003:15).

It is a worldwide Christian resurgence that is quite different from what was known up to this time in world and church history. It is a new kind of Christian identity that is growing apart from much of the traditional theological reflection of historical Christianity (Schreiter 1993:3). It is part of the new age of Christianity (Escobar 2003:15).

This post-Western (post-Christendom, perhaps also pre-Christendom) Christianity is hailed as the emergence of World Christianity. This new Christian expression is rapidly growing in the Two Thirds World and is very critical towards traditional Christendom. It is actively questioning the assumption of the universal validity of Western theological traditions.

This new development is challenging Western theology because Western theology has become suspect in many parts of the world today. Western theology is often regarded as irrelevant, speculative and the product of ivory tower Western cultural institutions. In many parts of the world it is being

⁴ *The first church is the New Testament church, the second church is the Western church (Christendom), the third church is also called the Southern Church; the church outside of the West currently growing in the majority, Two Thirds World.*

replaced by Third World theologies (Bosch 2001:4).

The reason for this is that Western theology is not answering the questions being asked in the realities of the Third World today. Churches in cultural settings vastly different from those of traditional Western Christianity are not only raising new questions but are asking questions that traditional frameworks of theology cannot answer (Schreiter 2004:3).

The abstract concepts of Western theology may have answered the questions of the past, but they fail to grapple with the issues of today (Ott and Netland 2006:27). There is a growing sense that the theology inherited from the older Western Church does not fit well into these quite different and new cultural circumstances the Third Church is now faced with.

How did it happen?

Western culture smothered the Western church

The Western church is today confronted with the negative legacy of Christendom. This legacy is not because of doctrinal error, but because of cultural preferences in the formation and development of Western culture from its inception. From the very beginning economics was not only the heart of, but also the organising principle of the process of Western globalisation (Escobar 2003:56). It made Western culture capitalistic and imperialistic in character and profit-driven to the extreme.

In this way Western culture (also) became self-serving, materialistic and introverted. This is not only true of the culture but also of the Western church and Western theology. The church did not confront the culture but helped to establish and defend the status quo and eventually became smothered and paralysed

by it. For reasons mentioned already and because of a selfish cultural preference the church did not focus on mission but directed all its energy towards maintenance.

Even the Christendom theology became short-sighted. Within the classical divisions of systematic theology, no place was given to missions and when it was included it became optional and peripheral to the work of the church. Theology restricted itself to the church or at most to Christendom (Conn, Ortiz and Baker 2002:13).

All of Protestant theology succumbed to the pressures of the Enlightenment to make faith plausible as something done by professionals for the sake of the believing community (Bosch 1995:17).

The division within the church between the clergy and the laity, despite the work of the Reformation, remained. This created a leadership problem within Christendom. Leaders trained within an Enlightenment frame of mind seem to be unable to lead the church out of its cultural captivity. Theological education is still conducted within the wider context of Western culture and is still shaped by the enlightenment paradigm.

There seems to be growing frustration over evidence that classical theological education has not adequately prepared men and women for leadership in 21st century churches. But Christianity as a whole is facing serious challenges. Walls warns of the sad reality that “Neither the churches of the North nor those of the South have yet taken in the full implications of this major movement in the Christian heartland, the theological academy least of all.” (Baker 2009:31). The signs of the times are clearly visible – while the strong donkey is (still) crouching between the sheepfolds.

A way forward?

More than once in the history of God’s *missio Dei*, He had to intervene in the life of his chosen people to refocus them missionally. The Christian church in a post-Christendom world is finding itself again where the Christian church in New Testament times lived – on the margins of a heathen society. It cannot be “business as usual”.

The solution, according to Greenway begins with the pastors who lead the congregations and the training they receive for ministry (1987:183). However, there seem to be some resistance against or maybe an apathy towards what is currently happening in the world. The status quo of Western theological education reflects a sorry state of stagnation. It is not ready to face the challenges that the formation of World Christianity presents.

Patrick Johnstone asserted that Western seminaries at this time in history constitute “one of the greatest hindrances to world evangelization” (Wright 2010:16). The Christian church in a global formation should be critical towards a theology removed from the furnace of life and not hammered into shape on the anvil of the local church (Chester and Timmis 2007:157).

The Christian church must therefore urgently rethink, reformulate and reorganise its relationship to the academy. All of theology need to be rethought in missionary terms because every situation encountered within our globalised world is a missionary situation (Chester and Timmis 2007:152). The evangelistic sterility of mainline Western churches, including some that remain orthodox in their doctrine, is a terrible witness to Christianity and is at the top of the list of the problems we face in world evangelisation.

Forward, by going back

There is only one way forward. As a church we need to go back; back to the Bible, back to the local church and back to mission. Theological education must again be linked to the church. It cannot be limited to the academic training of the professional clergy alone. The elite, professional concept of fulltime ministry must be eliminated.

The whole people of God should be trained for ministry and in this way the ministry will return to where it belongs – to God’s people. Ogden calls it a whole body ministry (Ogden 1990:9). He also says that we live in the generation when the unfinished business of the Reformation (rediscovering and reigniting the office of the believer) will be completed. The conclusion is that missions should (must) rescue the church and its institutions.

Conclusion

When the Jewish people became introverted and self-serving in their religion and failed to be God’s instruments on behalf of fallen mankind, God not only warned them through the work of the prophets, but eventually sent them into exile.

The exile was not God’s abandonment of his original plan for Israel but a reaffirmation thereof. When Jesus Christ came to this world, He again approached the Jewish people first, but they did not accept Him. God eventually used a remnant of the Jewish people to launch the New Testament Church missionally into the whole world (Matthew 28; Acts 1).

It is noteworthy to also observe that God even had to subject the first Christian church in Jerusalem to persecution (Acts 8:1) to align them with Jesus’s original command (Acts 1:8). To only focus on yourself and your own self-interest is a problem as old as mankind itself. A strong donkey crouching between the saddle bags. Especially within God’s chosen people.

This writer is convinced that this is exactly what is happening within Christendom and the Western church today. History repeats itself and normally we don’t really learn from history. Christendom is dead or dying because it failed to be part of the *missio Dei*.

It may acknowledge knowing the signs of the times and may even be like a strong donkey, but it is “crouching between the sheepfolds” (saddle bags). The only question that remains to be answered is this: Who will the remnant be that God will use in the final phase of the *missio Dei*?

Unstoppable and continuing globalisation, overwhelming people movement resulting in sprawling urbanisation, the death of Christendom, deep-

ening secularism, the exponential growth of global Christianity and the rampant Covid-19 pandemic are the signs of our times. A rear-view nostalgic and selfcentred reminiscence and longing for the past will not serve the *missio Dei* in this time.

The full-frontal confronting reality of the unfolding “last days” must invigorate a missional Christian church to complete the task that Jesus Christ gave to and equipped his church for. God’s chosen and sent people must act on the privileged knowledge they received from God. The strong donkey is supposed to carry its full load the full distance and to its destination (Matthew 24:14). Those who are not moving with the *missio Dei* are going to be left behind.

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2. The lordship of the Sovereign Christ in a time such as this

The importance of hope in challenging times

The way any human being lives in any situation, your behaviour and your character, is determined mainly by what you expect your ultimate future is going to be.

The Bible teaches us that for a Christian his expectation of God's future is a life shaping certainty of God's eternal love and glory in the coming new heaven and a new earth.

The most important and powerful life changing dynamic of the Christian faith is to experience within oneself, now already, a foretaste of God's new great and everlasting future. When your eyes now already catch a glimpse of the breathtaking glory of God's final redemption and coming new creation, your life becomes transformed even in times of crisis. Then you become part of the hands and feet and compassionate heart of Christ working through his body (the church) to stir up hope where hopelessness seems to prevail.

When Christians live with a deep assurance and conviction that Christ is definitely busy – now already – ushering in his eternal kingdom, they become part of ministries in which they erect signposts of the coming of his kingdom. In the midst of challenging times of crisis they radiate his compassionate heart and echo his voice and act as his hands and feet to make a difference in the midst of tears and pain in the broken world we still live in.

It all boils down to a heartfelt conviction that Jesus Christ is our sovereign Lord and in a time such as this that we are currently living in, He opens doors to unique opportunities for the ushering in of his kingdom.

The title of this contribution is based on the wellknown missionary mandate of Mathew 28:18-20 and the words of Esther 4:14 as a point of departure.

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:28-20 ESV)

For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this. (Esther 4:14)

In the practical explanation of key biblical principles, I'll also refer to other relevant passages of Scripture.

The proclamation of Jesus as our sovereign Lord as one of the deepest sources of hope

It is of extreme importance to always at all times in history keep in mind that the words of Jesus in Matthew 28:18-20 is more than a missionary mandate. The main theme of the whole passage is the Sovereign Lordship of Christ.

When we carefully consider the four times that the words ALL is repeated in these few sentences it becomes clear.

ALL - power in heaven and on earth

ALL - nations

ALL - things I have commanded you

ALL – I am with you ALWAYS, to the end of the age.

As one German commentary phrases it: “Dies ist der Almachtswort der Auferstandenen.” (This is the proclamation of the omnipotence and sovereign rule of the Resurrected Lord).

Jesus was stressing that He is the risen, reigning, King of kings and Lord of lords who reigns over this world and over his mission with absolute sovereignty. Nothing is outside his sovereign will. When we meet with resistance in our ministry, we must keep in mind that God either allows it for his purposes, or he overcomes it for his purposes. His sovereign purposes are never thwarted. The extent of Christ's Lordship encompasses “all power and authority”. In his dissertation on the covenant basis of

Matthew 28:18-20, Richard de Ridder¹, convincingly pointed out the parallels between the proclamation of Matthew 28:18-20 and the coronation hymns in other biblical references, especially Daniel 7:13-14. In the coronation ceremonies and comparative hymns, three elements can be recognised: elevation to royal or regal dignity, promulgation and proclamation of elevation to regal status, and coronation and transfer of authority to the new king.

Richard de Ridder pointed out how these elements which are inherent in Daniel 7:13-14 can also be seen in 1 Timothy 3:16, Philippians 2:9-11, Hebrews 1:5-14 and Matthew 28:18-20. What makes Matthew 28:18-20 unique is that whereas the coronation is proclaimed in the other passages, Matthew 28 is the throne speech of the enthroned Lord.

In the times we are living in we must constantly remind ourselves of who is the God we are serving who says:

*. . . I am God, and there is no other;
I am God, and there is none like me,
declaring the end from the beginning
and from ancient times things not yet done,
saying, 'My counsel shall stand,
and I will accomplish all my purpose.'* (Isaiah 46:9–10)

My constant prayer is that we may be amazed and convinced about the authority of Jesus Christ over the whole world, that may stir up unshakeable boldness in us, knowing that we are part of the unstoppable mission of God.

Paul was driven by such convictions when he wrote: “Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!” (1 Corinthians 9:16)

He is referring to the pangs produced in him by the constraint to preach the gospel. His words have to do with being made a servant of Jesus Christ, and our permission is never asked as to what we will do or where we will go.

The church as the body of Christ can be nothing else than church for the world, for the church's being for the world is itself an expression (although incomplete) of the breadth of the lordship of Christ, its Head.

God makes us broken bread and poured-out wine to please Himself. For the church to obey the mandate to make disciples of all nations means to

¹ De Ridder, R.R. 1971. The dispersion of the people of God; the covenant basis of Matthew 28:18-20 against the background of Jewish, Pre-Christian proselyting and diaspora, and the apostleship of Christ, *Kampen: Kok*.

accept and submit to sovereign power of Jesus Christ. When a church begins to be convinced of that call, agony begins that is worthy of the Name of Christ. Every ambition is nipped in the bud, every desire of life quenched, every outlook completely extinguished and blotted out, saving one thing only – “separated unto the gospel”. Woe be to Christians and churches who try to put their feet in any other direction when once they accept this call of the sovereign Lord.

The promise of his continuing presence

The final ALL provides all the hope and comfort needed to faithfully continue to obey the command to make disciples of ALL nations.

This almighty sovereign King of kings assures us of his continuing personal presence no matter what we may encounter in life.

The third sentence from the lips of Jesus brought his mountain-top message to its glorious conclusion: “And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:20 NIV). The opening words “And surely” (καὶ ἰδοὺ, literally “and behold”) emphasise the importance of the reality being declared. It assured His disciples that there is no need for doubts or misgivings on their part in accepting the commission given them. He declared that He is no absentee lord who leaves his people to carry out their assignment unaided and alone.

His emphatic assurance is, “I will be with you always” (ἐγὼ μεθ’ ὑμῶν εἰμι πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας, literally, “I, with you I am all the days”). These words are not a mere promise, “I will be with you”, but an emphatic assertion, “I, with you I am”. The emphatic pronoun “I” (ἐγὼ) adds strength to the assertion of his personal presence with them.

“With you”, while directly addressed to the believers assembled before Him, is not to be localised but comprehends the whole church. He assured them of His perpetual, spiritual presence. In Revelation 2:1 He is symbolically portrayed as the One who “. . . walks among the seven golden lampstands”. The meaning of the messianic name “Immanuel”, God with us. (Isaiah 7:14), which Matthew quoted in recording the virgin birth of Jesus (Matthew 1:23), here finds its glorious realisation. His disciples will be scattered in different directions, going into distant lands; and will experience different stumbling blocks (even disastrous pandemics), but they can boldly go in the strength of his assured presence with them.

Jesus assured His presence with them in two ways; He is with them “always, even to the end of the age”. “Always” assured them that his presence will

be constant, not merely intermittent and changing. His presence with them is assured throughout their days, through “days of strength and of weakness, days of success and of failure, of joy and of sorrow, of youth and of age, days of life and days of death—all the days”. He will never desert them, even in days of fierce trials and afflictions.

He further assured them of his presence “even to the end of the age”. This assurance, as Lenski well notes in his commentary, “extends far beyond the lifetime of all who were present before him that day”. His invisible presence is now linked to the eschatological hope of the church. His invisible presence is assured to every believer until that day when He will return for His own. Then his spiritual presence will become a visible presence, but none the less spiritual, sustaining, and delightful; then we shall see him whom not having seen we love, and shall know even as also we are known.

Assurance of open doors

In Revelations 3:8 Jesus says: “I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door ...” Then down in verse 10, he says “Because you have kept my work about patient endurance ...”

With these words He teaches us that a Christian can face trials and even suffer with purpose. Christian sufferings are not meaningless.

A Christian sees all suffering, all trials and all pain as purposeful. In holding on to this truth in our hearts, Christians become people of endurance.

In the New Testament, an open door almost always means an opportunity for the success of the Christian message.

Paul talks about it in his two letters to the Corinthians and Colossians. An open door is an opportunity for the Christian message to spread and be very successful in a community or a neighbourhood or a city.

Jesus knows that in ourselves we have little strength. He says, “I know your deeds... I know that you have little strength ...” It means although you are now small in numbers even not very talented, you will win over people who you never thought you’d win over.

How’s that going to happen? He says: The reason I’m going to open that door is because you patiently endure. This is the irony. Jesus says the way you handle closed doors will open others. He says, the reason I’m going to open that door, the reason people are going to see a greatness about you, the reason you’re going to overcome, the reason you’re going to be able to win people over is because of the way in which you handled the closed

doors of your life and ministries.” In verse 10, he says you have patiently endured.

What it means is when God closed doors, maybe doors of career, doors of health, or doors of church buildings, Jesus says when you are patient in handling your closed doors, I will open other ones.

He is saying suffering is never for nothing. If you handle suffering properly, it will turn you into great people who can open other doors. If you handle closed doors right, I will use those closed doors in your life to enable you to open other ones.

This is an extremely important truth that the Bible teaches and, frankly, something we can see often happened in church history.

The ways God opened doors during pandemics in the past

When you are filled with the Holy Spirit He also fills you with love and compassion to be a channel of God’s love and compassion in this broken world.

Rodney Stark published a book a few years ago with the title: *The Rise of Christianity*. He reveals historical facts, but also brings a sociologist’s perspective to bear on the puzzle behind the success of early Christianity. In his book he has a whole chapter on epidemics, networks and conversion. He proves from documents how early Christians were remarkably different from their pagan neighbours during such crises.

When the great epidemics hit the urban centres, while others just fled. Christians stayed caring for the sick; several died in the process of doing it.

In depth historical research on the rise of early Christianity revealed that Christianity might never have become so dominant if classical society had not been disrupted and demoralised by the catastrophes of massive lethal pandemics in 165 and in 251 AD.

The epidemic of 165, that was called the ”Plague of Galen”, was so severe that Marcus Aurelius spoke of caravans of carts and wagons hauling the dead from cities. Researchers estimate that from a quarter to a third of the population perished during the epidemic.

When the epidemic of 251 was at its height, five thousand people a day were reported to have died in the city of Rome alone.

In the writings of Cyprian, the bishop of Carthage, it can be seen that Christianity offered a much more satisfactory account of why the terrible times had fallen upon humanity than paganism and the Hellenistic philosophies and projected a hopeful even enthusiastic portrait of the future.

In an Easter letter of Dionisius, the bishop of Alexandria, he values that Christian love and charity had from the beginning been translated into norms of social service and community solidarity. When disasters like pandemics struck, the Christians were better able to cope and this resulted in substantially higher rates of survival. In the aftermath of each epidemic Christians made up a larger percentage of the population.

At the height of the second great epidemic around 260 in his Easter letter, Dionysius wrote a lengthy tribute to the nursing efforts of local Christians many of whom lost their lives while caring for others.

“Most of our brother Christians showed unbounded love and loyalty, never sparing themselves and thinking only of one another. Heedless of danger, they took charge of the sick 'attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ' and with them departed this life serenely happy; for they were infected by others with the disease, drawing on themselves the sickness of their neighbours and cheerfully accepting their pains. Many, in nursing and curing others, transferred their death to themselves and died in their stead . . . The best of our brothers lost their lives in this manner, a number of presbyters 'deacons' and laymen winning high commendation so that death in this form the result of great piety and strong faith, seems in every way the equal of martyrdom.”

On the contrary Thucidides reported that once the contagious nature of the disease was recognised non-Christian people were afraid to visit one another. As a result “They died with no one to look after them; indeed there were many houses in which all the inhabitants perished through lack of any attention . . . The bodies of the dying were heaped one on top of the other and half-dead creatures could be seen staggering about in the streets or flocking around the fountains in their desire for water. The temples in which pagans took up their quarters were full of the dead bodies of people who had died inside them. For the catastrophe was overwhelming that men, not knowing what would happen next to them, became indifferent to every rule of religion or of law . . . No fear of god or law of man had a restraining influence. As for the gods, it seemed to be the same thing whether one worshipped them or not, when one saw the good and the bad dying indiscriminately.”

Baby girls were considered a liability, especially during pandemics. Demographics in the first century in certain parts of the world were stunningly imbalanced male to female. Female infanticide was not uncommon. Infant girls often considered the equivalent of deformed, were killed by exposure. In essence, it was permitted by law to leave them outside the city on the dung heap to die. That is about as clear a judgment of “worthless” on a human life as can be made.

There was, however, a growing group of people who seemed to think the judgment was an error. Rather than accepting the culture’s assessment regarding the value of female they went outside the city to the dung heaps to find and rescue the abandoned baby girls.

The decision was both risky and sacrificial. It required standing against the mainstream and making a judgment that ran counter to the culture of that time. It meant the giving of life, time and goods to someone else’s discarded baby girl. It meant extending the circle of one’s responsibility. It meant being devalued and disdained for stooping so low as to treat that, which was deemed worthless, as precious instead.

Who were these people? They were the church, the Body of Jesus Christ. They followed the Lamb who went outside the city gates to make the ultimate sacrifice and give his life a ransom for many who were deemed worthless. By his death, He judged them precious. His first century body followed Him outside the gates to the garbage heaps of those days to rescue baby girls.

The call that was answered by the first century Christians is not unlike a call that now sits before us in the 21st century church in South Africa.

In an article in Citizen press in October 2018 with the heading “SA babies dumped like trash, dead or alive ... and it’s getting worse”, it is revealed that new-born children are being dumped in bins, wrapped in plastic and thrown in the veld, into trash to be delivered to rubbish dumps and disposed of in myriad ways, in their thousands.

Some recent figures estimate that 3 000 new-born babies were dumped and thrown away like trash in the year 2020.

The question that remains to be answered is whether or not we too will follow the Lamb outside the city gates to pursue and rescue those found worthless in the eyes of this world and sacrificially work among them because they are precious in His sight.

When Rome conquered all the nations of the world in the first centuries, all national borders were opened. The cities became fiercely multi-ethnic, which led to a great deal of ethnic tension. The Christian church was the first institution in the history of the world that brought people together across those ethnic barriers and said: race means nothing.

If you ask why were the Christians so much more compassionate to the sick? Why were they so much more ethnically inclusive than everybody has ever seen? There is one main answer: Their attitudes and lifestyle were dependent on what they believed their ultimate future is going to be.

Christians had hope!

They were shaped by a joyful certainty of God's future: Eternal glory and love. Therefore they could stay in the cities, because they were not afraid of death, because they knew after death comes God's love.

They were ethnically inclusive because they believed that there is one God who was busy gathering his new people from every tribe and tongue and nation.

When the Holy Spirit takes hold of your life, He brings this supernatural joyful assurance of God's future glory in your life and you start to radiate his compassion into this broken world.

Look and pray for open doors in a time such as this . . .

Lessons from the Book of Esther

In times of crises, we need to see the opportunities given by God, without denying realities and looking them straight in the face.

It was necessary for Esther to be fully informed about a law that had been decreed concerning the massacre of all her people which had been planned. Mordecai then sends her a message informing her of the details of the precise amount of silver that Haman had promised to pay to the treasure chest of the Persian king in exchange for the massacre of the Jews. He also sends her copies of the act of law which had been promulgated in the Susa city to that end.

To be able to see the possibilities surrounding the realities of the times we live in, it is necessary for us to thoroughly consider all the facts surrounding a situation.

Mordecai then asks Esther to reveal her Jewish identity to the king and to ask him for grace. But things are not as easy as it seems.

Nobody was allowed to see the king or to visit him without an invitation. To go to the king while he is in forecourt without being summoned could cost you your life. The only exception is when the king extends his golden sceptre to the person and by so doing saves the person's life.

Esther became aware of all the problems. In times like that it is very necessary then to find certainties and to hold on to them.

That is what Mordecai's words in Esther 4:13-14 is all about. "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?"

Mordecai took grasp of the absolute certainty that salvation will come for God's people. He did not know how, but he is sure that the Lord will never let go of the works of his hands.

Mordecai knew that God did not need Esther, but that she needed God. In times of crisis it is imperative that we should realise our total dependency on God as well as our own responsibility. It is then necessary for us to deny ourselves and seek God's honour as true believers and to recognise opportunities provided by God for deliverance.

This is what Mordecai is telling Esther. It is because of God's providence that you have been placed in the palace.

In the midst of the global Covid-19 pandemic we need to ask ourselves: Why am I here, where I am living and working and why at this specific point in time?

Verse 16 tells us clearly what Esther's decision was in the end when she sends a message to Mordecai: "Go, gather all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish."

To fast means that God is more important to me than anything else. It means that I hunger for God more than for food. It means that you are setting yourself apart from the pressures of life in order to be able to pray more intensely.

When God renews and freshly empowers his church and expands his sovereignty, it is always accompanied by deepening in prayer, true remorse and by sincere humility.

The underlying attitude in such a deepening in prayer is very important. In Zechariah 12:10 God says: “And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a first born son.”

When God renews his church it brings with it tears and a deep sorrow about sin. People realise: my sin has pierced God’s heart.

God renews people by guiding them to come to him with sorrow in their hearts in order to find his guidance.

Is this not what we need above anything else in a time such as this: A church that humbly search for God’s will and come to him through fasting, praying and in humility?

In this manner God used the crisis in Esther’s life to work sanctification and purification. Sometimes God casts his children into a crises situation in order to sanctify and to cleanse them of a wrong value system, selfish motives and a type of half-hearted hypocritical sham religion. He wants to draw them closer to Him.

In a very powerful manner the book of Esther tells us very accurately that when you admit your vanity and your weakness before God, it leads to a change which could have far reaching implications in the political struggles for power and the progress of history.

When God’s children really seek their refuge in Him and in doing so admit their absolute dependence on Him, He is able to bring about sudden and immediate changes which will affect the course of events for those who are threatened. God’s children will only have a future if they, like Mordecai and Esther, weep and in sincere tears honestly confess, “Heavenly Father we know that no man-made political system is able to ensure our future. You alone determine our future. We place ourselves in your powerful hand to rule the hearts and lives of political leaders.”

For you and me there is a throne which is much higher than that of Xerxes, a much more powerful King than the king of Persia. Earthly kings like Xerxes are mostly inaccessible. You cannot just walk in and state your case.

God came to us in Jesus Christ. He received tax collectors, prostitutes and sinners; He opened his arms to them and said, "Come to me all who are burdened and weary. Come to the throne of grace in order to receive mercy and grace and in doing so receive help when it is most needed."

Mordecai was not welcome in the palace with all his sorrows and worries, but we are welcome to go to the Lord Jesus with broken hearts and pour out all our sorrows before the throne of grace. He is not someone who has no sympathy with our weaknesses; like us He was, in all respects, submitted to temptations.

In a time such as this we need to put ourselves totally in the hands of the Lord. Esther said: "If I should die, so be it" but the Lord says; "I will never reject him who comes to Me." Because He died for us on the cross. All of us strayed like sheep, each of us walked our own path; but the Lord laid all our iniquities on Him.

Continue to worship and sing to the glory of God

If you listen to the great music throughout the centuries, you'll begin to realise that suffering has enriched people's lives and gave them courage to persevere. The suffering in the life of an artist makes them richer, wiser, deeper, and more profound.

Suffering can make you much more human. Suffering can enrich. Suffering can educate. Suffering can be extremely meaningful. It can make you the kind of person (if you handle your closed doors properly) to enable you to go through other doors you could never go through if you hadn't become what you are through the way you handled your failures, the way you handled your pain.

One of many examples of the best music and songs is the words of the well-known hymn written by Martin Rinkart: Nun danket alle Gott (Now thank we all our God).

Martin Rinkart was a Lutheran minister who came to Eilenburg, Saxony at the beginning of the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648). The walled city of Eilenburg became the refuge for political and military fugitives, but the result was overcrowding, and deadly pestilence and famine. The Rinkart home was a refuge for the victims, even though he was often hard-pressed to provide for his own family. During the height of a severe plague in 1637, Rinkart was the only surviving pastor in Eilenburg, conducting as many as 50 funerals in a day. He performed more than 4 000 funerals in that year, including that of his wife.

Yet Rinkart was a prolific hymn writer. In Rinkart's "Jesu Hertz-Buchlein" (a booklet with spiritual songs about the heart of Jesus, 1636), the hymn *Now thank we all our God*, appears under the title "Tisch-Gebetlein" (a short prayer before meals). It is known that this song was widely sung by the time the Peace of Westphalia was signed in 1648.

My prayer is that in the midst of the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic our churches and our lives will radiate songs like this in our hearts as we sang it in four different languages during the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in Wittenberg in October 2017.

English	Afrikaans	isiZulu	German
Now thank we all our God with heart and hands and voices, who wondrous things has done, in whom his world rejoices; who from our mothers' arms has blessed us on our way with countless gifts of love, and still is ours today.	Kom dank nou almal God met hart en mond en hande; loof hom wat wonders doen tot in die verste lande. van vroeg van kindsbeen af, het hy ons trou bewaar en tot vandag toe nog geseën en gespaar.	Siyayibong' iNkos' ngomlomo nangezandla. Yasithokozisa ngezibusiso zayo. Sisand' ukuzalwa yasilondoloza ngezipho zothando kuze kube namhla.	Nun danket alle Gott mit Herzen, Mund und Händen, der große Dinge tut an uns und allen Enden, der uns von Mutterleib und Kindesbeinen an unzählig viel zu gut bis hierher hat getan.



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3. Why a church needs to be sound before mission is possible

This contribution aims to describe the necessity of church readiness before launching missions. Church readiness is the preparatory stage which sets the foundation on which the mission blocks are laid. The strength of the foundation determines the strength on the structure built on it. In short, this essay seeks to highlight what the church ought to be and do in the preparation phase of accomplishing its mission and to substantiate the need for such preparation.

It is important at this stage to say that a sound church is one that has spiritually mature members who can transform communities for the Lord. Spiritual maturity results from training members to be disciples of Jesus and so become the real light and salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13–16) that God uses to call the world to Christianity, thus enabling the mission of the church.

Next one has to define what mission is and position the church within the missiological context. I begin by describing what a church is which indicates what the church should look like and do.

Church defined

There are many definitions of the church, but the one defining church to be the body of Christ is most appropriate. Paul extensively refers to the church as such in his epistles to different recipients to indicate the unity and diversity therein (Romans 12:1; 1 Corinthians 12:12–27; Ephesians 3:6; 4:15–16, 5:23; Colossians 1:18 & 24).

The unity and diversity are a result of the difference in gifts that each member has. Each gift is essential and can profit the entire church in the same

way that each body part is essential and functional. The body imagery indicates the fact that each member of any congregation should be empowered to use his/her gifts to serve the body, lest the body becomes dysfunctional. Like in the human body where the defect in one body part affects the whole body, so is it in the church that does not use all the gifts of all the members in service of the congregation.

All the members in each congregation are placed there by God and each has a gift that is profitable in that congregation, hence underrating or minimising the members' gifts affects the quality of the church's spiritual growth. Inadequate spiritual growth hampers the believers' cooperation with God in the *missio Dei*, resulting in abortive mission endeavours. It is imperative to make the church grow to spiritual maturity, a characteristic that compels members to be missional and so fulfill the calling of the church.

It follows that, as the body of Christ, The Triune God utilises his church, in participation with Him, to accomplish his worldwide mission. The Triune God, while executing his plan with the world, chooses certain people to participate with Him in that process. These chosen people (the church) are the instruments God uses to dispense his plan in the world. Furthermore, God identified leaders among His chosen people to spearhead His worldwide mission.

The church leadership sits in the driving seat of the congregational mission, influencing the whole congregation towards participating with God in His mission. The reason is that the leaders are given relevant gifts that are necessary to help members reach their maximum potential of service in the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:11).

Needless to mention that the leadership gifts are not meant for their own benefits, but as means to activate membership gifts (Ephesians 4:7) to reach full potential of service, that allows the whole body to "attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God – a mature person, attaining to the measure of Christ's full stature" (Ephesians 4:13). When the church attains this state, it can easily achieve its missional goals, being sensitive to the leadership of the Holy Spirit in submission and humility.

The whole process is meant to make the church become missional, so that it can achieve its missional goals – witnessing Christ through word and deed. This can be summed up in one sentence: the messenger (church) must be equipped to mirror the message (Good News) to be presented in the world. The whole congregation should be trained to be disciples of Jesus Christ,

which is possible only through spiritual growth.

This point is emphasised by Jesus Christ in Matthew 28:19-20 that underscores the need for spiritual growth of all the members that are converted, as the ultimate goal of the church. The two out of three verbs (going, baptising) in verse 19 are participles and only making disciples is the main action verb indicating the importance of the spiritual growth of converted members.

Also, Matthew 28:20 focuses on teaching the converts everything that Christ taught which emphasises the spiritual growth of all converted members as well. In other words, spiritual growth is a product of teaching the members to obey everything that Jesus taught which leads the church to spiritual maturity through the Word. (John 17:17)

This contribution intends to explain what the church needs to do and what she needs to be before mission deployment is possible. Briefly summarised, we can say that it is imperative that the church herself and the way she functions should, as the body of Christ and the bride of Christ, be Christlike, reflecting the very nature of Christ to all who come into contact with her.

In order to achieve this state of being, the church leaders must teach all church members discipleship, lead them in the deployment of their several gifts and thus bring them through spiritual growth to spiritual maturity.

The following section, as foundational in positioning and preparing the church for mission, explores the biblical background and the definition of mission.

God and his mission

God desires that people come to know Him, which He does by revealing Himself through nature (general revelation) and through his Word – Bible and Christ (special revelation) (Grudem, 2000: 601–602; Berkhof, 2009: 5–8). Thus, people can know Him as far as He has revealed Himself. Mission is therefore traced in the revelation of God in the entire Bible and through its absoluteness in Jesus Christ. Berkhof further explains that the special revelation was necessary because sin had prevented man from interpreting the writing of God in nature (p. 2).

A proper interpretation of the purpose of God's mission is crucial in positioning the church for mission. It is essential to properly interpret the purpose of God's mission to be able to disambiguate missional hermeneutic highlights on the grand mission of God (*missio Dei*) and human activities flowing from it (missions). *Missio Dei* is defined below.

The mission of God (*missio Dei*)

Jesus' discussion with His disciples on their way to Emmaus indicates the entire Bible is all about Him. He is beginning and the fulfillment of the *missio Dei*, hence the Good News flows from His person and work on the cross. See Luke (24:25–27 & 44–48): Then Jesus said to them, “O foolish ones, how slow are your hearts to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and then to enter His glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He explained to them what was written in all the Scriptures about Himself.

Jesus said to them, “These are the words I spoke to you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about Me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms.” Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. And He told them, “This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and in His name repentance and forgiveness of sins will be proclaimed to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things . . .”

The missional hermeneutics developed from Luke (24:25–27 & 44–48) reveals that the Old Testament testifies about Him and that in the New Testament He is the absolute revelation of God (Wright, 2006, 29–31; 2010: 23–24). This hermeneutical argument confirms that the whole Bible is the mission of God, through which He reveals Himself.

The mission of God involves the Triune God in all aspects, from the creation narrative, the fall, and salvation that was planned by the Father, fulfilled by Jesus Christ (the Son), and is applied by the Holy Spirit. Jesus' testifying that the whole Bible is about Him indicates that salvation is central to the *missio Dei*. Thus, God's redemptive plan runs throughout the whole Bible.

In fulfilling His purpose (*missio Dei*), God's called people (the church) should be Christlike in order to be His expression. The Christlike church can align with Jesus Christ who is the head of the church and by confessing Him, the world is transformed. His incarnation, death and resurrection were meant to correct what was shattered by sin under the headship of Adam. (Kreitzer, 2009:2)

As such, He remains the resource for the church's successful missional mandate. Thus, Christ should be formed in the believers before they are engaged in any form of mission. To reiterate, the called people must mirror the one who called before they can cooperate with Him in his mission.

Mission is about being called and sent to accomplish the purpose to which one or a group of people is/are being sent to (Wright, 2019: 202). In any case, the one sent must be conversant with the assignment; otherwise no positive results will be realised. Looking through Scriptures we can establish that all the sent people were prepared for the mission to be accomplished.

In Hebrews (10:5) the writer highlights Jesus' word indicating his preparedness to offer salvation. "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but the body you prepared for me." Thus, Lord Jesus was sent into the world to offer salvation through His sacrificial death on the cross, resurrection and ascension – Good News (Luke 4:16–19).

Similarly, Jesus empowered His disciples for effective mission before sending them out. On the one hand, the disciples – the seventy and the Twelve, were empowered and sent to preach and demonstrate the power of God through proclamation and delivering and healing people of various diseases (Luke 10:3–9; Matthew 10:5–8).

On the other hand, the apostles were also sent to make disciples of all nations, baptising, and teaching them the whole truth (Matthew 28:18–20). To indicate the importance of empowering the sent people, Jesus told the Twelve to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit who would empower them for the assignment before going on their mission (Luke 24:49).

The church is no exception with regard to being empowered for the mission before participating in it. The believers should be Christlike to be effective in its mission, lest all efforts are doomed to failure.

Jesus indicates that mission is about sending and being sent when he declared in His priestly prayer that "As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world". (John 17:18). To emphasise the sending aspect, Jesus reiterates the same statements to the disciples after the resurrection, when He says: "As the Father has sent me, even though I am sending you" (John 20:21b). The place to which Jesus was sent is the same place He sent the disciples – the world (John 17:18).

Both Jesus and his disciples were sent for the same purpose – to redeem the fallen world. Nevertheless, the sent people should not rush to engage in missions before they are fully equipped for it. The church should be prepared to be a true expression of Jesus Christ before engaging in missions.

The sent people (the church) have the mandate of fulfilling what they are obligated to do, through the power of the Holy Spirit who enables all that the church does. Matthew (28:20) and Acts (1:4) clearly indicate that the

church can only participate in the mission of God through the power of the Holy Spirit.

It is worth reiterating that Jesus had to empower the disciples before they could go on the assignments, He was sending them to accomplish Luke 10:9 and Matthew 10:8: Heal the sick who are there and tell them, “The kingdom of God has come near to you.” And: heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give.

Along the same lines, the apostles were sent to spread the Good News, but they were advised to wait for the empowerment of the Holy Spirit before they could go to proclaim the Good News. It stands to reason that empowering the sent people is the key for achieving the mission goals.

This is testimonial that the church should be fully equipped for the missions before attempting them. Nonetheless, the differentiation of mission and missions helps to shape the purpose of the church, in relation to the overall purpose of God.

Wright (2010:24–26) differentiate *missio Dei* and mission as follows:

1. *Missio Dei* is that which God is doing in the world. He calls the church to cooperate with Him in that activity. The key phrase in this definition is “cooperate with Him”, highlighting that what the church does is dependent on the Lord and flows from Him, hence the need to align with God’s missional purpose. It follows that the church cannot initiate anything new in the plan of God, but can merely obediently follow that which God is already doing – his mission.

Thus, the congregation members should be all what God wants them to be. This is the key to successful missions. This compels the church leadership to effectively engage the congregants with the Word that is capable of equipping them for missions.

2. Mission is the activity that the church engages in as a means of participating with God in the *missio Dei*. Mission is therefore any church activity taken in response to God’s call. Thus, the various ministries that the church deploys all endeavour to point the world to God, through Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Thus all the ministries are missions. In other words, God called the church as an agent through which He accomplishes the *missio Dei*. For the church to participate with the missional God, it has to be missional as well. The

bottom line is that the church becomes missional to cooperate with the missional God. The missional aspect of the church should be its life breath, not just an event.

It follows that a missional church works from within and beyond the boundaries of their congregation. This is a product of an organic church in which all the members have the same DNA through the Holy Spirit which compels them to spiritual maturity (Cole, 2007). This makes the life of its membership to be missional in all areas of life. Thus, whatever the church does is an expression of Christ thereby leading all people to faith in Jesus Christ.

Towards the mission direction

It is highlighted above that the church is called to cooperate with God in His mission, and the success of the church's cooperation is dependent on the degree of their alignment to God's missional means and purpose. In order to properly align with God's missional means and purpose the church must be prepared to be all what God wants it to be to fulfill its calling.

By church, I am referring to the entire body of Christ that should be made ready to execute their functions in the mission of God. At the apex of preparing the church are the church leaders who should spearhead the process of preparing all believers for their functions. The effective use of each member's gifts leads to the proper function of the whole body which manifests in spiritually mature members.

Church health is realised by qualitative (spiritual) growth of members, which results in quantitative (numerical) growth (Chaney and Lewis, 1977: 13). It stands to reason that genuine qualitative growth leads to quantitative growth, because the believers are capable of living and proclaiming the truth that sets peoples free from the jaws of sin.

Being quality members is the same as being missional. These members' lives are witnesses of Christ in and outside the church. Thus, each RSCA congregation should focus all resources available to develop quality membership. However, all this requires the leadership that can effectively use the quality member's gifts to benefit all the believers in their congregations.

It follows that, the leadership is given the necessary gifts (Ephesians 4:11) to enhance effectiveness in helping each believer to reach full potential of service in the body of Christ (Weems, 2010: 2) by using their God given gifts too (Ephesians 4:7). The whole process points to the development of Christlike Christians whose whole life is missional. Such members can trans-

form their communities and beyond with the light of Christ that shines through them and in them. In order to develop quality, Christlike missional Christians, it is advisable to adopt and deploy Schwartz's (1996 & 2006) NCD principles.

Schwartz's natural church development model

The Natural Church Development model (NCD) facilitates developing quality Christians who are missional. This section describes the NCD quality principles, indicating how and why they are necessary for qualitative growth of the church and also showing its relevance in enhancing the quality of Christians.

The NCD is comprised of eight quality principles (Schwartz 2006: 24–38; 1996: 22–37), which were established by Schwartz in 1996 and further described for more clarity in 2006. The NCD is a product of empirical research carried out over a period of two years, from 1994 to 1996. It makes use of a “sufficiently large data base to make scientifically significant accessions” (Schwarz, 2006:5).

His study involved 1 000 churches from 32 countries and in each church were 30 participants (Schwartz, 1996:18 & 2006:20). The use of several countries and churches across the globe underscores the applicability of the NCD in the entire world by adapting it to various contexts. As a result, the NCD was successful in all the countries during the two years of the study. Thus, the NCD was rated as being successful in different parts of the world (Schwartz, 2006: 15).

The NCD was used in 45 000 churches and 70 countries successfully. In addition, the translation of Schwartz's book into 40 different languages (Schwartz, 2006: 13) is an indication of the wide use of the NCD quality principles. If the NCD was not effective, so many churches would not have invested their resources on it. Thus, its wide use is a testimony of its effectiveness in developing quality Christians who can effectively witness Christ in the world with their entire lifestyles. The RCSA cannot be an exception in which the NCD could fail to develop RCSA quality Christians.

The bottom line is that quality Christians are the agents of transformation because they are enabled to demonstrate and state the truth that sets people free via all aspects of their lives.

The NCD quality principles and how they are implemented to prepare RCSA congregations for missions are discussed below.

1. Empowering leadership

This most important principle applies to enabling leadership effectiveness in leader's various gifted offices. The apostle Paul underscores that the gifts given to the leadership (Ephesians 4:11) are the means to help the believers to move to where God wants them to be. Though the leaders are gifted in the ministry they are also called to lead. Leaders need to be appropriately trained to improve the effective deployment of their gifts.

It stands to reason that if Jesus who is God, the Son, spent about three and half years with the disciples training them for the ministry, how important is it that the church needs to equip its various leaders for effective missions. The trained and empowered leadership can easily implement the other seven quality principles to attain the desired quality membership.

Effective empowering leadership requires the skills of identifying members gifted for different specific ministries, of eliciting their participation and then the skill of train and deploying them accordingly. Thereafter an effective empowering leader will nurture the newly appointed leaders by continual on-the-job coaching and encouragement. This phase of on-the-job coaching and encouragement must include showing the new leaders how they should effectively lead other members to become Christlike.

Key to church health and growth is that the ordained leaders "rather than handling the bulk of church responsibilities on their own, they invest the majority of time in discipleship, delegation, and multiplication" (Schwartz 2006:25). This enables the deployment of multiple leaders who use their gifts to move the believers to where God wants them to be through guiding them to effectively use their gifts in serving the body of Christ.

Thus "to equip the saints for the work of ministry" (Ephesians 4:12), results in the production of mature membership that can apply the love of Christ in the world. The involvement of gifted leadership (both ordained and lay) in various ministries of their gifts excludes the hierarchical model where the ordained leadership seemingly directs everything that the congregation does.

This traditional model is unproductive because it does not make use of all members' gifts (Niemandt 2012: 6), thus disabling the body from functioning effectively, just as it happens in the human body when one part is disabled. Multiple leaders lead small groups each in which maximum help is given to individual believers resulting in making each believer to actively serve in the congregation. These small groups are not randomly made, but are gift based, in which believers of related gifts are grouped together.

2. Gift based ministry

The equipped leadership can identify and allocate the membership to appropriate ministries where their gifts can be optimally deployed (Schwarz, 2006: 26–27). It stands to reason that each congregation must utilise the gifts of all members, because each member of the body has an important function in making the body function effectively (1 Corinthians 12:1–31).

The bottom line is to ensure full participation of each member. That affects the quality of each member's ministry and subsequently that of the whole congregation. Each believer should be taken through the next six quality principles to understand that spiritual maturity is the key to mission success.

3. Passionate spirituality

All the believers should be helped through the Word to lives that are committed to “practice their faith with joy and enthusiasm”. (Schwarz, 2006: 27 & 1996:26). A church that is enthusiastically committed to its faith, fulfills the Great Commandment – loving God totally and neighbours unconditionally (Matthew 22:36–40). For the believers, the wholehearted devotion to God and others compels them to reflect Christ, which is the only medium for missions.

4. Functional structures

The following organic leadership will optimise how effective the church promotes rather than inhibits active participation of congregation members, leading to proper functioning of the body. It follows that the more the members are motivated to serve in the congregation, the greater the chances of spiritual maturity in the several ministries and the whole congregation.

5. Inspiring worship

Believers are inspired by true worship that enhances them to gaze at the face of the Lord: engaging with the Word, prayers, music in such a way that congregants experience the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Regarding such worship, Schwarz (2006: 30 & 1996: 31) argues that, when ‘worship is inspiring, it draws people to the services “all by itself”. When believers are drawn to full service in the body, the maturity of the body is realised as the apostle Paul indicates (Eph, 4:12–13).

6. Holistic small groups

The membership's cohesion deepens their love, which is the essence of church health. As said above, when believers are allocated to small ministries of their gifts, they help one another to reach the full potential of service through the Word, fellowship and any other daily activities that help the capacitation of the groups.

7. Need-oriented evangelism

The focus of this principle is to develop bridges that help share the gospel by meeting the needs felt by the people to be evangelised. The relationship developed between the church members and the target population creates an interest in non-believers to listen to the gospel, which is the Holy Spirit's instrument for conversion.

To reiterate, it is the Christlikeness in believers that allows them to interact perfectly well within and outside of the church. The believers in each ministry of each congregation should begin by identifying the needs of their members and meet them. This practice helps them to identify the needs of the communities and meet them with the love of Christ.

8. Loving relationships

Members' commitment to others connects the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. Full commitment to others and to God, leads the believers to help their colleagues to spiritual growth. When the whole congregation attains spiritual growth of believers, it becomes a true expression of Christ, which is missional. All that is missional is an expression of Christ which no doubt brings people to belief and strong trust and confidence in Christ.

Conclusion

This contribution's focus is to enable believers to be missional to successfully cooperate with God in the *missio Dei*. This is a product of the gifted leadership's engaging of all believers to actively serve in the body of Christ. Active service is imminent when the believers are helped to grow into spiritual maturity which is possible through implementing Schwartz's NCD quality principles.

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4. The Holy Spirit who renews and empowers

Everyone who belongs to Christ, every Christian believer, has been given the Spirit (Romans 8:9b), who both regenerates us by the word of God and empowers us for our witness and ministry.

It is remarkable that, for hundreds of years, theological reflection on the work of the Holy Spirit has been limited to his renewing work, the new birth, calling us to spiritual life, faith, conversion and sanctification. There seems to have been little or no understanding about his work of empowerment. For example, the standard work by the Dutch theologian Abraham Kuyper, *Het Werk van de Heilige Geest*, a volume of about 700 pages, discusses in minute detail the renewing work of the Spirit, without even a single mentions of the empowering work of the Spirit.

When writing about the Holy Spirit, I keep in mind the words of our Lord himself to Nicodemus: “The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit” (John 3:8, NIV). The Holy Spirit is God himself, and who will ever understand God? Still, the Bible teaches us many facts about the Spirit and his work. I limit myself to what Scripture teaches.

Two main aspects of the work of the Spirit

According to Scripture, there are two main aspects of the work of the Spirit, to wit his *regenerating* work, and his work of *equipping* believers for their ministry. His work of regeneration is not limited to the New Testament; every person needs to be regenerated in order to become a believer, because

with the exception of the Lord Jesus, every human being is by nature an enemy of God, dead in sin (Ephesians 1:1,4,5; Romans 8:7,8).

Old Testament and New Testament believers were both naturally dead prior to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Being spiritually dead is universal, it includes all humankind throughout history. The regenerating work of the Holy Spirit was, therefore, just as necessary in the time of the Old Covenant as it was in the time of the New Covenant. The Holy Spirit was at work during the Old Covenant too, otherwise no one after the fall would ever have believed.

The difference between the Old and the New Covenant

However, He did not at that time dwell in every believer. The apostle John wrote that the Holy Spirit only came after the exaltation of Jesus. He stated clearly that “Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.” (John 7:39). In Isaiah 59:21 we read the following prophecy: “As for me, this is my covenant with them ... My Spirit who is in on you, and my words that I have put in your mouth will not depart from your mouth, or from the mouths of your children, or from the mouths of their descendants from this time and for ever ...”

This is a prophecy about the New Covenant. Incidentally, the way the apostle Peter quotes this prophecy in Acts 2:39 confirms that the children of believers are included in the New Covenant, promise and covenant being synonyms here.

In the Old Covenant the Holy Spirit dwelt in a limited number of people, usually prophets, leaders and kings, and even in these He seems not to have dwelt permanently. In the New Covenant He came to stay permanently, until the return of Christ. The Lord Jesus made it clear that this prophecy was to be fulfilled at Pentecost (John 14:16, GNB: “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, who will stay with you for ever.”)

Different ways of reacting to the work of the Spirit

From the human side, there are two possible ways to react to the Holy Spirit and his work. Let us discuss these in some more detail.

He can be resisted (Acts 7:51), or the opposite, be obeyed.

It is possible to blaspheme against him (Matthews 12:31), or the opposite, to recognise and thus acknowledge his work.

He can be grieved or saddened (Ephesians 4:30), or one can live by him and be led by him (Galatians 5:16).

He can be quenched (1 Thessalonians 5:19), or the opposite, be fanned into flame (2 Timothy 1:6).

Resisting and blaspheming the Spirit

To *resist* the Spirit is to regard him with enmity and to refuse to obey him. That was the sin of which Stephen accused the Jews who were ready to kill him (Acts 7:51). To *blaspheme* him is to ascribe his work to the devil. When the Pharisees said that it was with the help of Beelzebub that Jesus cast out demons, he answered that they were blaspheming against the Spirit, and that this was a sin that is never forgiven.

The sins mentioned above are obviously committed by unbelievers. A believer does not resist the Spirit like the unbelieving Jews who killed Stephen, and their forebears. It is also difficult to conceive of a believer blaspheming against the Spirit. There are, however, two other possible ways of reacting to the Spirit, which involve specifically believers.

Grieving the Spirit

The first one is the sin of *grieving* the Spirit. According to Ephesians 4 the Spirit is grieved by sins committed consciously, such as raging, nursing anger, brawling, slander and every form of malice, untruths, unwholesome talk, theft and drunkenness. On the other hand, living by the Spirit and being led by him means living a life of love for God and our fellow human beings, including our enemies.

This goes hand in hand with constantly being filled with the Spirit, as we are instructed and exhorted to do in Ephesians 5:18. Note that in the original, the Greek version of this verse the present tense imperative is used; indicating that being filled with the Spirit is not an occasional occurrence, but a continuous process.

Moreover, believers are active in the process of being filled by the Spirit, since it is stated in the form of a command to us. The parallel place in Colossians, the “twin letter” of Ephesians, written at the same time as Ephesians and treating similar themes, is “Christ’s message in all its richness must live in your hearts” (Colossians 3:16, GNB), or “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly . . .” (NIT). Clearly this indicates that being filled with the Spirit is also being filled with the word of Christ, the Bible. Studying the Bible is important for being filled with the Spirit.

Occasional fillings with the Spirit

When one studies passages such as Acts 4:31, it becomes clear that even though the all believers were baptised and filled with the Holy Spirit (see

also Ephesians 4:4-6), there were still, in addition to that, occasions when the Spirit fell on and filled a number of believers in a special way, giving them special boldness and filling them with joy.

We read in Acts 13:52 that in the Pisidian Antioch a number of gentiles came to believe the gospel. Paul and Silas were then expelled from that region, but the disciples who were left, were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit. The same is mentioned in Acts 4:31.

It happens in addition to the daily filling with the Spirit. It still happens today. We know of more than one instance where believers were filled with unspeakable joy for a while, in some cases not being able to explain what happened to them. Some people call this the baptism of the Spirit, or the second blessing, but the Bible simply calls it being filled with the Spirit.

There are unfortunately some people who seem to imagine that being filled with the Spirit gives them control over the Spirit. According to the Bible, the truth is the other way round – being filled with the Spirit actually means that we are under his control.

These observations are obviously not an exhaustive treatment of the subjects discussed.

Quenching the Spirit and fanning his flames

The last aspect to be discussed is the sin of *quenching* the Spirit, and the opposite, *fanning the flames* of the spirit. Since this aspect is relevant for mission and evangelism, it will be discussed in somewhat more detail, since it is particularly relevant to the Great Commission.

Quenching the Spirit is mentioned in 1 Thessalonians 5:19 (GNB: “do not restrain the Holy Spirit”; NIV: “Do not put out the Spirit’s fire ...”), and from the immediate context it is clear that it refers particularly to not properly appreciating the charismata, neglecting them, or not providing room for these gifts to work freely.

The Spirit who equips us for carrying further his message

At his ascension to heaven, the risen Christ, having received all authority in heaven and upon the earth, instructed his disciples to go to all nations and make them disciples (Matthews 28), but first to stay in Jerusalem, waiting for power from on high to equip them for this task.

It is noteworthy that the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost came in the form of fiery tongues fanned by a mighty wind, and those who were filled with him started speaking in foreign languages, so that people present there

from all corners of the Roman empire heard them extolling the great deeds of God in their mother tongue, the languages spoken at their homes.

The implications of this phenomenon are very clear. The Lord Jesus at his ascension commanded them to stay at Jerusalem until they were filled with power from above, and then to go to all people and make them disciples. They were now filled with that fire, that power, and they had to go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to every nation. If not the main purpose of the empowerment with the Spirit, obviously it was at least a very important aspect of that empowerment.

The cost of disobedience

One cannot escape the conclusion that neglecting the Great Commission amounts to restraining the Holy Spirit, putting out his fire. It is plain and simple disobedience.

Yes, one can quench the fire of the Spirit, even though He is the almighty God himself. The Lord Jesus was the almighty God himself, and yet He allowed people to beat Him, spit Him in the face, scourge Him, crucify Him and mock Him.

Then it is unfortunately possible for us to also quench the flames of the Spirit. He is still present, he never leaves the church, but his flames are covered by the ashes of our disobedience and carelessness until he smoulders like coals under the ash. Revival and reformation mean that the ashes are blown away and the flames are fanned into a bright blaze again.

Can the message be put clearer? It seems clear enough to me. What could we accomplish as churches in the absence of the Holy Spirit? The Lord Jesus promised to be with us always, until the end of time, but this promise goes hand in hand with the commission to proclaim the gospel. If we want to claim the promise, we have to fulfill the commission. There is no other way.



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5. How to do and not to do mission

The Great Commission is, no doubt, the most important assignment that Christ left us – as the church – before he went to be at the right hand of the Father Almighty.

The text¹ in Matthew 28:18-20 says, “And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’”

Mark 16:15-16: “And he said to them, go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”

With it, he also gave us the promise of his presence always, when he said: “And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

The promise of the Spirit was attached to this commission. He told them on that blessed day in Acts 1:8: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

No wonder therefore why the church since the first century has sought to fulfill this important mission. Through the years the church has tried different methods and strategies of how best to do mission and plant churches on home soil as well as in foreign lands. Some methods are very close to the Bible while others are quite far. This latter is due to over reliance on human wisdom as opposed to complete confidence in Scripture as a source of light

¹ *All references from the Bible are from the English Standard Version (ESB)*

and guidance in this matter.

It is of utmost importance that we, as a church of our Lord, go back to Scripture and seek to discern the heart of the Triune God in this commission of Christ. We should evaluate what we are doing in the light of that insight. We will most likely then, if we are objective enough, be able to see where we might be missing the point. In this way we can humbly correct what can and needs to be corrected, and strengthen what needs to be strengthened.

The words we refer to as the Great Commission are spelled out by Christ between his resurrection and ascension. In these words, Christ made his mandate clear to his disciples and his church in general throughout history, that he wants us to be preoccupied with this activity – making disciples.

Christ wants all men to hear the gospel proclaimed to them. The heart of the Triune God is in missions. The church was never intended to be a cosy club of like-minded individuals who gather on Sundays for a feel-good experience. The church is rather the body of Christ gathered from all nations, tribes and tongues. This is the mission of God.

Sadly, though, the way we go about doing missions tend to defeat the very aims we are trying to achieve. We wonder why we are not succeeding. Is it because the people we are ministering to today are more hard-hearted than the people in the first century?

Of course not. Humanity has always had the same basic problem, namely, sin. (Romans 3:23). All of humanity is doomed to perish under God's righteous judgement for their sin and rebellion (Romans 6:23), unless they turn to God in faith and repentance and accept God's offer of forgiveness of sins found in Christ Jesus.

I have to declare upfront that in dealing with this subject I do not claim in any way to be an expert. I am also not belittling the efforts of those who have laboured in the Master's vineyard. My attempt here is to contribute, hopefully in a positive way, by sharing my insights and experiences of church planting work that the Lord has graciously enabled me to do.

I hope that this may be helpful in challenging every missionary or church planter to realise that the task before us, as difficult as it is, is not an impossible one. In fact, it ignites passion and excitement in the one who has firsthand experience of the saving grace of God in Christ. The one who is motivated by the love for the Master and deep concern for the doom of pagan humanity, as well as an appreciation for what He has done for our

redemption, cannot help but love much. (Luke 7:47)

Again it is important that we recognise that the Lord is sovereign in missions. That is why He is called “the Lord of the harvest” (Matthew 9:38; Luke 10:2). This means that he is in charge of the harvest and those who labour in it. Ultimately He is the one who is also sovereign over the fruit of the harvest. We can only plant and others water, but ultimately, what good is that if the Lord does not grant growth (see 1 Corinthians 3:6-7).

As missionaries and church planters, we need therefore to labour with God and not independent of Him. As Paul puts it, “For we are God's fellow workers.” (1 Corinthians 3:9). It is in him that we get our marching orders. It is in faithfulness to him rather than the positive results of our efforts, that we can expect to hear the words, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” (Matthew 25:21,23)

I will emphasise three important things that need to be taken seriously as we seek to fulfill the great commission mandate. The first one is *the priority of prayer*. Secondly, *biblically sound evangelism*. Lastly, *discipleship of new converts*. This has been the way I have been mentored into church planting, and have seen it working in the ministry the Lord has graciously entrusted to me.

The priority of prayer

Indispensable part of the Great Commission

Prayer is a way of saying to God that we are totally dependent on Him. On the other hand, lack of prayer is the exact opposite of that. The Lord Himself warned his disciples that, “apart from me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5)

No wonder it is so very clear in Scripture that prayer is central to fulfilling the mandate of the Great Commission. We see this truth both through the teachings of our Lord Jesus and his example. For an example, Luke tells us that the Lord would withdraw to desolate places and pray. (Luke 5:16)

A closer examination of this verse shows that it was not a once-off activity, but rather a habitual pattern of his life on earth. At the very beginning of his ministry on earth after his baptism by John, before he preached his first sermon or performed his first miracle, he started with 40 days of fasting and prayer.

It should not be any different for us either. The Lord made prayer a very necessary part of the Great Commission. He saw the spiritual need of the masses that came to him, so he called his disciples to prayer: “The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord

of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.” (Matthew 9:37-38)

This is also mentioned in Luke 10:2. By this, the Lord was declaring the impossibility of effective missions without prayer. Greenway eloquently puts it this way: “Jesus made it clear that the calling and sending out of missionaries is primarily the work of God, for He is “the Lord of the harvest”. Our primary task is to *pray* that he will call and send people of his choosing. We are assured that if we pray, he *will* send people”. (Greenway, 1999:89)

The apostles too made prayer their first priority in ministry. When faced with a possible distraction in their work, they were determined not to be sidetracked but rather insisted on devoting themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word. (Acts 6:4)

The apostle Paul in particular saw prayer as an invaluable resource in fulfilling the mission of God. It was in the context of fervent prayer that he and his co-worker Barnabas were commissioned. In Acts 13:2-3 we read that, “While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.” No wonder then that the apostle Paul made prayer the important part of his ministry. He often requested the churches to pray for him and his team of co-workers who were either travelling with him or were in prison with him.

He asked that the church should pray for an open door or opportunity for the word as well as clarity on his part as a gospel messenger. This he says in Colossians 4:3-4: “At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.”

He also asked for prayers for receptivity of the word among those he was preaching to. This he says to the Thessalonians in this way, “Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honoured, as happened among you, and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men. For not all have faith.” (2 Thessalonians 3:1-2)

Finally, he also requested prayers for him to be given the right words to speak whenever the opportunity presents itself, and also to do so boldly. Hence he says to the Ephesians, “praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance,

making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.” (Ephesians 6:18-20)

Prayer sharpened the Apostle Paul’s discernment, enabling him to be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit in missions. He wasn’t doing missions in terms of his preferences. The clearest example is that of his first missionary trip to Europe. Paul would have preached in Asia, but the Holy Spirit forbade him. Then they tried to go into Bithynia, “but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them”.

This they faithfully obeyed, against their preferences, until at Troas Paul saw a vision at night of a man of Macedonia “standing there, urging him and saying, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us’”. With this settled conviction about the will of God for them, they immediately sought to go into Macedonia, “concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them”. (Act 16:6-10)

Another instance is when he first preached in Corinth. There was opposition to him and his message. Obviously being human like us he would have been prone to discouragement. Yet, we read that he continued there for one year and six months of fruitful labour.

Why? Because he listened to God. We read, “And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, ‘Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people.’” And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them. (Act 18:9-11)

We can deduce from this and many other instances in Scripture that it is important to engage in fervent prayer before we launch out into the mission field. We need to prayerfully discern where the lord is leading us. But that shouldn’t end there. We also need to be praying throughout the missionary engagement, recognising that we are in a spiritual warfare.

The enemy of our souls will not leave us alone to ruin his kingdom and dispossess him of his spoils without a fight. He will do everything in his power to hinder us and oppose us. He will use all sorts of means in this regard. The Apostle Paul experienced countless oppositions and persecutions. When writing to the church in Corinth he says, “But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.” (1 Corinthians 16:8-9)

If a man like Paul could experience difficulty in ministry and had to depend on God by means of prayer, how can we hope for an easy life? When we have prayed and have an unwavering conviction that we have heard from God where we should go, we are ready to start the work of evangelism.

Biblically sound evangelism the heart of missions

At the heart of the Great Commission is a specific mission. And that mission is the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Great Commission is a command to take the gospel to all men. Therefore, it is of great importance for us to understand the gospel first so we can be able to do the great commission well. If we fail to do so, then we will be no different from the Old Testament character called Ahimaaz who was zealous to run as a messenger, but having no message. (2 Samuel 18:19-30)

The Great Commission involves among other important things, evangelism – the preaching of the gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. By this I mean simply telling the good news without imposing anything. (Dever, 2018:130). We need to be simple enough so that even an illiterate person can understand.

I have over the years found great value in the EE3 material (<https://www.ee3.org.za/classic-ee>). In my church planting endeavours, I have used it to do one-on-one evangelism, and also to train believers to do so. It summarises the gospel very well. It explains the concept of sin, that man is a helpless sinner who cannot save himself. It also touches on the holiness of God and the fact that He cannot tolerate sin but must punish it. And that the only hope for sinful man is Christ Jesus the Son of God, who although He is perfectly holy, yet gave Himself up to die in our place, for our sin. In this way He took our place and made it possible for sinful man to be reconciled to God through faith in Him.

The gospel must be communicated to all very clearly, in simple terms, in a language that can be understood. This task requires the boldness that only the Holy Spirit can give. The evangelist must at all times be very much concerned about this and not be too much concerned about results. He must through faith rest upon the promise of God that His word shall by no means fail.

As the prophet says, “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall

accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.” (Isaiah 55:10-11)

Again, it brings us back to acknowledge the sovereignty of God as I have previously pointed out. Of importance also is that the church planter’s life ought to bear evidence of grace. It must be clear to others that despite the imperfections of character that we all share, this person “had been with Jesus”. (Acts 4:13)

I have often found the door-to-door evangelism, as well as person-to-person, especially helpful and fruitful in my ministry experience. Sometimes I have even used a loudspeaker on street corners to preach a simple evangelistic sermon from a Bible text. This last one may not work for everyone, but I’m speaking as a South African who has planted churches in semi-rural areas and have tried and tested these methods.

Some of the evangelism pitfalls

When Word and deed is out of balance

The very first thing a church planter or missionary may be struck with in a new prospective church plant area are the socio-economic needs. The church planter will obviously be moved with compassion for the suffering that he may be witnessing. He may be overwhelmed by the needs of his target audience, say hunger, and starts to distribute food parcels to those who come to church meetings. Eventually people come in high volumes, not because they have been affected by the preaching of the missionary, but because somehow they see the missionary as a solution to their socio-economic challenges. They respond to free food or other handouts.

Lady Maitland lamented the same reality in the mission work in India. She sadly noted that, “there are very few natives who are even nominal Christians, and still fewer whom we can reasonably believe to be anything but what is here called ‘curry-and-rice Christians’”. Eventually such people are congregated and may even go through membership class and be accepted as members. Some eventually become leaders, such as elders and deacons. And yet, they have a superficial understanding of the gospel.

I do have to say, however, lest I be misunderstood, that there is value in works of charity. It is an indispensable part of the gospel as we see in Matthew 25:34-40, “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was

in prison and you came to me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’”

The caution though is that it should not eclipse the gospel. Because sooner or later the church planter’s focus will turn to humanitarian relief work rather than the primary task of preaching. We must be careful at all times when doing charity, that we do not make it sound like their responding to the gospel in any form has a bearing on whether they will receive material or financial help.

Charity ought to always be a means rather than an end to missions. The main emphasis and focus must always be the preaching and teaching of the gospel. The oversight and nourishment of the spiritual body must precede the diaconal. This was the understanding of the apostles at the start of the church, when they said in Act 6:2-4, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”

Many church planting endeavours have degenerated into another charity programme and not the advancement of the kingdom of God through the proclamation of the gospel. The result is what Maitland laments about in her well known *Letters from Madras*, referring to those she called “curry-and-rice Christians” because of their ulterior motives in becoming Christians. In her fifteenth letter she wrote, “There are very few natives who are even nominal Christians, and still fewer whom we can reasonably believe to be anything but what is here called ‘curry-and-rice Christians’. In England, I think people have a very false impression of what is done in India. That is not the fault of the missionaries, who write the real truth home; but the committees seem to publish all the good and none of the bad, for fear of discouraging people. In fact, it is unreasonable to expect more to be done without more efficient means.” (Maitland, 1846: L15)

When overlooking the underlying worldviews of the target audience

In order to do evangelism well, we have to also take note of the underlying worldview of our target audience. We must realise the fact that at the core of a human heart is a worldview that has been shaped by years and years of human depravity, idolatry, ignorance and spiritual deception. Miller *et al* in the book, *Worldview of the kingdom of God*, observed that “Just like the disciples, the worldly ‘yeast’ of our culture shapes all of us in ways we often fail to recognize. All of us carry around a mental model of the world, a set of ideas or assumptions about what we believe to be true and false, wrong and right.”

These assumptions shape our choices and ultimately determine the kind of lives we lead. (Miller *et al*, 2003:10). He refers to these assumptions as “worldview”. He says that, “A worldview is the total set of assumptions that a person holds, either consciously or unconsciously, about the world and how it works. Sometimes referred to as our ‘belief system’ or ‘mindset’”. (Miller *et al*, 2003: 13)

Humans are social beings. We develop our mindset – our way of seeing the world – from our culture. We tend to think the way our culture thinks and values what our culture values. This is part of what it means to be human. However, when we accept Christ as Saviour, our mindsets need to be renewed. The word “repent”—from the Greek word *metanoeo*—literally means to change one’s mind.

Repentance results in seeing the world the way God created it, then living within that framework. In coming to Christ, we need to begin to think “Christianly”. We need to increasingly take on the mind of Christ, not the mind we inherit from our culture. Understanding Christianity as a worldview is important, not just for us personally, but for our society and the nations of this world as well (Miller *et al*, 2003: 11).

Professor emeritus Koos van Rooy has rightly observed that, “When the gospel is preached, it is the Word of God which enters the culture of sinful people. Many aspects of that culture expresses attitudes and thoughts which cannot be reconciled with the gospel.” (Van Rooy 2021:110). This is no doubt a worldview issue.

In the light of this observation, therefore, we can rightly say that the gospel has to transform man at the core of his being, at the worldview level, otherwise he will not be a new man in Christ. He may have head knowledge

of religion or religious beliefs. He may give the right answer in a catechism class, but he will still remain a natural man, and not a spiritual one. Therefore, an inside-out change is necessary if the objectives of missions are to be realised.

Van Rooy says, “But, specifically in the *spiritual* field the similarities amongst people are greater than the differences. The spiritual needs of every natural person are the same: he is estranged from God, he no longer knows God. He is a sinner. Eternal death awaits him. He must be reborn. Therefore, the gospel of Redemption is for every person basically the same.” (cited by Van Rooy 2021:109)

Miller *et al* as well as Van Rooyen’s observations are very important to consider particularly by those of us who labour in church planting and missions if we are going to plant Biblical churches comprising of genuine believers. We cannot afford to overlook or ignore the worldview of our audience. If we do, the result will likely be that we have a syncretistic type of Christianity where the believers have not really cut ties with their old pagan beliefs and practices.

Every church planter or missionary must therefore be very bold, like the apostles and the prophets of the Old Testament. He must be willing to stand for the truth in the face of opposition even if it means standing alone. He must recognise that missionaries have a prophetic role in proclaiming the truth and confronting error and unbelief.

This calls for the missionary to understand that he comes as a man of God, a representative of Christ. He ought to fear no man but Christ, to whom he is ultimately accountable. The fear of people will distract him from the task at hand, and lead him to compromise.

As the Scripture says, “The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe.” (Proverbs 29:25). A snare is a trap. What this passage is saying is that if you fear people you are essentially trapped. You are more likely to go astray like King Saul who said to Samuel, when confronted about his sin. “And Saul said unto Samuel, I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord, and thy words: because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice.” (1 Samuel 15:24)

When establishing a church through discipleship of new converts

Once people have received the gospel, the “now what” question becomes obvious, and rightly so. Because it goes without saying that the logical outflow of evangelism is discipleship and formation of a church or churches. Norman Shields puts it this way, “The Great Commission did not stop with the winning of converts. The apostles and the missionaries that followed them were to baptize those converts ... Baptism is, of course, a personal response to God’s grace in salvation – the answer or ‘pledge of a good conscience towards God’.” (1 Peter 3:21).

But it is also ordained by Christ as the means by which a missionary (or a church) can acknowledge that those baptised are Christians. Thus, when Cornelius and his friends came to faith and received the Holy Spirit, Peter knew that they were now in Christ and argued with his fellow Christians that they should be baptised. (Shields, 1998:82)

The gathering into the church of those who respond in faith and repentance is the goal of evangelism. New believers need to be equipped in the basic Christian doctrines, be integrated into the life and service of a Christian church (Ephesians 4:12), and partake of the sacraments. This is not an easy task that can be accomplished overnight.

New believers have to also be taught very early on that they themselves are called to be witnesses. (Acts 1:8). Thus they should be encouraged to reach out and share the good news with their friends, neighbours, colleagues, schoolmates, etc. Of course this should be done under careful guidance from the church planter. If we don’t do this early on, we run the risk of planting churches which are handicapped, where the pastor is expected to run the show while believers are just spectators.

Again, believers will not grow spiritually if they are encouraged to learn as much as they can about their faith and share it with others. Evangelism alone is not enough. Our evangelism endeavour ought not to be just a hit and run action. A wellknown saying in Africa is that one ought not to reproduce like a snake, meaning to just let your young fend for themselves.

Unfortunately, this is a common, well intentioned, but sadly unbiblical and disastrous approach to evangelism. The Lord expects us to not only call sinners to repentance but to shepherd those who have come to the saving knowledge of Christ by “teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you”. (Matthew 28:20). This task is what the Lord was saying

to Peter about feeding his lambs, feeding his sheep as well as tending His sheep. (John 21:15-17)

It is also worth noting the fact that the church planter has to endeavour early on to instil among new believers the principle of stewardship. Young converts need to be taught very early on that the Lord is the owner of everything, and we are just stewards. That we give not so that God will somehow bless us. But rather because He has already blessed us in ways beyond comprehension.

The gift of His Only Begotten Son is a priceless gift to which we need to respond with gratitude and giving of ourselves and our resources. When the people grasp this mindset, they cannot help but want to give because they find joy in the greatest gift that they have already received, which is Christ.

Conclusion

I hope so far it is now clear where I'm coming from when I advocate three important things that need to be taken seriously, as we seek to fulfill the Great Commission mandate.

We have seen the absolute importance of prayer from the planning stage and throughout the execution of the mandate.

Secondly, we have also seen that a proper spiritual foundation ought to be laid through biblically sound evangelism. Christ must be faithfully proclaimed to the target audience, tirelessly, diligently and with much patience.

Lastly, follow-up and mobilisation of new converts with the view to disciple them and form a church, ought to follow immediately. The saying is true – “strike while the iron is still hot”. It is important to quickly organise converts into a spiritual formation of some sort while there's still excitement about their newly experienced faith. We shouldn't give the devil a foothold to sow doubt and discouragement in the heart of the new convert.

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**Reflections on some mission work
in Southern Africa**



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6. Who made us¹ the Church: The missionaries or the Word of God?

A brief reflection on the mission history of the Reformed Churches in South Africa to propose a biblical and inclusive way of doing mission.

Some background

History appears to be innocent when you do not go to *ad Fontes* and you rely on secondary sources. There is always a temptation to distort the reality that can negatively bear on many generations to come. However, when you read history from *ad Fontes*, history can be brutal and humbling by God's grace. It shows how people in history distorted the historical events to help us to see that we built our lives on a sandy foundation. Thus, we can humble ourselves and confess our sins and seek God's guidance for the future.

This article seeks to reflect on the mission endeavours of the Reformed Churches in South Africa (RCSA = GKSA) in the black communities of South Africa to investigate its basis and intention in the light of the recent experiences in the black Reformed Churches. Which experiences compel us to look back in history to understand the present to forge a better path to the future? Churches are dwindling in numbers, cannot take care of their ministries, and are not involved in mission work to advance God's kingdom

¹ *The pronoun us refers generally to Reformed Black Churches in South Africa with special reference to the Reformed Churches in South Africa of Synod Soutpansberg.*

in communities.

Very few black churches² can take care of the stipends of their ministers and do mission work on their own, which is not the case with other black churches. Schutte raised, in the 70s, challenges on the nature of these churches, focusing on the Reformed Church Meadowlands in Soweto. Schutte (1973:14) observes the following: “Hier het ons probeer bepaal of die feit dat lidmate aan ‘n Gereformeerde kerk behoort, impliseer dat daar ‘n mate van kongruensie is tussen gepredikte leer en die lewe van lidmate.” Critical to the Church's life, this challenge brings a question to one's mind: what kind of gospel the missionaries preached to these people?

Therefore, this article will go back to the history of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands when they started with the idea of converting other nations to Christianity to investigate their intentions and attitudes towards people they intend to convert. It will also look at the life of the first church at the Cape of Good Hope regarding their relationship with the indigenous people.

Finally, it will look at the origin of Afrikaner nationalism, the Voortrekker movement from the Cape in the South to the North in the 1800s, and their implications on understanding the church's mission to indigenous people. Here are two documents³ written in the Reformed Churches in South Africa (GKSA) dealing with the church's missionary task to the indigenous people. They help us understand the intent and the attitude of the white

² *The reference is to the Reformed Churches in South Africa Synod Soutpansberg. These are the few churches that were mainly in the far North, originally composed by people from Shona, Tsonga and Venda tribes. It is the only synod still existing of the three synods created for black Reformed churches in 1963. The Southlands synod, for Coloured churches, merged with Synod Potchefstroom in 1983 as a result of the Tri-cameral parliament politics that excluded blacks and accommodated Indians and Coloureds. Synod Midland, which was the biggest, comprised of churches in the South, originally composed of people from Ndebele, Sotho, Zulu, Xhosa tribes. They were mainly urban churches found mainly in the black townships around big cities such as Pretoria, Johannesburg, etcetera.*

³ *The two documents are the following: Die Sending van die Gereformeerde Kerk in Suid Afrika: ‘n Historiese oorsig, saamgestel in opdrag van die sinodale deputaatskap vir die sending. 1953. Die Calwyn-Jubileum-Boekefonds, Potchefstroom. And Uit Een Bloed . . . ‘n Rapport aan en ‘n Besluit van Die Algemene Sinode van die Gereformeerde Kerk in Suid Afrika oor Rasseverhoudinge. 1961. Pro Rege–Pers Beperk, Potchefstroom.*

churches concerning the missionary task towards blacks.

As being black Reformed churches within this historical context, this paper will address and propose a biblical and inclusive way of doing mission work as Reformed Churches in South Africa.

The Dutch Reformed Christians' original intent and attitude when starting with the Christian mission to other nations seem positive and welcomed from the indigenous people's viewpoint.

The mission work of the Dutch Reformed Christians to other nations started two centuries later than the Roman Catholic Church mission to other countries. They learned from the mistakes committed by the Roman Catholic missionaries. They had an opportunity to evaluate the Catholic mission based on the Bible and their confessions and envision their mission to other people. They could reasonably deal with the question of who, how, and what of the mission work.

Thus, Hoornbeeck rejected the Roman Catholic mission strategy of mass conversion and baptism but required a thorough catechisation before one's admission as a church member. (Loots et al. (ed.), 1699: 13) He also argued against the Roman Catholic mission to subject the newly instituted churches under the Roman Pope. The newly formed churches are independent and equal to the sending churches. (Loots, 1669:14)

Hoornbeeck and his company, interested in foreign mission as God's will to his church, expressed their shock at Spanish cruelty to the conquered nations in the gospel's name. They wanted to conduct their mission differently. They, therefore, insisted on sending missionaries of impeccable Christian behaviour. They believed that force could not be the means of propagating the Christian faith. It should happen with peaceful persuasion and pious example and with friendly conversation (Loots, 1669:19). This friendly attitude that one sees here can attest to the Dutch Reformed Christians interested in doing Christian mission work worldwide in the 17th century.

In Book 2, Chapter 12, Hoornbeeck dealt with the question of the conversion of the heathens. In Chapter 13, he dealt with the persons to go to the mission field. From these two chapters, it is clear that they intended to conduct mission work congruent to the Bible. They tried to deal with the pride of seeing themselves as better than the heathens receiving the gospel. They expressed the attitude required from the missionary as follows: "From the church, it is required first of all that it does not regard the state

of the miserable heathens as alien to itself, including its task towards them, to cure and save them.” (Loots, 1669:335)

They should see themselves in those to whom they preached the gospel. They were not different from them. They are also the objects of God’s grace. As we read in John 10:16, they are also God’s sheep who will listen to God’s voice and become one flock under one shepherd. Thus, the missionaries to the foreign land should be the best in faith, doctrine, judgment, wisdom, prudence, integrity, and men extraordinary in their holy zeal. (Loots, 1669:339). Their motivation for mission work should be their love for work and not gain or stipend.

Though the church did not disapprove of slavery in total, they spoke against the inhumane treatment of the slaves because they are to embrace the Christian faith that promotes peace and not violence. You cannot feed a dog with one hand while the other hand holds a stick. If it eats your food, you should consider that to be a miracle.

The other interesting element in their attitude on Christian mission is that the church should always trust the head of the church, Jesus Christ, in accomplishing its goal. They discouraged the church’s dependence on the government but trusted that God would provide. (Luke 9:3). It is essential to mention this element because its neglect by the Reformed Churches in South Africa cost the church and the society a fortune. We are leaking wounds with no clue how to heal them.

In their envisioning of the missionary task of the church among heathens, they cautioned vigorously against greed. Greedy people should never consider going to the missionary field. As quoted by Hoornbeeck, Acosta called greed the worst stepmother of propagating and maintaining the faith. (Loots, 1669: 359. Missionaries avoid involvement in people’s politics to deny the heathens their property rights based on their stupidity or irrationality. Missionaries should excel in love for people and zeal for the kingdom of Christ.

Missionaries practice what they preach and use the native means such as music, language, and science to reach the native people. (Loots, 1669:367). These are the weapons and aids needed for the missionary task of the church. The Christian faith is about righteousness. It may not be compromised.

When you listen to this primary source used at the beginning of the missionary endeavours of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands in the 17th

century, one needs to ask, what has gone wrong with the mission of the Reformed Churches in South Africa? How did we end up where we are today as the church? If these were the attitude and intention, something uncalled for has happened that changed the direction of the original path. Thus, we can quickly answer the question: What has gone wrong with the mission of the Reformed Churches in South Africa?

How did the first church of the Cape of Good Hope relate to the indigenous people?

In this section, we will look at the conduct of the first church at the Cape of Good Hope as the manifestation of the intent and attitude of the Dutch Reformed Christians who saw it as God's will to preach the gospel to other nations. The focus is on 1652 and the subsequent years. 1652 is the year that President Zuma said was the beginning of South African problems.

The year 1652 was Jan van Riebeeck's arrival at the Cape of Good Hope (Giliomee, 2003: xii). The Reformed faith arrived at the same time at the southern tip of Africa. The French and German emigrants followed the Dutch emigrants at the Cape Colony.

There were Khoi and San in the same environment. The growth of the refreshment station led to the importation of slaves from East and West Africa. Thus, various people composed the population of the Cape of Good Hope. The history of the first church at Cape of Good Hope attests through its baptismal and marriage records that all people who formed part of the population were church members. Giliomee (2003: 18) says: "Marriage between white men and fair-skinned non-white were common during the first seventy five years." There are Afrikaner families today whose ancestors are non-white.⁴ (Giliomee, 2003: 19)

The church at the Cape of Good Hope had a close relationship with the government. The government paid some church employees and owned the church buildings. (Giliomee, 2003: 5). Consequently, the government expected the church officials to be respectful and obedient towards it. The Dutch Reformed Christians, like Hoornebeeck, warned against this union when they envisioned mission work among the heathens.

⁴ *The former President F.W. de Klerk acceded to the fact that one of his ancestors, Sussana was the daughter of Diana of Bengal, an Indian slave (De Klerk, 1998 :4).*

The marriage of the church and the government did not help. It is not the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck that is the origin of South African problems, but the adulterous marriage between the church and the government authorities. It is this marriage that shaped the history of South Africa.

Thus, we can conclude that the church at the Cape of Good Hope adhered to the intent and attitude articulated by the Dutch Reformed Christians in their envisioning of the mission work among the heathens. As a result, all people from various backgrounds became church members, and the church accepted intermarriages and not frowned upon them as it became a norm later on. Furthermore, the church did not listen to the caution of looking at Christ amid poverty instead of embracing government support.⁵

The Voortrekker movement manifested the nationalistic ambition that undermined the Christian witness envisaged by the Dutch Reformed Christians in the 17th century.

It is safe to judge the history by visiting the *ad Fontes* that people claim their influence on their history. Here, I refer to sources such as the Bible, the church confessions, and other historical documents that people used to define their identity and mission.

The argument advanced here is that the Dutch Reformed Christians in South Africa strayed away from the primary sources in defining their identity and mission. As a result, they contradicted the original intention of the Dutch Reformed Christians in the Netherlands during the 17th century.

Dolf Britz affirms this presupposition in his article, “Ecclesiastical Interpretation of the 6 April 1652”. He detailed how the white South Africans, Afrikaners in particular, celebrated this date in their history. The pertinent

⁵ *One can correctly make a distinction between two communities of Dutch Reformed Christians who emigrated to America and to South Africa with regard to their contribution to their respective societies. Emigrants to America and Canada, though heavily influenced by the Christian discovery policy, that led them to undermine the lives of native and African Americans, resisted the temptation to embrace the financial support from the government. They built schools, colleges and many other institutions on their own, which they currently still own. They fought against the domestication of the church by the American culture (Burchaell, JT, 1998: 783). Emigrants to South Africa, on the other hand, saw their survival mainly in their relationship with their governments. Schools and colleges built on Christian foundation to promote the Reformed faith were later taken by the government. That move silenced the witness of the Reformed faith in South Africa. I consider this to be a tragedy because the Reformed witness is silenced in the development of the society.*

description he made is that celebrations of the church orchestrated the celebrations of 16 April 1652. Psalm 147:12-14 was the basis of the theme of the 1752 centenary celebration of the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck. The preacher saw the foundation of the Israelite community serving as the basis of the identity definition of the Cape society (Britz, 2004:5).

God strengthened the bars of their gates and enclosed them with his surpassing care and love. Thus, Britz (2004: 5) argued that the people in 1752 interpreted the history of the Cape as God's providence. There was nothing wrong with the people to look back and see God's providence. However, that interpretation became problematic when they compared themselves with the natives. They never saw themselves in the lives of the natives as expected from them.

Hoornebeek (Loots, 1669: 352) argues: "The fact that the heathens are no Christians does not deprive them of their natural rights, and only lawfully established that authorities can use force against them." The negative impact of the interpretation became more evident in the following centuries of the history of South Africa.

In 1852, the Dutch Reformed Church in the Cape organised the bicentenary celebration with a theme from Psalm 68:31: "Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God."⁶ (Britz, 2004:7). The psalm is the celebration of Israel's God over the enemies of his people. In this celebration, under the leadership of Abraham Faure (1795-1875), they saw the past 200 years as the answer to Jan van Riebeeck's prayer that "true reformed Christian doctrine may in the future planted and spread among these wild and brutal savages".

Thus, they interpreted his arrival with an undertone of missiological consideration as if he introduced Christianity in the dark continent (Britz, 2004: 8-9). Before the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck, the land suffered from deplorable circumstances. The Christian religion is a solution through its blessings to promote the welfare and civilisation of the indigenous people. The focus, then, shifted to the development and extension of the church (Britz, 2004: 11).

⁶ *In the Hebrew Bible (Stuttgartensia), the words are in v. 32b, and in the English NIV, the words referred to are in v. 31b, which says, "Cush will submit herself to God".*

Here one sees the development of the definition of the church as an ethnic entity towards other people. It is a European white church with a mission of being the light to the savages of the dark continent. This definition has shaped the history of South Africa, resulting in the apartheid policy with its devastating consequences to both black and white people's lives and the church. It prompted immensely the Afrikaner nationalism, which led to the Voortrekker movement to the North.

During this time, we trace the establishment of the Reformed Churches in South Africa (GKSA) in 1859. There is no way to deny that the developing understanding and interpretation did play a role in how the new church came into existence.

Britz continues to shed light on how the people celebrated 1652 in 1952. The people celebrated 1652 as the birth of a people, with a soul of its own, own character, an own way of living and mental attitude, and own destination determined by God (Britz, 2004: 12). This commemoration was after the National Party declared Apartheid as a government policy. The observance became a national event funded by the government.

During the memorial, people displayed Africa as the darkest Africa. God elected the Afrikaner people and the Dutch Reformed Church (and the other two Afrikaans churches) to banish the darkness of the heathendom from their fatherland (Britz, 2004: 13).

This nationalistic thinking coloured the thinking of the Reformed Churches in South Africa doing mission work among the indigenous people. They established churches not to be like their churches, part of their church structures, but ethnic churches that would exist and serve within their ethnic groups. They viewed racial equality as a threat to the church's life, which they fought against strenuously.

Reflection on the mission policies of the GKSA affirms that identity politics played a significant role in the church's mission to African communities

In 1859, GKSA came into existence. These are Afrikaans speaking churches that did mission work in the African communities. There are two other Afrikaans speaking churches (NGK and NHKA) that also did missions in the African communities, but which are not the focus of this article. GKSA (Reformed Churches in South Africa) in synod Potchefstroom (Afrikaans speaking churches) started with two local congregations: in Rustenburg and Pretoria. The one in Pretoria was small and had

a humble beginning (SGKSA, 1953: 9) but played a crucial role in raising the need for mission work in the newly established churches' lives.

However, the churches did not embrace the awareness with enthusiasm. The reason was as follows: “Reeds in 1871 spreek die Kerkraad oor sending onder die heidene, maar is met vrees vervul oor die moontlikheid dat dit noodwendig sou moes lei tot gelykstelling, soos dit in die Kaapkolonie deur die Voortrekkers tot hulle leedwese ervaar was. Nieteenstaande die Sinode te Potchefstroom (1869) ‘n suiwere klank oor die rassevraagstuk laat hoor het, was daar nog geen voldoende gerusstelling oor die maatskaplike gevolge van kerklike sending nie en het die saak nog vir jare bly rus.” (SGKSA, 1953: 9)

The context in which the church lived during that time influenced the reason given above. Churches questioned the result of the mission work among the Africans on the experience of Afrikaners in the Cape Colony. The experience led them to move from the Cape to the interior in 1836. The Afrikaners' concern was the impact on their lives if the natives are civilised by the mission work.⁷

On the other hand, mission work among Africans by Afrikaners was the work of enormous sacrifice as it should be. Rev. P. Postma did excellent work in mobilising his church council in Pretoria around mission work among Africans. His insistence on the mission work in the church's life led the church council in Pretoria to give a mandate to Mr. P. Bos in 1904 to start with mission work among Africans.

In 16 March 1910, the classis examined Bos according to article 8 of the Dordt Church Order.⁸ He was successful in his examination and then

⁷ *Race relations and equality played a significant role in the understanding of the missionary endeavours of the GKSA towards the Africans. The experience seemed to have influenced their 1961 decision on the establishment of parallel ecclesiastical structures of the Africans. The same mentality of fear of equality shaped Afrikaners' understanding of church unity after the democratisation of South Africa in 1994. They proposed paternalistic structures that guaranteed them the role to determine the destiny of the Reformed Churches in South Africa. The rejection of the proposed structures by Synod Soutpansberg, on the basis that new ecclesiastical structure should listen to the Word of God and the new South African reality, led the Afrikaans speaking churches (GKSA) to cut ties with synod Soutpansberg. The result of the abandonment of the hard-won relationship is to run away from the question of race relations and equality in the church and in the society.*

⁸ *The article says: “No one who has not studied shall be admitted to the office of the Word, unless that person displays unmistakable evidence of extraordinary gifts, piety, humility and*

ordained as a missionary and assigned the Soutpansberg area⁹ (SGKSA, 1953: 10). This beginning was indeed a humbling one. It was not the university graduate who did the work but an elder who felt God's calling.¹⁰ Rev. Bos worked when there was minimal awareness of mission work in the GKSA, and as a result he worked with meagre resources (SGKSA, 1953: 11). There were times that he had to use his own finances to support his work as a missionary.

There are lessons from this history that black churches need to learn in identifying their reason for existence in a democratic society. The future belongs to God, and the church has to trust him, not on its scenario planning. Scenario planning should bow to the will of God. The church should never fail to follow God's calling, no matter how difficult it is. He will take care of it.

This article cannot finalise the discussion on the origin of synod Soutpansberg churches without engaging the 1961 document titled *Uit Een Bloed*. This document explains the grounds for establishing parallel ecclesiastical structures in the Reformed Churches in South Africa.¹¹

Furthermore, the document described biblical principles of love and justice as the basis of personal, social and ecclesiastical relationships. Still, the synod rejected that they can mean the mixing of people, societies and the church. Instead, people and societies can be neighbours who maintain their

modesty, sound intellect and discretion, and eloquence. If someone presents himself for this office, the classis, with the approval of the general synod, shall examine him, and if the outcome of such examination is favourable, he has to present a number of private probatory sermons after which the classis shall deal with the matter according to its judgment and in an edificatory manner."

⁹ *Maybe this is where the name of our synod came from to honour the work of Rev. P. Bos as a pioneer of the mission work in the Soutpansberg area.*

¹⁰ *In his entrance sermon as the minister of the Word, he preached from John 3:30: He must become greater; I must become less. From hindsight, this was an indictment to the GKSA which was concerned about the future as people rather than the kingdom of God. The current GKSA has to learn a lesson from this history if indeed they want to preserve their communities in the new South Africa.*

¹¹ *The argument in the document was not to establish separate churches, but one family of churches with their own separate ecclesiastical structures which can express their unity with an overarching synod structure that brings the families together. This was a smarter project than the Dutch Reformed Church project which advocated the establishment of separate churches of different ethnic groups.*

identities. The synod, therefore, decided: “Hieruit volg dat ras- en volksvermenging as beginsel en reël op kerklike gebied, verwerp moet word. Dit is nie vir die kerk tot voordeel nie. Dit het die Here behaag dat op die Pinksterdag elkeen in sy eie taal oor die groot daad van God hoor spreek het. (Hand. 2:11)” (UEB, 1961: 75).

Though the Reformed Churches in South Africa did not argue for separate churches but argues for one church with parallel ecclesiastical structures for each family, the basis for both projects is the same. Smith, as quoted by Saayman (2007: 52), observed the reasoning/feeling of the white churches in the 19th century before the establishment of any separate churches as follows: “As in society the good relations are preserved as a result of the separation of whites and non-whites, it seems that for the same reason and therefore in the interest of good relations also in the church, it became necessary that separate gatherings be held.”

The intention became more evident in 1951 when the Natal Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church established the Reformed Church in Africa. The synod says, “because according to our policy of apartheid we ought to minister separately to these people.” (Saayman, 2007: 52). Van der Watt (2010: 166) sees the influence of the 19th century German missiology, which understood Matthew 28: 16-21 as going to the nations. Thus, each people group should have its separate indigenous churches.

The other texts used in the “Apartheid” Bible were Genesis 1:25, Deuteronomy 32:8 and Acts 17:26; the church viewed them as natural laws that justified establishing separate churches (Van der Watt, 2010: 166). The distinction made between mother and daughter churches and the reason was that the mother churches guided and supported the daughter churches.

The difference made between mother and daughter churches explains the paternalistic relationship between white and black churches, which caused significant damage to the identity of black churches. The Reformed Churches, through their faith, wanted to save Africans from their savage lifestyles. (Tshaka, 2012:360)

Thus, the Reformed churches denied the Reformed faith an opportunity to learn and influence African worldviews, which explains the deranged character displayed by members of the black Reformed churches regarding the ownership of the Reformed faith.

This history helps black churches to understand that in their establishment, non-theological factors of a social and political nature played a more

significant role than theological factors. (Saayman, 2007: 49). Boesak (2010: 290) says: “The justification of our oppression was not generally Christian; it was Christians from the Reformed tradition who invoked the Bible and Christian faith for this justification.”

Thus, many indigenous people equated the Reformed faith to political oppression and economic exploitation, unbridled capitalism and social discrimination. For black people to accept this faith, the expectation was for them to be sinful, silent in the face of human suffering and willingly accept the status quo of oppression (Boesak, 2010: 290). The silence characterised many of the black Reformed Churches in South Africa in their history. Churches, therefore, owe the young generation a response to the question they are asking: Can we be Reformed and black?¹²

However, in this short history, black churches see God’s hand preparing them to become authentic Reformed churches. Afrikaners brought the gospel, which led black people to accept the gospel to be churches before God’s face. Afrikaners offered some sacrifices, such as their investment in theological training of black pastors and evangelists, building schools and clinics. There is a silent voice in this history that black churches need to hear today: *The black man is also responsible before God called you.*

Is there hope for future mission endeavours of the Reformed Churches in South Africa to the world?

The question is directed explicitly to Afrikaans speaking churches. The reason for taking this question to these churches is their quest for identity in the new South Africa. Their conduct in the history of this country raises eyebrows as to how they should serve God’s kingdom. The majority of those who suffered under Apartheid find it challenging to associate themselves with the Reformed faith of the Afrikaans speaking churches.

It is this faith that refused to raise a voice when condemned to landlessness and lesser humanity. It refused to articulate their experience but affirmed the Afrikaner experience as the context to understand the Reformed faith. It demanded all who embraced it to think and act in line with the knowledge of the giver, who happened to be Afrikaners. That understanding of the Reformed faith has led to another monster that had killed the black

¹² *Response to this question will need a different space to this one. However, it is an important question that black churches need to address if they are to become relevant and effective as God’s instruments for transformation in their communities.*

Reformed churches, i.e. paternalism.

Black churches are not mature enough to support their ministry. Thus, they are to depend on white churches for material support. The paternalism of this kind destroyed the life of the black churches and had a significant impact on the country's economy. The privileged few white people carry the country's economic burden because of the structural racism with the full blessing of the church.

Suppose the Reformed Churches in South Africa (Afrikaans speaking churches) contribute positively by being the church of God to the well-being of this country and the continent. In that case, they are to stop running away from this reality.

I know this analysis does not go well with many white leaders within the church. Some of us who raised these issues have been labelled as people who hate the Afrikaans institutions, unforgiving and always looking back into history. I need to assure them of our love for the church and the Reformed Church in particular. However, we live with the conviction that we need not obliterate the past to move into the future but draw valuable lessons for the future. It is in that spirit that I emphasise this matter.

The other tendency that the Afrikaans speaking churches need to deal with is their future with political power. This temptation denied the church her rightful position globally and led the church to compete with social movements to change society.¹³ This tendency displayed itself clearly during unity discussions between white and black synods after 1994 and the talks on amalgamating theological seminaries of the churches. Models advanced by the Afrikaans speaking churches ensured that the *swart gevaar*¹⁴ does not swallow them.

The black churches (Synod Soutpansberg) rejected the proposed model,¹⁵

¹³ *Violence erupted at Capitol Hill on 6 January 2021 led by some Christians is the consequence of embracing this temptation of political power by the church. Colonial thinking, embraced by the church in the 19th century is the foundation of this political power temptation, which led the Afrikaans speaking churches to embrace Apartheid as a social system in South Africa.*

¹⁴ *“Swart gevaar” is a term used in South African politics to refer to the danger imposed by the black majority by the majority on the white minority. So white people are to be always vigilant to avoid this danger.*

¹⁵ *The model proposed for the restructuring of our major assemblies ensured that the white structures are not changed but ensured the disbandment of the structures of the black churches.*

which led to the collapse of the unity talks in 2009. Hunter (2010: 274) calls this thinking influenced by Constantinian tendencies toward conquest and domination. This attitude prompted Synod Potchefstroom in 2012 to decide to cut ties with Synod Soutpansberg, and they blamed Synod Soutpansberg for that decision.¹⁶

In considering their future contribution in mission work, the white Reformed Churches are to reflect on these matters seriously and invite honest criticism from their fellow black churches. They do not have the luxury to move forward as if nothing happened. They need to confess their participation in Apartheid and ask their fellow black brothers and sisters to forgive the atrocities of Apartheid on their communities.

Covenant with God demands sincere and hearty obedience to his Word (Matthew 5:20).¹⁷ They should come to see the necessity of forgiveness and reconciliation with their fellow Christians in the black communities, which I think they still downplay. Humility is the only way to greatness.

On this foundation, one can argue for the assurance of their contribution to mission work in the future. There are many opportunities in this country and Africa to spread the Reformed faith. However, where does one base that assurance? The biblical narratives give us that assurance, and we need to declare it on top of our voices that wherever God calls his people, He is with them and He can accomplish his purposes with them.

Stephen's defence in Acts 7 reminds us of this truth. The temple is not where God resides, and God lives with his people wherever they go. God revealed himself as the God who created heaven and earth. They belong to Him. Thus, Luke reminds the church that the geographical space cannot confine God. No one can localise Him. Stott (1990: 132), in his commentary of Acts 7:2-8, says: "We cannot miss Stephen's emphasis on the divine initiative. It was God who appeared, spoke, sent, promised, punished and rescued. From Ur to Haran, from Haran to Canaan, from Canaan to Egypt, from Egypt back to Canaan again, God was directing each stage of his people's pilgrimage."

¹⁶ *The decision states that there is no functional and structural unity between Synod Potchefstroom and Synod Soutpansberg.*

¹⁷ *It says: "For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven."*

The place and the circumstances cannot inhibit God to work with his people. God has a commitment to his people, not to the area. This understanding served as a huge comfort to the early church sent to the whole world. The same account encouraged the early Dutch Reformed Christians like Hoornebeeck to think of a compassionate Christian mission to the world. Hunter (2010: 277), commenting on Jeremiah 29:4-7, says: “It was toward this end that Jeremiah counselled his community not to be nostalgic for the past, for the past could not be recovered . . . exile was the place where God was at work. God’s purposes with Israel . . . were served by the Babylonian invasion.”

Failure to understand God in this way limits our imagination of what God can do with us in all life circumstances. People can look at themselves and think they are so small in number. They do not have resources and conclude that they are not worthy of doing mission work. The church should find her assurance of her reason to exist on who God is.

Thus, there is no way to argue that the Afrikaans speaking churches forfeited their chances to do mission work in South Africa due to their history. There are many opportunities for evangelisation in their communities. They do not need to leave their suburbs to do mission work. God brought the world to them and all of us through migration. It is a shame to see many Reformed Church buildings closing down and bought by Moslems in our towns, whereas there are many black Reformed Christians in those towns struggling to find a facility for their worship services.

The notion of multicultural English churches embraced by many Afrikaans churches needs a close investigation to establish why such churches cannot speak the languages of the targeted people. Is it another form of paternalism? Is it another form of preserving political power that will ensure a future? Is it the result of guilt consciousness and the need is to clean our conscience?

All Reformed churches in South Africa are to hold hands together, think together and imagine tomorrow together under the guidance of the Bible and our confessions. If that happens in the context of frankness, honesty and humility, people will realise that God made them his church, and He can work with and through them to build his church and kingdom in this world despite all the circumstances they are facing in this world.

Perhaps it is here at the conclusion to remind my fellow Afrikaner Reformed brothers and sisters that we do not become a church solely on

the efforts of missionaries, but we are born by his Word. We should, therefore, not be afraid to look into the future with hope because He can fulfill what He promised.

Conclusion

The trouble for this country did not start in 1652 when Jan Van Riebeeck landed at our shores, but rather when the people of the Reformed faith embraced human power to achieve self-preservation in the strange land. They came up with their scenarios planning to look into the future. They were not careful not to forget that their future is in their obedience to God, who saved and protected them against the torrents in the sea. Thus, they opted for the inhumane policies of Apartheid that soiled their Christian witness in the country. For their future as God's people, they are to look back with remorse of hearts and commitment to look into the future in obedience to God, as explained in our confessions.

From this history, the black Reformed churches should learn that the future is not in the political and economic dominance of other people, but in obedience to God in how we think of the future of the church and the country. We are to participate in building institutions in society that will promote the common good in the community. We must realise that missionaries who brought the gospel did not make us but that we were made by God Himself. We are to think beyond our experiences.

God has to use us as instruments of peace and reconciliation in society despite disparaging words from within and without. Mission and church planting, in all our cities, should become the heartbeat of our churches. If we fail in this, we will become a disappointment to those who eagerly and faithfully brought the gospel to our communities and the future generation. Nothing can deter us. God is with us through his Son Jesus Christ and his Holy Spirit.

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7. The relevance of Reformed perspectives on demonology in Africa

Witchcraft still causes major social problems in South Africa and Africa. In addition, there are Reformed theologians in South Africa who express opinions and even Reformed denominations that have made synodical decisions that the devil does not exist as a person and that the existence of demons is a myth.

This article points out that a Reformed hermeneutical study and interpretation of relevant biblical perspectives may enrich the lives of Christians and bring some balance between current extremes in the understanding and application of biblical data on demonology.

An important topic

There is much vagueness and, at times, error in the Protestant ministries when Satan and the demons are mentioned. It seems that nothing of any importance has been written on the subject from a Reformed standpoint since John L. Nevius, a Presbyterian missionary in China, wrote about his demon possession and allied themes in 1894.

Although the main task and desire of the Christian is to grow in amazement and wonder at the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus as Lord (Philippians 3:8). It is part of Paul's instruction that Christians must put on the whole armour of God so that they may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil (Ephesians 6:11 – ESV).

Thus, the study of Satan and demons is a major facet of God's revelation that provides knowledge, insight and discernment about Satan's character, purposes and spiritual wickedness. That study may enable Christians to stand their ground in the evil day and, having done all, to stand firm (v. 13).

In his sincere pastoral concern for young Christians, Paul wrote that we should not be outwitted by Satan because of ignorance of his strategies (2 Corinthians 2:11). Paul also warns that Satan disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14, 15).

The historical developments, the realities of struggles with witchcraft in Africa and the ignorance of young people who grew up in Reformed churches, raises the question: What answers may Reformed perspectives, based on traditional Reformed hermeneutics, offer for a balanced pastoral approach in dealing with demonology?

Throughout history, overtly evil socio-political systems such as the idolatry of the Roman Caesars, the anti-Semitism of Hitler's Nazism, the evil of human slavery, the atheism of the communists, the dehumanisation of Apartheid, the wickedness of the ethnic cleansing in parts of Africa, racism and terrorism of all forms, and the greed of capitalism have all demonstrated the extent to which the evil powers can influence world systems and seek to thwart the blessings of humanity.

In covert forms, evil powers continue to influence humanity in the addiction of people in the drugs culture, in postmodern hedonism, the explosion of pornography, the disdain for the sanctity of human life, and the tyranny of secularism. All this denies people their true liberty to serve God. In personal pastoral counselling experience, I observed that young people who got involved with satanic covens became hooked on drugs, pornography and eventually violent bizarre and troubled behaviour.

In postmodern circles, the view is propagated that one should seek to communicate with angels in light of a belief that every human being has a guardian angel. Such a guiding spirit is regarded as more approachable than God and therefore you should pray to your guardian angel. They also believe in healing angels and comforting angels.

The New Age Movement also encourages people to discover their psychic abilities. Interest in spiritism, witchcraft and clairvoyance (predicting the future) has drastically grown among all layers of society. Celebrities, receiving entertainment awards, publicly credit their "spirit guides" for their success. The contemporary question for many today is not the medieval

query about how many angels can dance on the head of a pin, but how one may contact, converse with and “hug” one’s guardian angel.

Africa

As far as African people are concerned, they treat demonology with great respect. Their worldview has given much space to these phenomena. Therefore, when the West meets the non-West, there has previously been difficulty in reconciling differences. Demon activity is very real for African people as being pointed out by several scholars from South Africa and Africa.

In South Africa, the HIV pandemic has led to a new explosion of witchcraft, steeped in occult rituals and practices, and witchcraft medications. People are so desperate to find healing from HIV and Aids that witchdoctors and wizards have grabbed the market, advertising dotions and rituals for healing. Research projects have revealed that muti shops around Soweto have become a major economic endeavour.

I have personally been at the sickbeds and deathbeds of terminally ill Aids patients who were mixing sangoma muti (witchdoctor or traditional healer medications) with antiretroviral (ARV) medication that cost them around R2 000 – more than the ARV medication – with the reasoning that it will call on ancestral spirits to rescue them from the ‘bad luck’ of demonic spirits.

In significant parts of African Christian circles there is no difficulty at all in accepting the existence and reality of the influence of evil spirits. Confusion in this regard in Nigeria and the Congo is so bad that Pentecostal pastors demand large amounts of money to exorcise evil spirits from vulnerable children to assist their parents or caregivers to be liberated from all sorts of illnesses which are caused – according to their beliefs – by children who are possessed by a demon.

Any first-time visitor to an African initiated church service in any of the cities of West, Central and Southern Africa will be most impressed by the frequent reference to the devil and his demons. I observed prayers for exorcising demons binding Satan and delivering the oppressed in several church services. Not only are the worshippers conscious of the battle against evil spirits, but many church members and preachers specialise as ‘prayer warriors’ who wage spiritual warfare against evil spirits.

A number of African scholars have argued that the situational context of

Africa demands a contextualisation that regards specific teachings as special cases for Africans. Salvation must address the concepts of evil and sin in the African context. It makes no sense to the African to deny the presence of evil powers or to have a saviour who could not provide a complete and decisive victory over such powers.

The African reality demands a saviour who has the power not only to deliver the believer from evil powers but also to transform the lives of the bewitched and the dehumanised, enabling them to live actively in the community.

The concept of generational curses is an endemic worldview in parts of Africa. In Christian circles, it is based on an invalid understanding of Old Testament phrases such as “visiting the iniquity of the fathers unto the third and fourth generations of those who hate God”. (Exodus 20:5; 34:7; Numbers 14:18; Deuteronomy 5:9). A failure to emphasise God’s sovereign grace and the complete victory of Christ over such generational spirit, only fosters a mentality that paralyzes believers. The real battle for both world evangelisation and social justice has become a spiritual battle.

This fits well with traditional African worldview and is embraced in parts of Africa. Some interpreters on the continent of Africa have speculated that these demonic powers have specific names that are required to be known if spiritual warfare is to be successful. In yet a further interpretation, the concepts of ancestral spirits are merged with territorial spirits to produce a doctrine that requires nations to exorcise the demons of economic mismanagement and corruption before the African continent may begin to prosper.

A biblical perspective

All these extremes create the necessity for a comprehensive understanding of a biblical and valid hermeneutical based perspective on demonology.

In considering the publications about Satan, demons and angels, it is apparent that schools of thought within theological approaches and church practices regarding demonology, diverge on opinions about the authority of Scripture and valid hermeneutics.

It seems that those who deny the ontological existence of Satan and demons, and those who become obsessed with the devil and demons have one thing in common. They do not take the authority of Scriptures seriously and, as a result, they apply a hermeneutical approach in their

interpretation of passages and its applications on phenomena that, in fact, denies the unity of Scripture and the basic Reformational rule that Bible passages should be understood within their context, that the goal or scopus of a text should determine the meaning of a passage, and doctrine should be formulated through comparing various passages that deal with the same truths (*Sacra Scriptura sui ipsius interpres* – sacred Scripture is its own interpreter).

This inevitably leads to the epistemological question of how one comes to the truth. Crucial questions that should be asked are the following:

1. Is the use of anecdotes sufficient to establish a doctrine and justify new practices? For example, interviews with demons resident in demonised persons; information about demons gathered from practitioners of occult and animistic folk religions; frequently told and retold anecdotes and missionary testimonies; pragmatism; somebody's own "spiritual" discernment (they call it "inner Geiger counters"); or personal revelations from God (special "words of knowledge").
2. Should we accept information from the spirit world and claim to receive accurate information from demons?
3. What is the relation between the authority of Scripture and guidance of the Holy Spirit?

Reformed Christians have always primarily put their faith in the Lord who has revealed himself in his Word. It is his Word that has the authority in our lives. This means that our personal experience is never the authority upon which we base our beliefs on Satan and demons.

The words of the Holy Spirit in Scriptures teach, rebuke, correct and train Christians. Personal experiences or the experiences of anyone else, no matter how wise or learned they may appear, may never become our primary sources of faith.

Biblical teaching on Satan and demons

Satan is not just an evil, impersonal influence, but a very real person – a fallen angel with supernatural powers. Therefore, all that is true of angels in general is true of Satan and his fallen angels (demons). Like all angels, Satan is a creature, created by Christ, the Creator of all things as it is written in Colossians 1:15, 16:

“He [Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and

invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through him and for him.” (cf also John 1:1; Psalm 148:1–5).

Hebrews 1:14 describes angels as spirits. Demons are called unclean spirits (Matthews 8:16; 12:45; Luke 7:21; 8:2; 11:26; Acts 19:12; Revelation 16:14). The fact that we are told that we do not wrestle with flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in heavenly places (Ephesians 6:12), also suggests that Satan and his demons are spirit beings. Finally, the fact that Paul describes them as invisible, also shows that they are spirit beings. (Colossians 1:16)

Although extremely powerful, Satan is not omnipotent, omniscient or omnipresent. He simply cannot be everywhere at once. However, as the chief of his forces of demons or as the “prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:2), he is chief of a vast host of demons who are so numerous as to make Satan’s power and presence seem to be practically ubiquitous or everywhere at once (cf Mark 5:9).

Because of this limitation, many references to Satan or the devil include his whole kingdom. The person of Satan does not personally tempt each of us, for he simply cannot do that. He is only able to do so through his influence in world systems and hosts of demons.

Summary of gospel demonology

Considering all the data in the New Testament demonology, it may briefly be summed up as follows:

1. Demons are under a head, Satan; they form a kingdom.
2. They are incorporeal and generally, although not necessarily invisible.
3. They inhabit certain places which they prefer to others.
4. They tend to live in groups.
5. They have names and are sometimes identified with their victims and at other times differentiated from them.
6. They are the cause of mental and physical disease to anyone.
7. They can pass in and out of human beings and even animals.
8. More than one can take possession of a human being at the same time.
9. Christ made it one of his chief aims to overthrow this kingdom and set up his own in its place.
10. Christ cast out demons through his own name or by his word.

11. Christ could delegate this power, regarded as something new.
12. Christ never treats the possessed as wilful sinners which is in strong contrast to his words to the scribes and Pharisees.
13. Only on the rarest occasions does Christ come into direct contact with the possessed.
14. Christ's divine and human natures are recognised by demons.
15. At Christ's second coming, the members of Satan's kingdom are to be condemned to eternal fire.

Non-believers who are worshipping false gods are in fact worshipping demons. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:20: "... what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God".

When God commissioned Paul, he sent him to turn the gentiles, the unsaved, 'from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God' (Acts 26:18).

Not only does Satan hold the unsaved under his reign, but he also blinds the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see the light of the gospel. (2 Corinthians 4:4)

Coming under demonic control

By worshipping demons, participating in practices of divination, telling fortune or interpreting omens, being a sorcerer, a charmer, a medium, a necromancer or one who inquires information from the dead, people open themselves up to demonic control. Such things are an abomination to the Lord so that eventually their thoughts, their deeds and their identity more and more become dominated by an alternate personality – by another being.

Demonised people are not just hallucinating when they say that they are hearing voices. They are really hearing voices. They are not just manifesting another personality that they invented from trauma to cope with suffering.

This is what some people do, but maybe they have rather opened themselves up through lies, temptations, accusations, spiritism, demonism, occultism and addiction to the point where they actually have demons – unclean spirits at work in them and through them to destroy them.

Medication can help for some who have a physical condition, but those who are demonised, need Jesus. They also need repentance and truth, and the indwelling presence and power of God the Holy Spirit so that they will be controlled by the power of God and not the power of the enemy.

Demons do not own or possess any Christians. A Christian is God's sole

possession. However, Christians can open themselves up to demonic influences. Even though they belong to God, they can participate with Satan as Peter does on one occasion where Jesus had to say to him: “Get behind me, Satan.” (Matthews 16:23; Mark 8:33)

Satan did not fill and control Peter, but Peter was listening to him, speaking for him, working for him. So Jesus rebuked Satan and ultimately Peter’s work with him. An unbeliever can end up like the demonised man who was totally controlled. Believers can end up like Peter, participating in the enemy’s work even though they belong to Jesus.

Satan uses some of the following devices to attack people:

Pride: The Bible often makes it clear that pride is the reason for Satan’s fall, and also the source of all that is demonic. That is why James specifically refers to pride when he instructs Christians how to resist the devil. “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.” (James 4:6–7)

Hanging on to grudges: In Ephesians 4:27 Paul warns believers against giving Satan a foothold. Bitterness, pride and the lack of self-control during anger give the devil a half open door through which he attacks. A desire for retaliation is instigated by Satan.

Defence: the full armour of God

The most important fact about Satan that Scripture gives us is that he is a defeated foe. Colossians 2:15 tells us that Jesus Christ disarmed the powers and authorities, and “made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the Cross”. Satan has lost the big war. He is now engaged in guerrilla warfare against us and we can defeat him in this day-to-day struggle. Paul’s instruction to put on the full armour of God is a command.

Christians clearly have the identity (being in Christ), the authority (being seated with Christ) and the mandate to resist Satan and his demons. They do so not based on their own goodness, but because of Christ’s finished work on the cross. Because the One who is in us is greater than the one who is in the world (1 John 4:4), Christians can successfully stand against demonic schemes.

Their weapons in this ongoing struggle include their authority as seated with Christ at the right hand of God, far above every power (Ephesians 1:15–2:6), the name of Jesus (Philippians 2:10), their spiritual armour (Ephesians 6:18), prayer (a must in all cases – Mark 9:29), simple resistance

(James 4:7), forgiveness (Ephesians 4:26–32), and exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23; Ephesians 4:22–29; 6:10–18).

It is necessary to ‘demystify’ demonic activities. People need to be assured of God’s sovereign control over all satanic hordes, including witchcraft. They must be taught to know what the Bible says about the devil and his strategies that thrives on Christians’ ignorance of their position in Christ.

Pastors must take up their roles as spiritual shepherds of the church so that unwarranted prophetic excesses can at least be minimised. To help pastors and Christian counsellors to practice proper discernment when they counsel people suffering from demonic possession or warning signs of occultism and witchcraft, they should opt for teamwork including psychological and psychiatric experts as well as prayer support of spiritually mature Christians.

Paul notes that, through the church, “the manifold wisdom of God” will be made known to the principalities and powers. As the church, as the bride of Christ, extends the gospel, the very presence of the church is a declaration of the manifold wisdom of God to these evil powers.

Conclusion

The testimony of the Scriptures about Satan and demons is clear and cohesive. They are angelic entities who oppose God’s sovereign control. They try their unholy rebellion by influencing people to live in a way contrary to God’s expressed intentions. Simultaneously, they remain under his sovereignty and can be used by Him to affect the divine plan.

Christians must submit themselves to God and resist the attacks of Satan and his hosts. To do so, they must be aware of the basic truths presented in Scripture concerning not just the ontology of Satan and demons, but also their methods used to influence people’s lives. Once aware, Christians are to take their stand in Christ and oppose the working of demons, whether personally, corporately or in the structures and systems of society.

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Demon Possession - by Thomas Sappington

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/demon-possession/>



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8. Cult or Culture

A false problem statement is, as we all know, a problem that stems from false perception. The origin is false but the problem becomes a reality. In the mission field, one often struggles with such problem statements. After years of ministering, it can so easily flare up again depending on the right questions at the right time.

A few examples

During a visit from a certain anthropologist, I held a Bible study one evening. Afterward she asked the Naro speaking San people from our village a few questions which caught them off guard. "You have your own religion", she said. "Why do you still need the religion of the European people? You have served the Lord, prayed, and danced to Him for centuries – or to whom else have you done this? Was it the devil?"

Later another anthropologist visited us at D'Kar with a group of San people from South Africa who could no longer speak their own language. They only spoke Afrikaans. With them was their leader, whom everyone called Uncle Jan, with a bunch of bones and other things hanging around his neck. The purpose of their visit was to catch up on their "spiritual backlog" from our "Bushmen".

Trance dances

This specifically refers to the trance dances during which the dancers go into a trance – often so bad that they literally go crazy, want to climb trees, fall into the fire and make the most horrible unearthly sounds. Some of them just head off in a direction and then other people have to run after them to stop them from crashing into trees or fences. During this trance, the hands are laid on the sick and they are apparently healed. I have not yet seen the evidence of that, but this is what they claim.

One evening such a trance dance was arranged for the visitors so that they could see firsthand how it should be done. Spontaneously, the dance began with the women's whining songs and the men dancing around the fire.

Uncle Jan (the leader and a man of mixed race) sat next to me – he knew his Bible surprisingly well but unfortunately mixed it in a syncretistic way with all kinds of dreams, omens, and cultural practices.

Later, as the music progressed, the men began to go into a trance. One of them then started to make howling sounds and jerks. I drew Uncle Jan's attention to this. He answered me: "He is now going into the depths of the Holy Spirit." I immediately responded and said: "I do not believe this is of the Holy Spirit." He was aggravated by my reaction and went to bed shortly afterwards.

The next day I was requested to apologise to him for my statement. The anthropologist who was with them was furious with me and lit one cigarette after another and constantly verbally attacked me, ". . . how dare you . . . this and that . . ." The lady in charge of our dance group, a Dutch-speaking Roman Catholic lady, was all too eager to blame me, because not seeing the trance dances as divine, was for her a sacred sin.

My response was: "I did not mean or try to hurt anyone, nor to insult anyone. On the contrary, I only spoke to the leader and did not use my position to offend anyone. But I cannot be silent about my beliefs. He had the right to say what he believes, so have I. I certainly cannot live with my conscience and pretend to believe what I do not. After all, I would then be hypocritical."

One of the trance dancers started to attend church services regularly and was determined to make a confession of faith, which he did. This resulted in him losing interest in trance dancing altogether. He was one of dancers of the Kuru Development Trust who occasionally danced for tourists. When he mentioned to our cultural centre that he no longer wants to dance and that he now comes to church regularly, the Roman Catholic lady was furious over this. She blamed me for influencing him. Unfortunately, he eventually surrendered to their influence.

Irreconcilable

Recently, an Indian anthropologist wanted to know more from me about our church's history. Very carefully she formulated her question, but I soon realised where she was heading. She asked where we as a church stand to

the San people's culture? I answered that as far as I was concerned there is a distinction between culture and cult.

Culture is a man-made arrangement in which different peoples maintain and live in different ways, which in itself is not wrong, but a cult is a way of worship that is contrary to what Scripture teaches us. Along with that, there are a large majority of superstitions that are not at all reconcilable with Scripture.

A few examples

Recently I buried a child; the mother and a few other women cried uncontrollably. According to them, a certain person they called by name, had bewitched and killed the child. My question to the Indian anthropologist was: "If witchcraft is part of their culture and the faith around it, should we as a church support such things for the sake of culture?"

If a certain person has malaria or tuberculosis, but the culture claims he is bewitched and needs to be danced for to break the forces, should we preserve this heritage in the name of culture? Do you have to watch someone fade away and die in front of your eyes for the sake of culture, to preserve the so-called beautiful heritage?

Should we motivate the people to fear all the evils that will come upon them if they do not preserve certain rituals because the culture is full of such rituals and fears?

These are just a few of the many problems we face when it comes to culture.

Then some questions come genuinely and sincerely from the San people themselves.

Their ancestors danced for rain and then the Lord gave them rain.

If someone was sick, they danced for the sick and asked the Lord to heal him – or was it the devil that healed him?

These sound like weighty questions that evoke great sympathy until one shines the light of the Bible on it.

This is a question that many people in Africa ask: "Before we came into contact with Christianity, we were religious. When we prayed, we did not pray to the devil, but God. If we asked Him something, he gave it to us. Surely it was not the devil who gave it to us?" Therefore, for many African religions, it does not feel wrong to incorporate some syncretistic mixture

into their Christian faith.

A Zulu once said to me: “I pray to my ancestors who then convey the message to Christ and Christ to God.”

What the Bible says

In Acts 14, Paul and his company had to flee. They had to leave Iconium in a hurry because a movement arose among the gentiles and also among the Jews with their rulers to harm and stone Paul. When they realised this, they fled to Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe.

In Lystra there sat a man who was lame, crippled from birth, he never walked. While Paul was speaking, he kept listening. Paul looked at him and saw that this man had faith to be healed. With a loud voice, Paul said to him, “Stand upright on your feet.’ And he sprang up and began walking.”

The crowd was amazed and said to one another in Lycaonia: “The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!” And Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. Then the priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside their city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, intending to sacrifice with the crowds.

But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard this, they tore their clothes and ran into the crowd, crying out and saying: “Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did well by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.’ Even with these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them.” (Acts 14:11b-18)

In this section, we notice some important things. In the first place, Paul did not try to compromise between Christ and their religions, and yet Paul was not unsympathetic to them. “We also are men, of like nature with you,” he says.

Secondly, he does not condemn them, but the senseless gods, and calls on them to repent without compromising between their so-called gods and the God of the Bible.

In the third place, he introduces Him (God) to them: “a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them”.

Fourthly, he wants to free them from misunderstanding and includes all nations under one umbrella when he says, "In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways." (v. 16)

"Own ways" then mean by the nature of the matter the opposite of "God's ways". Therefore, they must repent. To someone who could say, "Yes, Paul, I hear what you are saying, but in the past, we have prayed our way to God or the gods or consulted our ancestors in our way and we were answered", his clear and unequivocal answer is: "Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness." (v. 17)

Though God allowed all the nations to walk in their ways, to set their ways, God was not in the least absent as far as His general mercy was concerned. If the San people danced around the fire in the Kalahari in their ignorance and distress and the Eskimos in Antarctica and the Indians in South America, God was not absent in His general grace at all.

The distorted image of God that every nation has had or has, does not at all make God apathetic to their personal need of every day, but when the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is preached, it comes with the drastic call: "we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, . . ." Paul could not put it more clearly.

There was a time when God in his tolerance allowed each nation to set its course, but there is also a time when each nation is faced with the drastic choice: Either Christ or my course to eternal damnation.

It comes down to the fact that in the past God has heard people in their need with his general grace by way of rain from heaven that he gave, regular harvests, plenty of food, and even made them happy. It was not the devil who heard them, but God, who was merciful to them, even though in their ignorance they diabolically sought the face of God.

It further means that there must be a drastic reversal and that there must be no systematic transition or reconciliation between Christ and one's course at all. If sacrifices were ever made on the altar of the unknown god in Acts 17, it could no longer be done after that, because Christ is the only sacrifice for our sins.

If the ancestors had been consulted in the past, it would then be intentional devil worship to go on with it, for Christ is the way and the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through Him.

Back to the question of cult or culture

In culture, not everything is necessarily bad or evil. God in his general grace also shone his light there that a thief is punished accordingly and that the youth learn to respect the old people. In English culture, we have "ladies first", while in the African culture the man should rather lead the way to protect the woman.

Every culture has its music, rhythms, and dances that in themselves are not necessarily wrong. How many beautiful proverbs are simply not locked up in their language, which testifies to the fact that God in his general grace also lets His light shine there by way of beautiful proverbs and insights to maintain order and authority.

Even of the most anti-Christian government that ever existed, Paul writes in Romans 13:1 "For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God".

Culturally there are many beautiful things that one can appreciate from every nation, but unfortunately between these culturally beautiful things also lay hidden occult practices of which every nation must repent before God.

Some also ask the question: "What about the sangomas with their roots digging and the drinking of their concoctions, but you very often get healed? Is there something wrong with that?" Of course not, there is nothing wrong with that per se. Very often one finds the contents of the roots in a more refined form in the pharmacy.

As Christians, we believe that God in his grace made the plant material available to us, not only as our food but also as our medicine, but as soon as I use the same plant that God has given me to treat my headaches against God's intention and then hang it around my neck or bury it at my doorpost to protect me from evil spirits or evils, I move from culture to cult. This is where these witchdoctors are so dangerous because in this natural medicine that God has given us they have in many cases added an occult dimension to rely outside of God on created things in the place of the Creator.

Cult then always accompanies fear. If you do not strictly follow certain rituals, certain evils can strike you. Thus, many cult leaders have a spiritual hold on the people around them.

The San people have a beautiful culture, but unfortunately also many cultic superstitions that have a restrictive or stifling influence on them, which

makes it impossible to live out their culture fully to the glory of Christ.

Many anthropologists have a romantic idea of the San and do not want to make any distinction between cult and culture. For them, it is one pretty, beautiful heritage.

To the anthropologist who came to visit us, I said that day: “While you are sitting there behind your desk writing the most beautiful books, I bury people with tears in my eyes because of superstitions you want to preserve to their downfall. While you are taking beautiful pictures of the ‘healing dance’ around the fire, we have to deal with the harsh reality that the ‘healing dance’ cannot cure tuberculosis, malaria, aids, and so on. Many of them were buried because they refused medical treatment and relied only on the dances.”

Had they received healing through these dances before the coming of the gospel, it was none other than the Lord who had mercy on them by way of his general grace, not because the dances were anything but because the Lord through his general mercy pardoned them in their difficult circumstances.

It is our daily struggle as missionaries to separate culture and cult from each other so that each in his own culture can bow the knee before Christ and acknowledge that He alone is Lord and God. May God give us the insight and wisdom to do so.



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9. The Reformed Churches and their missional calling in KwaZulu-Natal

It is heart-warming to know that mission work is considered in the Reformed Churches in South Africa (GKSA). The major assemblies, the general and regional synods and the classes ensure that mission deputies are appointed and deployed for mission work. The Theological School of the GKSA in Potchefstroom provides for missiology in its curriculum with the understanding that the mission of God to reach the nations with the gospel has been given to his church. (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; John 20:21; Acts 1:8)

The fact of continually diminishing number of members and entire congregations of the GKSA, despite formal orderly planning and involvement at all levels within the GKSA begs the questions: What really is the problem? Are the congregations really committed to mission work? Is mission work taken seriously? Are there any new congregations resulting from an input by major meetings?

In the Classis KwaZulu-Natal South – the classis I belong to – there are deputies for mission and evangelisation, yet congregations are diminishing and closing shop. There is no mission work, no church plant. We are losing what we have.

The GKSA might do well to reconsider its approach. It could be the top-down approach which results in congregations not being made to understand and commit themselves to missional work. We see deputies appointed from general and regional synods and classes, but we still see inactive

local congregations. The formal education and training of student ministers in missiology in their degree courses appears to be almost fruitless.

If this observation stating the apparent ineffectiveness of mission work by the GKSA is true, then there exists a great need to inspire all GKSA members to wholeheartedly embrace the imperative of the Great Commission, given to the church by the Lord Himself before He ascended into heaven.

While writing, I pray that this contribution may encourage my fellow Reformed church members to reconsider the importance of obeying the Lord's command to proclaim the good news. I am hoping that this contribution will help the congregations of the GKSA to fan into flame the preaching of the gospel, not only to the converted ones, but in outreach to the lost generation, the unchurched.

Members of the Reformed churches in this region need to consider the history of the mission work started by missionaries from the Netherlands Reformed Churches (NGK), in the late fifties to 2010. I will further use my own personal experience of being raised and mentored by Dutch missionaries as a means to remind my fellow Reformed church members about the mission work entrusted to them by the Lord Jesus Christ. I will use missional work by the Reformed Family Worship Church in Richmond as a form of case study.

The missional calling of the church

The mission of God is still as important as it was when first made audible to man. God hasn't changed since then and shall never change.

He made the call to his first New Testament church as stated in John 20:21. Some people might think that since the gospel has reached the entire world, today's church no longer has to focus on doing the missional work. This thought is influenced by an understanding and interpretation of the Acts 1:8: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (ESV)

This text is seen and interpreted as a map for the mission work, "Jerusalem . . . to the end of the earth". This second book of Luke shows that Dr Luke had this map in his mind as he follows the missionary journey of Apostle Paul. In Acts, the preaching indeed begins in Jerusalem and ends in Rome. Spain and Portugal was said to be the end of the world.

This has been the traditional understanding of mission work; “preaching the gospel to the end of the earth”. This was the focus when missionaries were sent to the nations of the world to preach the gospel in the era of missions in the late eighteenth to the twentieth century. Mission societies were formed. Missionaries, especially from Europe, were sent almost to the entire world to witness the love of God manifested through his Son, Jesus who died for all the peoples of this world.

However, this is aimed at individual people, not places. If witnessing is Scripturally meant to focus merely on where the evangelising must take place, i.e. the places that have not been evangelised, then the heretical thinking that *missio Dei* is concluded, can be partly justified. The whole world has heard the gospel. When looking again at Matthew 24:14; “And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” it may be concluded that as the gospel has reached the “throughout the whole world”, all that is expected is the second coming of the Lord, therefore no more great commission.

That conclusion is incorrect and heretical. Nowhere did the Lord direct his church to discontinue preaching or making disciples. Matthew writes “. . . teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of age”. Some Bible translations have translated, “αἰῶνος” for “age” or “time”; other translations have used “world”. The IsiZulu translation has also rendered “kwezwe” that is “earth” for “αἰῶνος”. But other translations rendered ‘time/age’ for “αἰῶνος” to the end of the time/age”. Indeed the gospel of the Lord has to be preached. In this text, Matthew 28:18-20, the emphasis is on the discipleship.

When the gospel has been preached and people turned into the kingdom of the Lord, or people become Christ followers, then they have to be discipled. This work of discipleship forms part of the commissioning. If that is so, discipling has to be practised till the Lord comes back.

There has been a shift from the traditional focus of mission of the past eighteenth to the twentieth century that focused more on the unreached nations in unreached places. The plan was to preach the gospel to the end of the world. This shift now is about preaching the gospel to the unchurched people here in South Africa. This may be driven by a number of reasons.

Secularism has given birth to a people who do not know the Lord, the post-Christianity era. South Africa like many countries is experiencing this challenge, “lack of knowledge” that will result into a disaster.

Second, the false gospel by the so-called prophets and apostles who are leading many people astray.

Third, the rise of African Traditional Religion. Many South Africans saw freedom of this country not only in political aspect, but also as religious freedom. To them Christianity was not their choice, but forced on them.

Fourth, Christianity was the national religion. Christianity would form part of public schools curriculum. Every public school was required to have prayers in their morning assemblies. Every learner in the public schools would gain some form of Bible knowledge. This has since changed, as all religions have been declared equal. Therefore Christianity is no longer receiving preference. South Africa is raising a generation lacking in Bible knowledge.

South Africa is a secular state. The current situation in our country is that many people do not know the gospel. South Africa has become a mission field again. South Africa needs God-sent evangelists. “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”” (Matthew 9:36–38)

A plea can be made to the congregations as well as all individual members of the GKSA to be obedient and commit themselves to the Lord’s call to witness his love.

History of the Reformed mission in KwaZulu-Natal

When the local Reformed churches weren’t able to bring the good news to their neighbours at the outskirts of Richmond, the Lord for the sake of His name intervened. He remembered the people who were living in the “margin” by sending missionaries from the Netherlands. The Lord had in his heart the people who were living at Nompofana, Groothoek Trust Farm, Mbuthweni, Ngwegwe, Stofela, etcetra. He had planned to reach these areas with his love. It came to pass and the place was reached with the gospel of the Lord. This is the history of the mission work at Groothoek and its outlying areas.

The Groothoek Trust Farm, in the area of Richmond in KwaZulu-Natal, was seen as a mission field allocated to the GKSA under the Gereformeerde Kerk Pietermaritzburg. Rev. M J de Haan, citing the minutes of the GKSA (1961, p170-171), shows that the Groothoek Trust Farm was allocated as part of a potential mission area. He further states that the GKSA was unable to start the missionary project. This farm is about 80 km from Pietermaritzburg. It had the potential for mission work, yet no mission work was done.

Rev. Johan Vonkeman was sent by the Free Reformed Church of Kampen, Netherlands, and arrived in South Africa in 1958. He started doing mission work in Pretoria, but began looking for other places. Mission deputies referred him to the Reformed Church Pietermaritzburg where the minister, Rev. Victor d'Assonville advised him to initiate mission work at the Groothoek Trust Farm, allocated to his congregation as a mission field where no mission work had yet taken place.¹

The mission work by Dutch missionaries

Rev. Vonkeman started mission work at Groothoek in the area known as eNkumane in 1959. Church services were being held here by the Methodist Church from Ndaleni, Richmond and the Ethiopian Church, where my grandmother was a member (AmaThophiya). There were also Catholic members in the area, as the Catholic Church was 4 km away from the place identified for mission work.

It is worth mentioning that this identified potential mission field had already been reached by other churches; Groothoek was not an outright new mission field. Yet, the Spirit of the Lord confirmed to Rev. Vonkeman that this was the place that He, the Spirit had sent him to.

So he started the mission work there. It was not a pleasant place for there was no infrastructure in that deep rural area. He was not discouraged, but walked around on foot and on horseback preaching the Gospel of the Lord in all the corners of the Trust Farm. He went down the valley in the area of Nompofana, uMkhomazi, Ngwegwe, preaching the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ. He went to the compounds of the commercial farms preaching the gospel. The Spirit of the Lord used him to touch people's

¹ *M J de Haan, Mission on the Margin. A Case Study on Reformed Mission Prospects in eNkumane, KwaZulu-Natal*

hearts and bring them to Christ. My own mother was among the first converts.

This mission work grew rapidly. Within four years five preaching posts were established. But as new areas were identified, the work load became too great for one missionary. The Free Reformed Church Kampen sent a second missionary, Rev. Van den Berg, in 1961. Within ten years three congregations were instituted and ten preaching posts were founded.

What was their working strategy?

The area in which the mission was done was deep rural, with limited resources. The community was on the outskirts, in the margin². There were no clinics and only one primary school. There was no employment. The job market was in the cities. The migrant labour system was the order of the day. Men, the fathers, were to leave their families for employment mainly in Durban and Johannesburg. This was the situation which the Dutch missionaries had to face.

They were to preach the gospel and provide answers to the challenges of the local people. They were determined to address the challenges they met. One of the strategies they employed in preaching and teaching the gospel was to identify and train evangelists who were later ordained as pastors. This method would address the need for leadership in those instituted congregations. As the Lord Himself did while preaching the good news, He identified potential disciples who would be ordained as apostles.

Paul also used this method; finding Timothy, training him to evangelise and also encouraging him to use the very same model: “. . . and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also”. (2 Timothy 2:2). This method worked in spreading and planting new congregations.

The needs of people were addressed; they clothed the naked, fed the hungry, built a clinic at the mission post, built schools in the areas where there were no schools. They used a holistic approach. The gospel preached would deliver people not only from their sins, but also from their immediate needs. Rev. De Haan in his book, states: “The Reformed Mission held a positive attitude towards ukusizabantu as its diaconal duty.”³

^{2 3 4} *MJ de Haan, Mission on the Margin. A Case Study on Reformed Mission Prospects in eNkumane, KwaZulu-Natal*

This approach is justified in the ministry of the Lord Jesus. “And He went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria and they brought Him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics and he healed them. And great crowds followed Him ...” (Matthew 4:23-2)

Though they were genuine in their approach their zeal was at times abused. Some people would join the missionary congregations just for material benefits and follow the missionary for wrong reasons.⁴ As it was the case in the ministry of our Lord, some of the many people followed Him for wrong reasons. When the Lord saw this, He was not impressed and had to admonish them. (John 6:25-27):

“When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, Rabbi, when did you come here? Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not labour for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal.”

This missionary work by the church in Kampen was blessed by the Lord Jesus. Five congregations were founded and are still active to date, the Reformed Churches Kwamncane, Idwala Lensindiso, Mbumbulu/Mlazi, Mid-Illovo and the Reformed Family Worship Church. The people of these areas are grateful to the Lord for having sent these missionaries to our country. They also appreciate the obedience of these overseas churches to our Lord's call.

The Reformed Family Worship Church, RC Ndaleni, and its missional calling in 1996

This congregation was founded and instituted by a Dutch missionary, Rev. A H Reitsema, in 1985. In 1992 the council called and ordained me, Siphon Phungula, as I am known, born and bred at the Reformed mission at Enkumane where Rev. Vonkeman worked as a missionary for almost 31 years. In 1985, I began my theological studies in the Reformed Richmond/Nqutu Seminary, which was the missionary founded theological school. He was mentored by Rev. Reitsema during his theological studies.

While I was still a student, I was much involved in the missional work in the farming communities. I held prayer meetings on the farms around Richmond, conducted after hours. Despite the turnover of residents, this ministry in the farming community grew rapidly. What was more important and satisfying than to see the gospel preached, seeing lives won for the Lord?

Great revival in times of violence

When I was called in 1992, Richmond was facing political violence which lasted more than a decade. The surrounding areas of Richmond, i.e. Ndaleni, Magoda and Esimozomeni became a no-man's land, a real ghost town in 1991-1992. Many people left Richmond for their own safety. The number of church members decreased drastically.

Congregants made an effort to follow other people moving out of the area, especially those moving to places around Pietermaritzburg and Durban. The congregation had to provide pastoral care to these dispersed congregants. As a result two preaching posts were established, i.e. the Mpumalanga Reformed Church in Hammarsdale, in the eastern side of Durban and Pietermaritzburg branch. Though violence was painful, the Lord used it to expand the preaching to these areas.

The Lord our God Almighty was in control throughout these difficult times. He revived His church, through prayers and Bible studies. The Spirit of the Lord brought together a remnant for these activities. Christians from different denominations in the area of Ndaleni gathered in the Reformed church building at Ndaleni for these activities. We prayed every weekend. There were morning and afternoon prayers every Saturday and Sunday and Bible study every Tuesday afternoon. These activities brought about a great revival within the Reformed Church members at Ndaleni, more especially the youth.

A team to witness the love of God to the Richmond community was born out of these activities. This group of Christians, calling themselves the Richmond Gospel Team (RGT), grew into an evangelistic ministry. It ministered the gospel of the Lord in the streets of Richmond, Ndaleni and Magoda. The Lord was using RGT as a beacon of hope for Richmond communities. These Christians were a salt and light. Souls were won for the church of the Lord. We witnessed the power of the gospel changing lives of young people of Richmond.

Being a leader of this team, I would indeed impact our congregation in the RC Ndaleni. It transformed and revived the congregation as never before. Members of the RGT who were also members of the Reformed Church became active even in the church. They would give testimony in the church services, which was something new, or was not practiced in the Reformed church liturgy.

We were purposeful in our approach. We wanted to live the life that adores Christ, to be good examples to our fellow Christians. We wanted to demonstrate our faith in living a faithful life. To be faithful in the worship service, faithful in giving (tithes and free will offerings). We were praying that whatever we do will be to the honour of the Lord. The Lord had taught us to be humble servants. From time to time we would be reminded of Luke 17:10. "...when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.'"

The Reformed evangelistic ministry

The life of the Ndaleni congregation was illuminated by the love of Christ through the life of the RGT members. The church having experienced this powerful life-changing gospel, resolved to plan revival campaigns in all branches of our congregation. This is how the Reformed Evangelistic ministries were born in 1996. The evangelistic team was made up of men, women and youth. Two of the three young men who were gunned down on the church premises at Ndaleni in 1996 were members of this ministry team. They were murdered after a tent campaign we had at Hammarsdale.

Our scope was far beyond our branches, aimed at reaching out to the unchurched people in different areas of KwaZulu-Natal. This was the response of the church towards Matthew 28:19-20. We were made to remember the words of the Lord, when He met His church for the first time after His resurrection, "As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." (John 20:21). He was sending them to fulfill God's mission to the world; to witness His love for the people of this world. The Spirit of the Lord made this calling so strong in all of the Reformed Evangelistic Ministry team members that we became determined to go and preach Jesus, Him crucified. The team was eager to go out.

A model used for evangelisation

Our plan was to have tent campaigns for two weeks. These tent campaigns would only take place during the school holidays, as the ministry team was made up of working people, high school learners and tertiary students. The

teaching part would then kick in as well as Sundays services. A prayer fasting for a week would precede every tent campaign. We would never ever go out without seeking the guidance and leading of the Lord through His Holy Spirit. For we knew that breaking into new grounds would always have challenges. We were aware of the spiritual warfare in those new territories.

I remember in one of our gospel campaigns, in the Umbumbulu area, called eMakholweni, in our last night services, the gangs came with guns, stood outside the venue, smoking dagga, swearing and insulting the preacher as he was preaching. After the preacher had concluded, a great miracle happened. Alter call was made. We witnessed this miracle, when those gangs came straight to the front and surrendered themselves to the Lord. One of those now has a stable family. I officiated at his marriage. Though he is not a member of our congregation, he is a member of the Kingdom of the Lord.

This tent campaign is and has been our working tool. Putting up tents was/is always a form of introducing ourselves in a new place. It helps us to become known in that particular community as we begin to visit households. We would put up a marquee tent for two weeks at a particular place, and would sleep in the tent for the duration. The first week was dedicated to preaching the gospel via redemptive preaching and the last week to teaching.

We preached Christ crucified, Him alone. People's needs were also taken care of. Prayers were made for their specific needs. During the day, house to house visits were made, sharing the gospel with the local people and praying with them and inviting them for night tents services.

Having finished evangelisation, I would do the follow-ups; teaching the new converts to establish their faith and trust in the Lord Jesus to prepare them for their baptism. Sunday services would have to be conducted for the new converts. When I concluded the ministry, a branch would be launched. Sunday service needed to be held for those new at a branch as well as Bible study during the course of the week. This would form part of pastoral care.

The first stop was Mpumalanga, in Hammarsdale, west of Durban. This branch was (then) about four years old. It had been founded during the violence in Richmond, in 1991. When the Ndaleni members fled for their safety, we followed them as their pastors. A branch was born. As this

branch was still very young, we said to ourselves that it would be good to strengthen our brothers and sisters.

In 1996 during the winter school holidays, we set out for Mpumalanga. We struggled without music instruments, but seeing lives coming to the Lord, was inspirational and a confirmation that the Lord was with us. We didn't look back. We were eager for more.

The second stop was Phatheni, which is a Richmond area. There was a call made by a certain mother, the late Mrs Madondo. She pleaded saying, "please come to Phatheni". This lady was a former member of the Hervormde church and she was now a member of Kwasizabantu. It was not an easy decision to make for the team to go to Phatheni as it was an area prone to violence. A large number of the population had fled the area. The local church leaders were among those who left Phatheni. There were no church services. The remnant was hungry for the Word.

What also contributed to the fears of the team to respond to this call was that the Phatheni area was consumed by faction fighting which later developed into a party political violence between ANC and IFP (Inkatha Freedom Party). Phatheni was a stronghold for IFP, while Ndaleni was predominantly ANC, where we came from. Enmity between these political parties was terrible. Intolerance and political killings were the order of the day.

The question that we had was: will they welcome us? We were not representing any political party, but the kingdom of the Lord. The Lord had helped us to be apolitical, in order for Christ's message to be received. We were faithful to the calling, though it was a high risk for people coming from an area that was known as an ANC stronghold. The Lord who guided us to Phatheni was so faithful to us. The gospel was preached. Lives were saved. Today we have a branch at Phatheni.

These were not the only places that were reached with the gospel of the Lord. There are also two branches planted around Durban: Kwandengezi and Clermont. Kwandengezi is a growing branch, while Clermont for some reasons that I will touch on has halted. Currently we are working at Mthwalume, on the South Coast. We started working in this area in March 2019. In December of that year, the branch was launched officially. Eight adult confessed their faith and were baptised with their children. I have assigned one of our student pastors to lead prayers and worship services.

We are grateful for the interest the Reformed Church South Coast has in this work. This congregation did send its representative during the launch.

The next move will be the North Coast, Richard's Bay and Empangeni, God willing. At the moment we are praying for this move. The plan is to reach the unchurched people with the gospel of the Lord.

Challenges experienced

There are two important elements in the spreading of the gospel, viz. human and financial capital. Human capital is the more important of the two. Harvest is plentiful, but harvesters are few. If it wasn't for this challenge of insufficient harvesters, we would have planted more congregations. As mentioned, once the tent campaign is done, then teaching the new converts follows and Sunday services have to be provided.

Ultimately, as the only trained pastor, I was too stretched to handle all the work. If we had more trained pastors, it would be easy to go on and on preaching Christ. New places, new people would have been reached, but human capital has been the greatest challenge. "Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest'" (Matthew 9:37, 38)

Conclusion

It is remarkable to see that although the Theological School of the GKSA offers missiology as part of the curriculum, there are few churches that see results. The general synod of GKSA appoints mission deputies, yet there are very few newly planted congregations. Is it because most of the ministers are not zealous for this work? The GKSA lacks so much in this field. The numbers of members in the GKSA are diminishing, some congregations had to close. The GKSA is spiritually challenged when it comes to missional work.

It has been said that South Africa has become a mission field. A generation that lack knowledge is growing thick and fast. The reason why the people of Israel perished, according to Hosea, was the lack of knowledge. "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you from being a priest to me. And since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children." (Hosea 4:6)

Apostle Paul saw himself as a debtor if he did not preach the gospel. (Romans 1:14). He considered himself a slave of Christ. The only thing that he lived for was the gospel of the Lord. In 1 Corinthians 9:16, he cried: “Woe to me if I don’t preach the gospel.” We can listen to him as he exhorted Timothy to preach the gospel in season and out of season (2 Timothy 4:2).

The Lord has commissioned the church, not individuals, to go and make disciples. (Matthew 28:19-20, John 20:21, Acts 1:8). This was the way the first church started the preaching. There were no mission committees, mission deputies, etcetera. Consider how the church in Rome started. It is believed that visitors who attended Pentecost in Jerusalem pioneered the preaching. In Samaria, Philip wasn’t called and released by the apostles to preach in Samaria. Persecution played an important role. The Lord had used it to spread the gospel. In the Antiochian Church, it was more organised. There the church in Antioch called and sent Paul and Barnabas as missionaries.

There has been a question as to who is responsible for the mission work. Is it the major meeting or the local church? What about the individual members? What is their role in the great commission? Is it only to give their money and pray for those in the mission fields? This question of who is responsible in calling and sending missionaries was much debated in the 16th and 17th centuries in the Netherlands. Adrianus Saravia, as cited by Rev. De Haan, thought that it is the local church that is authorised to call and send the missionaries, while on the other hand, again cited by De Haan, Justus Heurnius was of the view, “that each and every Christian is called to submit oneself to God’s guidance and neighbourly love.”⁵

A healthy local church will always live a life that witnesses the love of Christ, individually as well as corporate. The local church must teach and encourage the congregants about the importance of being missional as it honours the Lord God Almighty and also draws people into the Kingdom of the Lord. (Isaiah 2:1-5). Evangelisation was to be one of the church activities. “When the Church is absolutely different from the world, she invariably attracts it. It is then that the world is made to listen to her message, though it may hate it at first”, according to Martyn Lloyd-Jones. Peter would as well exhort believers, to “Keep your conduct among the

⁵ *De Haan, M.J.* Mission on the Margin. A Case Study on Reformed Mission Prospects in eNkumane, KwaZulu-Natal

gentiles honourable ... that they may see your good deeds and glorify God ...” (1 Peter 2:12). This is the same exhortation that Paul put to Timothy (1 Timothy 4:12-16).

The Lord has been and is sending us his redeemed Son to proclaim his love to the unchurched. We as his saved ones need to be obedient to his calling. If we really love Him we will allow Him to use us to his glory. May His name be hallowed in and through us, his Kingdom come and His will be done!



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10. Malawi as theater for the Reformed Faith

Malawi on the eve of the Reformed missions

Although the primary focus of this article is the question whether some missionary methods should continue or be discontinued, a brief description of the geo-political, socio-economic, religious and ecclesial setting can assist in gaining a rough idea of the situation in Malawi before the establishment of the Reformed Faith. Arguably, since Malawi's context is dynamic, some missionary methods might be outdated.

For a proper understanding of the meaning of Reformed mission, we need to define two key terms, Reformed mission and auxiliary service. "Reformed mission" in this article includes (a) the sending of missionaries to Malawi by Reformed churches and Reformed organisations, (b) missionary programmes undertaken by the Church of Scotland (CS), the Free Church of Scotland (FCS) and Dutch Reformed Church (DRCM) in Malawi, (c) Malawi as a mission field, (d) agencies like Blantyre Mission, Livingstonia and DRC mission which dispatched the missionaries to local areas, (e) Malawi as a non-Christian country, or (f) main centres from which the missionaries operated, (g) local congregations without a resident minister, (h) a series of special services intended to spread and deepen the Christian Faith, (i) the actual propagation and defence of the Christian Faith, (j) the expansion of the reign of God, (k) conversion of the Malawian heathens, and (l) the founding of new local, district, regional and national churches called the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP). "Auxiliary service" refers to supporting ministries such as education, medical work and industrial services in the areas where the work

of the CS, FCS and DRCM was concentrated for evangelism and church planting.

Noting that other services or approaches only have value and meaning in so far as they explain, concretise and emphasise the proclamation of the gospel, this paper argues that proclamation of the gospel is not merely one of the four approaches but stands on its own as the only task given to the church. These auxiliaries are meant to concretise the gospel proclamation and draw people's attention to Jesus Christ. Still the question remains which missionary methods used by the CS and FCS and DRCM ought to continue or be discontinued in modern Malawi in the 21st century.

Geo-political setting

Previously called Nyasaland, Malawi is a country in which the Reformed mission was established in the 19th century. Malawi is a landlocked country that shares borders with Tanzania in the north, Mozambique in the east and south and Zambia in the west. Malawi covers a total area of 118 484 square kilometers, of which 20% is covered by Lake Malawi, Africa's third largest freshwater body. Lake Malawi provided an easy means of transport for both slave traders and Reformed missionaries.

Before 1891, Malawi was made up of many Bantu kingdoms. Since the 1890s, the country has been divided into three regions namely, the northern, central and southern regions. The northern region has six districts, the central region has nine, and the southern region has thirteen districts. The Reformed missionaries divided their mission field in accordance with the political division of Malawi.

From 1891 when the country became a British protectorate, a new system of ruling called "indirect rule" was introduced (cf. Baker 1971: 7). In it the Reformed missionaries collaborated with government officials and traditional rulers in a sense that mission stations were all established only after obtaining approval from local chiefs. It was the aim of each mission to establish good, friendly and cordial relations with traditional leaders for the advancement of the kingdom of God in Malawi.

Socio-economic setting

At the establishment of the Reformed mission in Malawi, Bantu of the Yao, Lomwe, Sena, Tumbuka, Tonga, Nkhonde Chewa/Maravi and Ngoni tribes met with the whites and others from Europe (especially Scotland), America, South Africa and Asia. (Mwakanandi 1990: 5,6; Labuschagne 2003: 2,3;

McCracken 1977: 1-13). Missionaries spent ample time on learning local languages and later on introducing grammar to them. They used local languages as the medium of communication in their missionary endeavours.

Economically, Malawi relied on hunting, fishing, and gathering (Tindall 1968: 303). Farming and barter were new economic systems practiced from the 15th century and onward. Various crops were produced and animals were reared on farms for domestic and commercial use (Ott 1999: 151). The colonial government introduced advanced farming (agriculture) and trade in goods and services in order to replace and abolish the slave trade (Ross 1996a :15). Before and even after the establishment of the Reformed mission, religion was part of the daily fabric of many people and was deeply embedded in all socio-economic spheres.

Religious setting

At the time that preceded the establishment of the Reformed mission, Malawi's religious context comprised the African Traditional Religion (ATR), Islam, and Christianity. The ATR, Malawi's oldest religion, was the religious background of the indigenous people who were converted to Christianity and other religions and sects. A basic characteristic of ATR was a strong belief in the partly invisible and partly visible hierarchy between Chauta /Mulungu (God) ancestral spirits, the spirits of the dead, followed by king, chiefs and rainmakers, diviners, shrine prophetesses, with the living people at the bottom (cf. Rangeley 1972: 38). By virtue of their offices, each being of the hierarchy demanded a certain respect (c.f. Van Bruegel 2001: 247, 269 and Turaki, 2006: 29). Reformed mission gained influence among the members of the ATR and a good number of them gave their lives to Christ and became instruments of Reformed mission.

The first traces of an Islamic community in Malawi appeared in the 1840s through Arab traders, notably the Jumbes as local rulers who represented the sultan of Zanzibar and ruled along the coast of Lake Nyasa (now Lake Malawi). Reformed missionaries embarked on special evangelistic work in the Islamic villages and districts. A good number of Muslims gave their lives to Jesus Christ and some became ministers, elders and deacons (Mnthambala 2009: 48 and Paas 2006: 50-75).

In addition to the ATR and Islam, other religions and sects in Malawi include Hindus, Buddhists, Bahai and Jehovah's Witnesses. Members of these religions converted people to their beliefs through educational, medical, industrial and congregational ministries. Still the question remains, which methods of mis-

sionary work used by the CS and FCS and DRCM ought to continue or discontinue in modern Malawi in the 21st century?

Ecclesial setting

The known traces of Christian missions in Malawi were pioneered by a lay person by the name of Dr. David Livingstone who was a Scottish explorer sponsored by the British government. Of special importance to the introduction of Reformed mission was the appeal that Livingstone made at the Senate House of Cambridge University on 4 December 1857. His famous words were: "I go back to Africa to make an open path for commerce and Christianity; do you carry out the work I have begun? I leave it with you". (Weller & Linden, 1984: 13-14)

Responding to the plea, some Anglican Church members representing the universities of Cambridge, Oxford, Durham, and Dublin joined together in the establishment of a mission organisation in 1858, called the UMCA (Universities Mission to Central Africa). Pauw comments: The story of this first attempt of the UMCA was short and sad. Shortly after arriving in the country they encountered and forcefully set free a group of 84 slaves. Magomero was in fact right on the path of the slave trading route. Barely six months after arriving, Bishop Mackenzie died of fever and three months later, on 25 April 1862, ill-health and renewed tribal warfare had brought about the final evacuation of Magomero (Pauw 1980: 28).

According to the Anglican Church the primary objective of the mission's educational work was the conversion of people to Christianity, to which the demands of secular learning took second place (Pachai 1994: 344, 346).

The Roman Catholic Church mission was established in 1889 alongside the DRC mission. It was founded in 1902 through the enterprise of the priests of the White Fathers and the Montfort Fathers (Weller and Linden 1984: 100). The first group of priests arrived at Mponda in Mangochi, on 28 November 1889. After eighteen months, they left Mponda for Zambia and returned after three years. Upon their arrival, they founded a chain of mission stations, schools, hospitals and local industries across Malawi. These entities became a means of evangelism and discipleship.

Before the end of the 19th century Malawi saw the establishment of several wellknown industrial missions namely Nyasa Industrial Mission (1893), Zambezi Industrial Mission (1892), Baptist Industrial Mission (1895) and Providence Industrial Mission (1900). They were all independent of any denomination or organisations.

The principles along which the work was conducted were based on the views that the gospel could best be brought through industrial skills and manual work. To them industrial services were regarded as the primary medium of evangelism, discipleship and edification of the church. Ordained ministry was of no use.

Other non-Reformed Christian organisations and missions that operated in Malawi include American Sabbath Tract Society, the Seventh Day Baptist Church (1907), the Churches of Christ (1909) and the African Methodist Episcopal Church (1924). Reformed mission evangelised members of these sects and cults.

Reformed missions in Malawi

The next to arrive after the initial and first failed attempt of the UMCA were the enterprises of the Reformed mission. The Reformed Faith and practice were inherited and transmitted through the Belgic or Netherlands Confession of Faith (1561), the Heidelberg Catechism (1563) and the Canons of Dordt (1618/19). The DRCM subscribed to the three Reformed Symbols of Unity. The CS and FCS adopted the Westminster Confession (1646), Westminster Large Catechism and Westminster Shorter Catechism (1647) from their mother churches. These confessional documents were used as the doctrinal manual for instructing new converts.

The Livingstonia Mission

The FCS was established in 1875 as a result of another response to Dr David Livingstone's appeal of 4 December 1858. Under the leadership of a lay man, Lieutenant Edward Young, the FCS embarked on mission work at Cape Maclear at the southern tip of Lake Malawi. Named Livingstonia Mission in memory of Dr David Livingstone, its original purpose was to establish a centre which would grow into a town, and afterwards a great city of commerce, civilisation and Christianity. To materialise its dream, the work of the mission was launched mainly in four spheres: evangelisation, education, industrial work and medical work. The Livingstonia Mission through Dr Robert Laws played a leading role in the formation of the CCAP in 1924 and 1926.

The Blantyre Mission

Established in October 1876 as another response to Dr Livingstone's appeal, was the Blantyre Mission. Named after Livingstone's birthplace in Scotland, the Blantyre Mission was founded in Malawi's southern province in October 1876 under the sponsorship of the Church of Scotland. Slightly different from the aim of the DRCM, the mission defined its objective as follows: "Our

purpose we lay down as the foundation of all our work that we are building the African Church – not Scottish nor English – but African." In other words, as medium of mission work, the Blantyre Mission saw industrial service, not education, as primary means of missionary work. Today the Blantyre Mission is the Blantyre Synod of the CCAP.

The Dutch Reformed Church Mission

Next on the list of pioneers of the Reformed missions in Malawi is the DRCM from the Cape Synod in South Africa. With Blantyre Mission of the CS to the south and Livingstonia Mission of the FCS to the north, the DRCM was established in the central region in 1889. Rev. A C Murray and Rev. TCB Vlok jointly established the first mission station at Mvera. As regards to the aim of their mission, the DRCM missionaries differed slightly from the Scottish missions, especially on the subject of civilisation. Murray was quoted as having written the following in his diary:

"We are not sent out, I think, to civilize peoples, but to convert them. Not to give them a high secular education, but to teach them to keep all things which our Lord and Master commanded. Let those who will be our helpers as evangelists, catechists or teachers, learn what is necessary for their work, but as far as the people in general are concerned, let us impress the Word of God upon them in all possible ways, and furthermore teach them to read the Bible for themselves in their own language." (Pauw 1980: 60)

Right from the beginning, the Blantyre Mission and Livingstonia Mission showed interest in forming an indigenous church. Their discussions took a long time, but eventually in 1924 they founded a federation of churches called the CCAP. Under the leadership of William Hoppe Murray, the DRCM joined the CCAP in 1926.

By that time, each of the three missions had grown into presbyteries that developed into synods in 1956. Today the CCAP has five synods namely Blantyre, Livingstonia, and Nkhoma in Malawi, and the synods of Harare in Zimbabwe and Zambia in Zambia. These synods employed the same methods of missionary work although they had a different emphasis when it came to whether the proclamation of the gospel, not auxiliary services ought to be the primary task of the church.

An overview of multiple methods of Reformed mission work

Theological aspects

A brief overview of the relevant history indicates that the Reformed mission in Malawi owes much to the presence of both the Scottish and DRC missionaries.

Though all members of the two groups of missionaries equally accepted the four fold dimension or comprehension approaches to mission namely (1) kerygma, (2) education, (3) medical services and (4) socio-economic assistance, their understanding of the meaning of mission was quite different. Martin Pauw, a DRC missiologist, noted that according to the DRC missionaries:

“Mission is not four-dimensional but unidimensional, but in that singleness of approach, life is touched upon in all its aspects. Mission and proclamation of the Gospel can therefore never ignore the problems of disease, poverty and ignorance which it encounters, but will be moved by Christian compassion to do something to help people, and not merely to obtain an opening for the preaching of the Gospel.” (Retief 1958: 34)

As already said, although emphasis did differ in some respects, all the three groups of Reformed missionaries followed the same methods, and the same "Comprehensive approach". The DRC missionaries, for example, considered Reformed mission primarily as evangelisation – the ingathering of souls for the Kingdom of God. On the contrary, according to the Scottish Missionaries: “The mission is industrial and evangelical, designed to be a nucleus of advancing centuries of Christian life and civilization to the Nyasa and the surrounding region.” (Paas 2006: 195)

For the DRC missionaries, the proclamation of the Word of God was the primary task of mission while the other three "elements" of the so-called comprehensive approach, i.e., education, medical services and socio-economic assistance, are secondary or auxiliary services. As said above, in holding this view the DRC did not want to demote the proclamation of the gospel to the same level as the other three "elements" of the so-called comprehensive approach, i.e. education, medical services and socio-economic assistance.

Personally, I share the same views with the DRC missionaries. The proclamation of the gospel is not merely one of the missionary methods, but it is the only primary task given to the church. However, the other services or methods only have value and meaning in so far as they explain, concretise and emphasise the proclamation of the gospel.

Education mission

All the three Reformed missions largely considered educational service as one of the instruments of mission work in the promotion of evangelism, knowledge of the Scriptures and economic development. To attain these aims, according to the DRCM, a high level of education was not initially regarded as necessary and standards were only raised as the need arose or, and perhaps more so, as

government subsidy requirements prescribed.

This conservative approach to education was included in the DRC policy on mission which emphasised the need to maintain the social and cultural milieu of a people and not to disrupt society by lifting individuals out of their society to such an extent that they become estranged and uprooted and lose interest in serving their own people.

On the contrary, the Scottish missionaries strongly believed in what they abbreviated as three Cs – Christianity, Civilisation and Commerce – as primary methods of doing mission work unlike the aim of the DRCM assertion that the aim of their mission was to evangelise, rather than to detribalise through imposing Western civilisation on Malawians. In view of this, the latter stressed that the primary object of the mission school was to lead the learner to an intelligent grasp of the Biblical truth and through that to a sure knowledge of the way of salvation.

In due course when the Reformed church failed to manage education due to financial constraints, the civil government took over responsibility and began controlling education. As education became incorporated as part of the colonial system of government, dictated by governmental aims, the missions felt compelled to co-operate in order to preserve the vitally Christian character of the schools and of members of the local churches. Still the question remains, should educational service remain a method of missionary work in the 21st century?

Medical mission

The fact that medical doctors accompanied missionary personnel as well as the fact that medical work was undertaken by ordained ministers who had followed a short course in medicine, is always regarded as a grand reason to support the claim that medical service was a means of mission work although to some the belief that Jesus and his disciples spent so much time healing the sick is the primary motivating factor. Writing in his book on the same subject Verkuyl rightly observed:

“From about 1870 ... medical work came to be seen as a means of achieving goodwill and of making the native people receptive to the gospel. Medical mission was thus an auxiliary service, a means to more effectively achieving the real goal of proclamation.” (Verkuyl 19975: 214)

In Malawi, medical service as a specialised means of mission work made it difficult for missions to become directly involved in evangelism and discipleship because, seemingly, many local medical workers were not aware that the

service was meant to be a means of building up the church. The other reason is that after gaining independence in 1964, medical work fell entirely under the jurisdiction of the civil authority, making it difficult for churches to use, evangelise and make disciples because private hospital wards favour elites with good financial credit. Thus, the question whether medical service remains a method of doing mission work in the 21st century is still crucial.

Industrial mission

There were several reasons why the Reformed missionaries paid attention to the socio-economic aspect. It is alleged that apart from the obvious fact that the early arrivals had no choice but to provide their own vegetables and build their own buildings with whatever simple tools and crafts they had available, training helpers as they went along, there was the fact of the background of these missionaries.

Most of the DRC missionaries came from rural farm stock, men who were born and bred in Africa and made their living from its soil, becoming experts at improvising where more sophisticated tools or machinery were not available. In this they differed from, for example, Livingstonia Mission missionaries, most of who came from an artisan background as products of the Industrial Revolution.

One further important motivation should be sought in the theological background of the DRC missionaries. The Reformed doctrine concerning the ethics of work, including any form of manual work as an honourable and God honouring activity based upon the divine command, was bound to influence their views on encouraging manual and other forms of industrial activity. This was part of the reason why pupils as well as trained teachers and evangelists were taught to work with their hands "so that they should not get the impression that manual work is something degrading".

In the 1940s the mission began to run out of business because of local competition – which was exactly what the aim was. One of the main arguments relates to how the socio-economic services contributed to evangelism, discipleship and edification of the church. It can be argued that the industrial and agricultural training programmes were likewise aimed at serving the economic interests of missionaries rather than evangelism and edification of the church.

Congregational mission

Congregational ministry has remained an instrument in the promotion of evangelism, discipleship and edification of the Reformed church. It is not correct to assert that the CCAP is not a mere coincidence. Rather it is a by-

product of the missionary enterprise of the CS, FCS and DRC.

Three phases characterised the growth of the CCAP: The first phase commenced in 1875 with baptism of the first believers into membership of the mission followed by the formation of a number of mission stations and small congregations under mission councils.

The second phase saw the establishment of a federation of congregations in 1924 and 1926 largely under the control and authority of the mission as well as presbyteries. All along the emphasis was on progress towards an autonomous, indigenous church under its own leadership with missionaries in a supervisory and advisory capacity.

A third phase which came into full effect in 1956 saw three presbyteries in the CCAP being elevated to the status of synods, under a general synod of the CCAP. This was the outcome of lengthy constitutional developments.

The period of 1956-1962 was also set for the final phase in which progress was accelerated towards preparing for the final handing over of all responsibility to the young church. It was the time of awakening nationalism and political development in Malawi. Such simultaneous incidents brought much upheaval in the country so that pressure increased on the Reformed missions to dissolve their mission council and hand over leadership and authority to the indigenous leaders.

It may preliminarily be concluded that the division of the CCAP into synods, presbyteries, congregations, Holy Communion centres and prayer houses have played an important role in promoting evangelism, discipleship and building up of the church. However, such institutions become elements of mission work only where and in so far as they served the primary purpose of evangelism and edifying the church.

Christian literature mission

Printing and distribution of tracts, booklets and books were part of the work of the mission and church building. Not only did the printing press supply for many years all the readers and other books required in mission schools, but also in the church. The first booklets were produced as early as 1897 at Livingstonia or at Blantyre, or even in Cape Town, until the mission began its own small printing press at Mvera in 1907.

All books except the Bible itself were printed at various printing presses. In due course considerable progress was made towards providing the young church with religious and theological literature. The need to provide such

literature was recognised from the earliest times. The types of books printed by the church were Bible expositions, scriptural biographies, theological books, booklets explaining the way of salvation and concerning the Christian life as well as a religious magazines in the language of the people.

The other and perhaps more significant achievement was the introduction of religious magazines. The aim of the magazines was threefold, namely (1) to help evangelists and other church workers in their work, (2) to further the spiritual welfare of Christians and (3) to maintain bonds with the many thousands temporarily leaving the country to find employment. The question that this article poses is whether distribution of literature should continue as a medium to facilitate evangelism, discipleship and church edification. Should Southern Africa Reformed churches continue doing mission work using the same methods as the Scottish and DRC missions?

Which methods of Reformed mission should be continued or discontinued?

There may be diverse opinions as to whether or not all the methods which the Reformed mission used a century ago should continue to be employed today. To be more precise, should congregational ministry, education, medical services, literature distribution and industrial services equally be used as mediums of evangelism, discipleship and edification of the Church nowadays as they were during the missionary era? The answer to this question is “yes”.

A “yes” answer entails that certain missionary methods should be abandoned for the following reasons.

First, church-owned schools, hospitals and local industries do not have the financial muscle to sustain mission programmes administratively and financially.

Second, financial systems of the modern churches are too complicated, making them so much more difficult to manage and run mission programmes.

Third, the channelling of all profits of departments and institutions to church funds wrongly creates the impression that finances are there for the personal benefit and comfort of the Malawian missionaries, pastors and other Christian workers. Consequently tension arises between indigenous leaders and missionaries regarding the purpose of church funds.

Fourth, like many Southern African governments, since 1927 the Malawian government has been and is monopolising medical, educational and industrial processes and assumes the right to empower, heal and feed Malawians on the

diet of its own ideologies; for example that mathematics and science are better for social and economic development than Bible knowledge and that the Holy Spirit; the Word of God and prayer have no bearing on the healing of the sick.

Fifth, due to the constitutional democracy, many mission schools, hospitals, organisations and departments have lost their Christian missionary character and have become mere social and economic service providers.

Sixth, instead of institutional evangelism and discipleship through educational, medical and industrial services, the Malawian Reformed Church mission should focus on repentance, conversion, the new birth, sanctification, and a disciplined life rather than only sound doctrine contained in the three Reformed symbols of unity, subjective Reformed experience through Sunday schools, catechisation and baptism. The focus should be on personal experience with the Living Christ and the Holy Spirit as well as the practice rather than the theory of confessing sins.

Seventh, Reformed mission work should be an activity of every matured Christian through personal or financial contributions.

Eighth, every local church, classis (presbytery) regional and national synod of the Reformed church should be a living vessel of missionary activity.

Ninth, the new mission field to where the Reformed church should go and make disciples is through participation in the struggle against any form of injustice which is sometimes done in the name of Christianity, Christ and the Reformed church.

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11. Understanding the way of thinking in the African context¹

When we are called to serve God as missionaries and disciple makers in Africa, we are also called to serve the people of Africa. Therefore, we should not just understand God and his church, but we should also understand the African context. To do that, we need to understand the thinking that impacts Africa and churches in Africa. All of us have a set of rules in our mind that shapes the way in which we live and act. This is called mindset, worldview or way of thinking. In this article the term “way of thinking” will be used and not “mindset” or “worldview”.

Ways of thinking

Way of thinking answers the big and important questions of life. Questions like: Is there a God and what is He like? Is there truth and where can I find it? Where does evil come from? What is my purpose in life? How must I understand the natural world? What happens when I die? These answers become the rules in the minds of people that form the way they live and act. Understanding that the way of thinking in Africa shapes and forms the African context will be very helpful in understanding the African context and how to serve God and his people in Africa.

There are three main groups of thinking in the world. These three main ways or groups of thinking, shape and form the African context. These groups can be identified by the way they think about the physical and spirit world.

In the first main group, the spirit world is more important than the physical world. The traditional African way of thinking (TAWOT) is an example of this. In TAWOT, the spirit world is more important than the physical world, for example

¹ *This article is a summary and adaptation of a TOPLA study guide titled Way of thinking in the African context. It is the integration of stories, thoughts, efforts and inspiration of many dear Christian brothers and sisters. For a full list of their name, see the original study guide.*

the causes for sicknesses would rather be spirits and witches than physical things like germs and viruses.

In the second main group, the physical world is more important than the spirit world. The way of thinking in the Western world (North America and Europe), is an example. In the Western way of thinking (WWOT), the physical world will be more important than the spirit world. The causes for sicknesses, e.g. will rather be physical things, like germs or viruses, than the spiritual things, like spirits and witches.

In the third main group both the spirit and the physical world are important. The biblical way of thinking (BWOT) is an example. In the BWOT, both the spiritual and physical world are important, and the causes of diseases can thus be both spiritual and physical. In this article the focus is on the TAWOT (traditional Africa) and WWOT (Western) and their impact on the churches and poverty in Africa.

Key biblical truths about way of thinking

Satan has blinded people's thinking (2 Corinthians 4:4) and has taken them captive with empty lies (Colossians 2:8). When Jesus Christ started preaching, He said that people had to repent and believe in the gospel (Mark 1:15). "To repent" literally means that a person needs to turn his thinking around: away from Satan's thinking towards God's thinking. When a person repents and believes in Jesus Christ, that person becomes a new creation. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

As we follow Jesus Christ, our old thinking shouldn't form our lives anymore (1 Peter 1:14), and we shouldn't live according to our old thinking (Ephesians 4:17). We are now to be formed to the image of Jesus Christ (Romans 8:29). We should have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16). It is then when God's thinking becomes very valuable (Psalm 139:17). We should be rooted in Him (Colossians 2:7). We must love Him with all our heart, with all our soul and all our mind (Matthew 22:37).

We shouldn't think, live and act like unbelievers, but we should be changed through the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:2). The Word of God is like a very sharp sword, that helps us to see the thinking of our hearts (Hebrews 4:12). Like you take off old dirty clothes and put on new clean clothes, you should remove old thinking and old patterns of life and replace them with new thinking and new ways of living (Ephesians 4:22-24). We have godly weapons with power to destroy all thinking that is against God's thinking (2 Corinthians 10:5). How do we destroy all thinking that is against God's thinking? We must take every thought captive to obey Christ (2 Corinthians 10:4-5). The BWOT (biblical) way will be used to evaluate and take aspects of the TAWOT (traditional) and the WWOT (Western) captive and bring it under Christ.

A summary of TAWOT

An African example

There is a job for a new teacher at a school in a rural town. The headmaster of the school has a traditional African way of thinking. He needs to choose between two people. The first person has been a teacher for many years and did training at a college for teachers. The second person didn't have any training to be a teacher. This person also has no experience in teaching but is a family member of the headmaster. Who will the headmaster choose?

If he follows his TAWOT, he will choose the family member. Our way of thinking will form our actions and lead to our way of life. Let's trace the reason for the headmaster's decision to choose a family member as the new teacher, by looking at a summary of TAWOT.

Main parts of TAWOT

The illustration of ranks on the power ladder sums up the main parts of the TAWOT in Southern Africa.

All things in creation are ranked according to their power. This is the key thinking that shapes TAWOT. All things in creation are ranked and connected according to their power. This thinking holds all the other parts of the TAWOT together. It is the key to understand the thinking about god, spirits, spirits of the dead, the witchdoctor, witchcraft and family. This thinking is also the key to explain all the different practices, taboos and traditions of people holding to TAWOT.

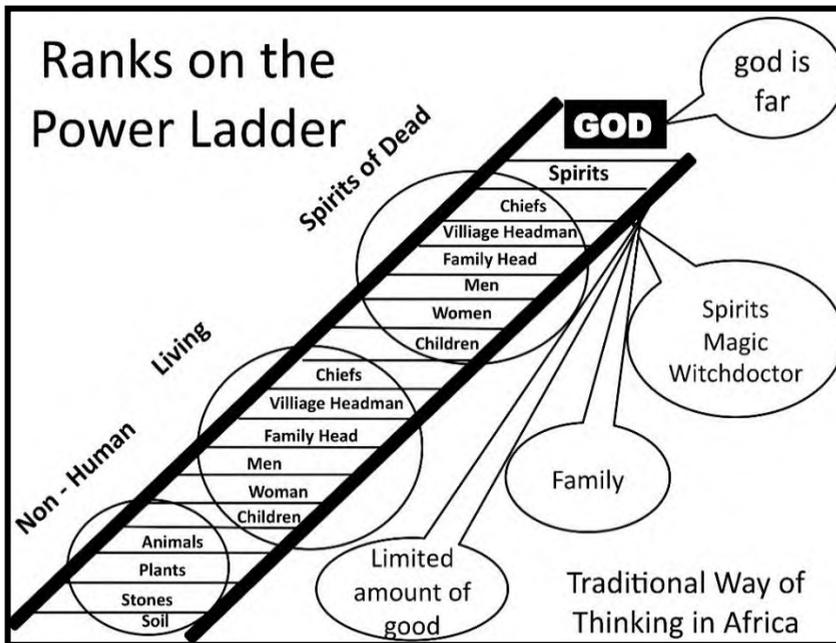
This ranking on the basis of power is like a ladder. On this ladder everything is ranked according to its power. The non-human things are ranked below the living. On the power ladder the living is ranked according to their power. The spirits of the dead are ranked higher than the living on the power ladder. Above the spirits of the dead are other spirits, usually seen as bad spirits. God is ranked on top of the power ladder. Even God is connected to the power ladder because He has the most power. The different powers on the ladder are connected and affect each other in a good or bad way.

God is far

Higher ranks with more power don't mix with lower ranks on the power ladder. A person only has contact with those that are on the steps closest on the ladder. Traditionally a child wouldn't speak directly with his father. The child will first speak with his mother. Then the mother will speak with the child's father on behalf of the child. In the same way contact with higher ranks on the power ladder is only possible through a go-between (mediator). This thinking has a very big effect on the thinking about God.

God is seen as the creator, but He is believed to be very far away. If a person can't reach a person higher on the power ladder, how can God ever be reached? He is on top of the power ladder and has more power than anyone else. He can't be reached; no contact or relationship with God is possible.

Therefore God has no place in the day to day life of people. He doesn't know people. He isn't a safe hiding place. He doesn't care, protect or heal. A person hasn't a responsibility towards him and can't sin against him. There is no longing for God and his glory, his peace and his holiness. Therefore, there is no chance that God will judge people. Because of the ranking of powers, God is believed to be far.



The living must go through the departed ancestors and break through spirits (demons) to receive blessings and protection of God. To do that, the witchdoctor and witchcraft play a very important role to help people to understand what angers the departed relatives and how to keep them happy. He also has the gift and power to help the living to defeat evil spirits and be able to break through to God.

Therefore, the witchdoctor, witchcraft, departed relatives and spirits play a big role in the daily life of people holding to TAWOT.

Spirits, witchcraft and the witchdoctor

After death a person continues to live as a spirit. The spirits of departed relatives are still seen as part of the family. These ancestors are less happy, but more powerful than the living. They are jealous of the living and want contact from the living.

Spirits of the departed communicate through dreams, snakes, bones, witchdoctors or possession. The living should bring sacrifices to the spirits. Through magic and witchcraft, the different powers on the ladder can affect each other. The living can manipulate or calm the ancestors through sacrifices. The spirits can harm, provide, heal or protect the living.

The living fear the spirits of departed relatives and evil spirits. Therefore, the living search for a spiritual cause behind any physical event. The spirits are more important than the living. Spirits can harm and bring death. Spirits can give life, healing, blessing and protection. Therefore, spirits control all aspects of life and are go-betweens or are obstacles to reach god. Sometimes the departed ancestors aren't just ways to reach God, but are worshiped in the place of God.

The witchdoctor plays an important role between the living and the spirits. He becomes the go-between between the living and the spirits of departed relatives. He also has the power to help defeat evil spirits. He can heal, bring deliverance, break holds and spells and give protection.

When a person has a problem, he or she will go to the witchdoctor to find out why the ancestors or spirits are angry and what needs to be done to calm the ancestors or spirits. He is a source of knowledge to identify who is bewitching a person. After consulting the spirits, the witchdoctor will show which person is causing the problem and what the solution is. This service isn't free and will always come with a price.

Family relationships and unity must be maintained at all cost

It is very important to maintain family relationships and unity at all cost. The traditions and the needs of family are more important than that of the individual person. A person is a person only through other persons. Everything that maintains good relationships and unity, is good. Everything that avoids or stops conflict, is good.

The spirits of dead relatives are part of the family. They play a very big part in the daily life of the family. Because of their power, they need to be consulted and obeyed. The living relatives fear the spirits and will always try to please them. The living relatives will also try to manipulate the spirits through sacrifices in the hope that the spirits would help the living with their daily needs.

The family becomes the source of knowledge and truth. Beliefs and customs of family, including the departed relatives, are very important and must be followed at all cost. The family uses fear to keep family members following the beliefs and traditions of the family. The warning will be that something bad will happen if the beliefs and the traditions of the family are not followed. In TAWOT, it is a sin to disobey the family customs, traditions, beliefs and ceremonies. Therefore the living look at the past to hear from the spirits in order to control and rule the present and the future.

There is only a limited amount of good in creation

Good is defined as power, life force, luck, health, prestige and influence. Each person receives a fixed amount of good or life force, because there is only a limited amount of life force or good in the creation. This power or life force can only be increased by taking it away from somebody else. The most common method used to make life force more, or to take life force away, is witchcraft.

It is very important to maintain the balance of rank and power. A person isn't supposed to try to get more good, life force or power, because it is fixed and limited. A person should stay on the same place on the power ladder. You aren't supposed to go up or down on the power ladder. The only way to get more power and move up the ladder, is to take it from someone else. If a person becomes ill, the question will be: Who is causing this illness? His life force or power isn't supposed to become less. The thinking is that someone is bewitching that person. Therefore, a spiritual cause will always be seen behind a physical event. If the person has malaria, the question will be: "who sent the malaria mosquito?"

The way of thinking leads to the way of life

Let's return to the headmaster who appointed an untrained relative as a teacher. Why did he appoint an untrained family member with no teaching experience as a teacher?

His way of thinking about the ranking of powers leads him to appoint a family member as a teacher. He believes that his family includes the spirits of dead relatives. He knows that they are higher on the power ladder and have more power than he has. He knows that he must, at all costs, maintain unity and good relationships with his family. If he appoints the family member, his family, including the spirits of his departed relatives, will be pleased. If he appoints the other teacher, his family might be unhappy, and his ancestors might punish him. Out of fear of his family and to maintain good family relationships, the headmaster appoints his family member as the new teacher.

Many beliefs and cultural ceremonies in Africa are linked to ancestral spirits. These beliefs and practices touch people's daily lives from birth to death, and vary from tribe to tribe. The root thinking that leads to the way of thinking about the spirits of dead relatives and cultural ceremonies, is the thinking that God is far.

The thinking that God is far, is untrue. God is very strong and very close. God is the Creator and the Provider of all life. (Genesis 1-3). He knows everything and will judge all people. (Revelation 14:7). He is the King above all kings (1 Timothy 6:14-16). Jesus Christ is Immanuel, meaning God with us. (Matthew 1:23). He became a servant saviour that loved his people so much that he sacrificed his life to restore our relationship with God.

When we minister to people with TAWOT, the lie that God is far, must be replaced with the truth that God is very close and very strong. Serving people with words and deeds, is the best way to do this. We should love all people so that they can see and feel that God is close. We must live and tell the truth to them and help them to discover God as He made Himself known in the Bible

An African example

A pastor was born in a family who only knew how to please their ancestors. His grandfather, while undergoing training to become a traditional healer, was wearing bracelets, because he thought that he would not survive a single day if he took them off. His hope and trust was on these bracelets. Under his bed were items he used when praying to ancestors. Items like traditional medicines needed in his training to become a traditional healer, bracelets, pieces of clothing, home-made beer and snuff.

Simultaneously, he was attending a Bible college, learning to become a pastor. He was given an assignment on the book of Joshua. The Lord opened his eyes as he was reading the history of Achan (Joshua 7). Achan disobeyed God's command and hid things he took from Jericho in his tent. He thought nobody knew, but God knew. Because of his sin, the anger of the Lord burned against the Israelites and they couldn't stand before the people of Ai. Thirty six soldiers were killed in Ai. After God identified Achan as the sinner, he, his wife and children were put to death.

After the pastor had read this history about Achan, he looked under his bed. He saw all the things he used when he prayed to his departed ancestors. Then a question hit him: "What is the difference between Achan and me?" The answer was: "There is no difference." Suddenly he understood that God wasn't far, but close. God knew about the things under his bed.

This made him run outside and get his wife. They took all the things under his bed outside the house and burnt it. There was also a tree in his garden where they prayed to their ancestors. He also chopped down that tree.

His understanding of the truth that God was very close and very strong set him free. It had an impact on his whole life. He said that Jesus Christ saved him and gave him a new life. He wasn't just freed from ancestral worship. He was also freed from other sins like being unfaithful to his wife. He said: "Jesus Christ didn't transform me into a European man . . . ; no, Christ transformed me into a new African man."

A summary of WWOT

A Western example

Mr. Washington sits in the garden of the White Lilly Old Age home in New York. He is 81 years old. His wife Jane passed away ten years ago. After the funeral, his son Peter said that he couldn't stay in his house anymore. Peter looked for an old age home and brought Mr. Washington to the White Lilly. The very friendly staff takes very good care of Mr. Washington.

Mr. Washington is daydreaming about the time when Peter was still a little boy. He was always smiling when Mr. and Mrs. Washington came back from work. They taught him the American dream. You can do anything if you put your mind to it. If you study hard at school and university, you will get a good job and be

able to be successful. You could buy a big house, drive a fancy car and live a life of comfort without worries.

Peter studied hard and started living the American dream. He was a very successful businessman. He was doing business all over the world and could live a life of comfort and style. He could buy anything he wanted. He could travel the world and take very good care of his father by paying for his father's care at the White Lilly.

But Peter's success came at a price. He was very busy and didn't have time for important relationships. Peter rarely visited his father anymore.

Mr. Washington is very sad and lonely. He hasn't seen Peter for two years. Peter phones him every year on his birthday. Mr. Washington had his 81st birthday yesterday. Peter forgot to phone him.

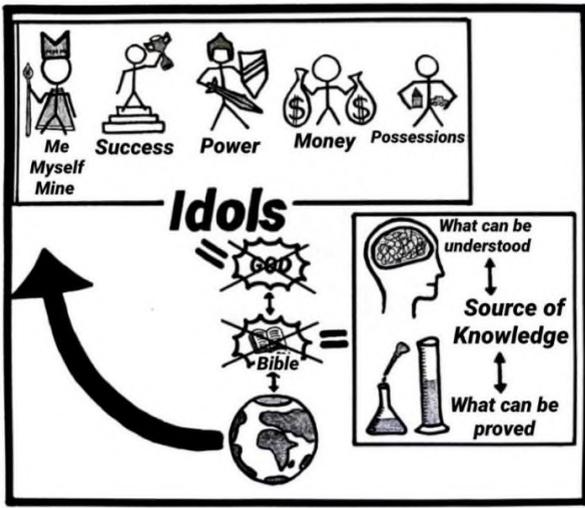
In WWOT (the Western way) the only thing that is real and important, is the physical world. Most people in WWOT think that there is no God and there are no spirits. Only things that can be seen, touched, smelled and heard are real. There is no creator, the natural world started by accident and developed over many years. WWOT literally sees the world as a world without God. The sciences like Biology, Physics and Chemistry according to WWOT can explain everything, even how the world began.

God's Word, the Bible, is also thrown away. The Bible isn't viewed to be the revelation from God, but only a very old book written by people with no relevance for us today. People's own understanding becomes their source of knowledge. You study the facts and decide what is true. There are no absolute truths. My understanding is truth for me, and your understanding is truth for you. Therefore, truth is relative.

Only the physical, material world matters. If you don't serve God, man will replace God with idols. In WWOT God is replaced with physical or material idols found in creation. Almost anything in creation can become an idol. The most common idols in WWOT are people, success, power, money, possessions, work, entertainment, sport, etcetera.

Man falls in love with himself. People's whole lives are about themselves and their own needs and wants. Important words are me, myself and mine. My needs and desires are more important than anything else. My life, my body, my success, my comfort. People tend to be selfish and misuse others to gain advantage, power and success.

WWOT



In WWOT money and possessions are security. There is a great drive to become rich and possess many material things. Your purpose in life is to get money and possessions so that you can enjoy a comfortable life till you die. Where you stay, what type of car you drive, the type of phone you have, what brands of clothes you wear and your ability to travel and see places, are very important. The solution to most problems in life is money.

Many people are addicted to their work. Their identities are based on the work they do. They work from early in the morning till late at night. They work during weekends and don't rest enough. Their work becomes more important than any personal relationships or how others feel. Let's return to Mr. Washington and his son Peter.

Mr. and Mrs. Washington taught their son Peter to chase after the American Dream. The way of thinking behind the American Dream is that money, possessions, success and a person's own desires are the most important goals in life. One of the results of this thinking is that people don't have time for their parents when they become old. They chase their material idols and think that making sure that their elderly parents' physical needs are met, is love.

The negative impact of TAWOT and WWOT on churches in Africa

WWOT had a big impact on churches in the Western world

Firstly, the church withdrew from the world. Physical things like business, arts and politics were seen as worldly and not the focus of the church. The church focused on spiritual things like prayer and Bible study. Church life became limited to Sundays and had little impact in the daily life of people. This thinking impacted the way evangelism was done. The gospel was limited to personal salvation with-

out the need to follow Christ as King and to worship Him in all areas of life. Churches became focused on buildings and Sunday worship, but weren't seen serving justice and helping the needy in the world.

Secondly, the logical mind decided what in the Bible is truth. Things like miracles that the mind couldn't understand, needed to be given a new meaning. Historical facts like the bodily resurrection of Christ were given a new symbolic meaning. For example: Christ needs to rise in you. You should follow his example, was the new meaning of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

These ways of working with the Bible remove the heart out of the gospel. Without faith in the bodily resurrection, there is no Christianity. Thus interpreted, the Bible is considered to be merely an old book, written by people about God, and not God revealing Himself to man.

Churches also became more like the world. The goal of life in the world also became the goal in the church. Blessings from God were limited to what leads to money, possessions, power, success and health. God isn't served to bring Him glory. No, God is served with the purpose to receive his blessing of health and riches. Worship became human-centred and not God-centred. Man wasn't in service of God. No, God was in service of people and their desires. In many cases these WWOT (Western) goals mixed into the gospel, were and are still the gospel being imported to Africa through missionaries, NGO's and television preachers.

Both TAWOT and WWOT impacted churches in Africa

The impact of TAWOT is seen in many churches in Africa. The narrow gospel without discipleship didn't change their TAWOT that God is far. Therefore, they believe Christ is far and can't be reached. Members will continue to consult their departed ancestors and will still go for protection and healing and be part of traditional ceremonies. In some churches these influences of TAWOT are practiced officially, and in others unofficially. In most cases, the focus in these churches will be more in the Old Testament than in the New Testament.

In the last two decades, many churches were established all over Africa. Unfortunately many of these churches are a mixture of WWOT and TAWOT with Christianity. The mixing is possible, because both TAWOT and many Western Churches under influence of WWOT are human-centred. God and the departed relatives aren't worshipped for love and glory. They are worshipped for personal gain.

The so-called "man of God" replaces the witchdoctor. The witchdoctor plays a very important role as mediator in TAWOT. The ancestors speak to him. He has knowledge and power to identify and give solutions for the needs of people. He is also the one that can help to defeat evil spirits. In these new churches, the so-called men of God replace the witchdoctor, and do the same things that witchdoctors do.

The man of God can also hear directly from God and is able to defeat demons. God speaks directly with the man of God. The full council of God, as given in the Bible, is lost. Many of the members of these churches aren't able to use the Bible to test whether what the man of God says, agrees with the Bible. For many the instruction of the man of God is as if God said it Himself. If the man of God says: "God said to me . . .", then they blindly follow the instruction. Therefore, they eat grass and snakes and drink petrol and poison, when the man of God says so.

The promises and the methods of the man of God and the witchdoctor are similar. If you compare advertisements of witchdoctors with the advertisement banners of churches, and what their man of God promises, you will find it very difficult to find differences between promises of a witchdoctor and the so-called man of God (Mbewe 2012: 1). You regularly read and hear that these men of God impregnate woman in their churches. They use sexual intercourse to free these ladies from spiritual husbands. This method is also a way in which witchdoctors help their clients to be freed from spirits and to solve problems like barrenness.

An African example

News concerning a pastor in South Africa who has convinced his church members to eat grass has shocked the world. What many people don't know, was that a few days prior to this, photos made their rounds on the Internet, showing this pastor walking on his flock, while they lay on the floor as a way of delivering them. Something had certainly gone awfully wrong! Pastor Lesego Daniel of Rabonni Centre Ministries has certainly brought himself into the limelight by these insane activities. He is telling his congregation that this is how to get closer to God (Mbewe 2014: 1).

The so-called men of God churches are TAWOT covered in Christian soup. The idols of WWOT, like money, possessions, health, power and success, have been exported from America into Africa through prosperity gospel preachers.

But the true gospel sets people free and changes the way of thinking. The gospel of the so-called men of God in Africa, enriches the men of God, because they enslave and steal from the poor and those without hope. These human-centred churches are nothing more than the witchdoctor and the witchcraft of TAWOT covered by misused out of context Bible verses to give it a Christian flavour.

God and his Word are enough for the real man of God. A love for God and God's glory is the purpose of the lives of the true men of God. God's Word is their only source of truth. In the past, the man of God was a preacher. He preached the message of hope to a fallen world. The gospel of salvation and repentance was preached. The man of God explained God's Word and equipped the church to follow and serve God as their King and Saviour.

Some ideas of how TAWOT and WWOT cause and sustain poverty

An African example

Mr. Banda has planted a beautiful maize field. He lives next to the beautiful Lake Malawi. His neighbour is Mr. James. He needed to go away for study for three months. When he left, Mr. Banda's maize garden looked green and beautiful. When he returned from his studies, Mr. Banda's maize field was brown and dry. The cobs never even developed.

The next day Mr. Banda visited Mr. James to ask him to help his family with food. Mr. James asked: "When I left, your maize field was so beautiful. What happened to your maize field?" Mr. Banda replied that his maize field failed, because there wasn't enough rain. Then Mr. James asked Mr. Banda: "You live right next to the lake, why did you not take buckets and water your maize?" Mr. Banda replied that he didn't want to anger the spirits. If the spirits wanted his maize to grow, they would have sent the rain.

The way of thinking and poverty in Africa

In Africa many people are very poor. Therefore, many Christians, church leaders and the communities they serve, are also very poor. When local churches want to bring change and serve poor people, it is also very important to understand how a way of thinking impacts poverty. Our way of thinking about things like time, work, people and creation impacts poverty. It shapes our actions and the way we live.

Mr. Banda's thinking, that spirits control creation, leads to poverty and hunger in his family. As God's steward of creation, he didn't rule over creation and use the God given water to water his maize field. He became passive and waited. This type of thinking leads to poverty and dependency.

We mustn't see each element of thinking separately, but rather as an entire system of thinking. It isn't just the separate effects of thinking about time, work, people and creation, but also the combined effect of this way of thinking that leads to poverty.

Thinking about time

In TAWOT (traditional way) time or history looks at the past. It is looking backwards. It is like walking towards tomorrow with your back towards tomorrow and your eyes towards yesterday. History is something that happens to you. Spirits control our lives and our tomorrows. This type of thinking leads to losing hope. We are trapped in poverty and there isn't anything we can do about it. Life begins with problems. My life is going nowhere. This leads to a life of dependency, a life without purpose and hope.

In BWOT (biblical way), time has a beginning and an end. God is in control and creates us with a purpose to bring Him glory and disciple nations. We are part of his story. History is HIS-story. We can celebrate the past, enjoy the present, and

plan for the future. We are forward looking. We were made to create history. God created us with freedom and personal responsibility. It brings an understanding that we all are missionaries. I am born with a purpose.

Thinking about work

Many Christians in Africa and also people with TAWOT see work as a curse. They believe that work came as a punishment after the sin of Adam and Eve. We work to survive.

In BWOT, work was part of God's plan from the beginning. God worked six days and He rested on the seventh day. He gave Adam work before the fall. Adam had to name the animals and they had to rule over and take care of creation. Work is part of our dignity. Work lifts our spirit. We work to bring God glory.

In the Old Testament, we saw how God provided for the poor. Farmers may only harvest their fields once. If the workers missed some of the wheat, they weren't allowed to go through the field a second time. God also commanded that they weren't allowed to harvest the edge of the field. The remainder of the harvest and the edge was given to the poor to harvest. The poor could harvest behind the workers and harvest on the farmer's land. The history of Ruth harvesting on the field of Boaz is a biblical example how poor people could still work and not become dependent.

Thinking concerning people

In WWOT man is a mouth and a stomach. It is all about my needs and what I want. A man only thinks about himself. People tend to be selfish and don't share what they have. They will spend a lot on their own comfort but wouldn't care much about others in need. Because of this thinking, the individual person is more important than the group.

In TAWOT man is spirit. The physical side isn't so important. A father will rather give money for the funeral of a departed relative than money for his child's education. This is an example how this thinking can lead to poverty. In this thinking, the individual person's life isn't important. The group is more important than the individual.

My tribe or race is better than your tribe or race. This thinking is found in both WWOT (Western) and TAWOT (traditional). Two examples how this thinking leads to poverty, are that job opportunities are linked to your tribe or race. Another effect is that many violent conflicts and even wars in Africa happened because of tribes and races standing against each other.

Women and children have less value than men. This thinking is found in both WWOT and TAWOT. In rural areas of Africa, the needs of men are more important than that of their wives and children. Woman will do a lot of the work in the fields, but many times have very little say on how the money is spent. Boys

will work taking care of cattle and will not be able to attend school. Girls will marry very young and won't be able to complete school.

In BWOT (biblical way), man is heart and mind. Man is created in God's image to love God and serve all people. Both the individual and the group are important. It is like the body and its parts. Each part has its place for our bodies to work well. We are interdependent of each other. Each race or tribe is equal in value, but wonderfully unique. This should be celebrated. Women and children are made in the image of God and have equal value to men. Their roles differ, but their value before God is the same.

The way forward

Three foundational and interconnected reasons for the general state of churches in Africa are:

- narrow evangelism
- weak discipling
- failure to transform people's "way of thinking".

The first reason is *narrow evangelism*. This is when God is preached as the Saviour, a miracle worker and giver of wealth, but God as the Judge and the King aren't preached. Faith is preached, but repentance of sin and submitting to God our King, isn't preached. So, the full gospel, announcing that our Lord Jesus Christ is King, Prophet and High Priest is not properly proclaimed.

The second reason is *weak discipling*. After having been evangelised with a narrow gospel, many Christians are victims of weak discipling. Weak discipling is when Christians aren't taught the cost of following Jesus Christ (Luke 14:25-33). Nor are they taught to obey all that Jesus Christ commanded (Matthew 28:20). Therefore, they don't follow Jesus Christ and aren't able to make disciples of others. Proper "discipling" requires a relationship that demonstrates progressive, long term, patient mutual understanding and practice of all Christian virtues. Discipling is a shared pilgrimage of learning.

The third reason is that their way of thinking has not been changed. People are evangelised with a narrow gospel and receive weak discipling. They will not change their traditional way of thinking. They will simply choose parts of the gospel and mix simply chosen parts of the gospel and mix it in with their traditional way of thinking (syncretism). They will call themselves Christians. They will attend a church service on Sundays, but they will also pray to their ancestors for rain in a time of hunger. They will only serve God for his blessings of health and wealth.

Present and future missionaries and disciple makers should adopt BWOT (biblical way of thinking) and examine their own way of thinking in this light. They should also understand both WWOT (Western way of thinking), and TAWOT (the traditional African way of thinking) and how it impacts on the African context and churches in Africa.

The establishment of so called “discovery groups” is a wonderful practical way to teach and adopt a BWOT, the full gospel of the kingdom and biblical discipleship. “Discovery groups” meet to discover from God’s Word who God is, and how He wants us to live. The group uses God’s Word as the source of true knowledge. The Holy Spirit teaches the group through the Word.

God’s Word is stored in their hearts and members are trained to share God’s Word. Group members help each other not to just hear God’s Word, but also to obey God’s Word. They become people building on rock and not on sand. They hear God’s Word and then obey it. The “I will . . . commitments” help them to obey God’s Word and let the gospel reach their communities through a lifestyle of truth and unconditional loving service.

In most churches, there is a lot of talking about love, but little is said about doing love. Congregants are told that one must love one’s neighbour, but they do not practice it. ”Discipline of love-deeds” and “seed actions” are two practical tools to develop a lifestyle of unconditional loving service.

“Discipline of love-deeds”, as shown in the table , is a simple tool to plan and commit to do at least one small deed of unconditional love per day.

“Seed actions” is a practical tool for groups in congregations to develop a loving service. A “seed action” is a small deed of love by a group of believers using what they have, to reach unbelievers, to bring God glory. We don’t need to wait for outsiders or money. We can start with what we have.

Furthermore missionaries and disciple makers that have been influenced by the WWOT (Western way) should acknowledge the idolatry in their churches where physical things like possessions, money, success and self-importance are trusted next to God. Such reliance on worldly values for happiness and success must be revealed to be impermanent and of little value even in this current dispensation.

Day	Who to serve	What you plan to do
Sunday		
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		

There will also be tension between the needs in the local church and the needs of the missionaries serving outside the local church if the idols of the Western way

of thinking are not put aside. The result will be that a church's ability to fund missionaries and missional work will decrease. However, the existence of both the physical and spiritual dimensions should be kept in mind when ministering to people influenced by the traditional way of thinking (TAWOT).



In the past some missionaries under influence of WWOT considered claims by those under the influence of TABOT to be mere superstition. Consequently, those under the influence of TAWOT would close their ears and hearts to the message of WWOT missionaries. Satan, the father of lies, also uses his power to deceive. Discernment is needed to distinguish between deception and evil demonic influence.

Missionaries and disciple makers that have been influenced by TAWOT should acknowledge the idolatry in their churches where things in creation like ancestral spirits, spirits, charms and magic are trusted next to God. To be missional these idols must also be put aside and trust in God alone should be proclaimed and demonstrated. Care must be taken that idols of TAWOT are not replaced with idols of WWOT.

To trust God as He reveals himself in Scripture, the Bible must be seen as the source of truth above all other possible sources of knowledge. In TAWOT the witchdoctor and the family (including departed relatives) are the sources of knowledge. Fear is the method used by the family and the community to keep people following the traditions and the idolatry of TAWOT.

To help people with TAWOT see that the Bible alone is the only source of truth, missionaries and disciple makers must proclaim and live the truths of the Bible and show how the fearful threats of TAWOT are lies. They must testify that they stopped practicing the rituals and obeying the taboos of TAWOT and the threats simply did not happen. They must testify that they trust God and love God with everything they do in every situation. They have to demonstrate their unconditional love for God in every situation, in good times and in times of hardship.

Another very important starting point in discipling people of TAWOT is to proclaim and demonstrate at least three relevant attributes of God, namely: omniscience (all-knowing), omnipotence (all-powerful), and omnibenevolence (supremely good, as per John 3:16. In other words, God knows everything, has the power to do anything, actually does do everything and is perfectly good. Especially the concept of “Emmanuel” must be accepted and believed so that disciples do prayerfully commune with the living Christ. (Consider that TAWOT reckons God to be disinterested and unconcerned in worldly matters.)

Against the traditional African way of thinking that God is unconcerned with events on earth, stands the confession of Emmanuel, enabled by the biblical way of thinking. Once the people subjected to TAWOT know and confess Emmanuel, the need to resort to ancestors and witchcraft falls away.

Conclusion

In the spirit of 1 Corinthians 9:22-23: May all *Western way of thinking* brothers and sisters become weak and become all things to all people so that by all possible means they might save some. May all *traditional African way of thinking* brothers and sisters also become weak and become all things to all people so that by all possible means they also might save some.

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**Some mission activities in
Southern Africa**



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12. Theological education in the service of mission

What is the role of theological education in the mission of the church? During the past two centuries, theological education has had a prominent role within African missions. Bible schools and other forms of Bible-based education were essential introductory methods for mission in each new area of gospel expansion (Walls 2013; Pobe 2013).

The history of theological education in African mission is expansive and diverse such as: Robert and Mary Moffat's education programme at the Kuruman mission station where the Bible was first translated into Setswana (1857); the pioneer efforts of Johannes Ludwig Krapf in East Africa (Gathogo 2009); and James Stewart's ministry at the Lovedale Missionary Institute with a vision for what later would become the University of Fort Hare (UFS 2021).

The mission of theological education regarding the mission of the church has also been theoretically promoted. Increasing attention has been given in recent decades to the strategic place of theological education in the mission of the church (Banks 1999, Ott 2001, Das 2015). Indeed many important insights are gained by reflecting on theological education at the intersection of both mission methodology and educational philosophy.

What is the place of theological education in Christ's church's mission and, more precisely, how should our theological education ministries serve the mission of the churches within Southern Africa today? What is the historical importance of, and the theoretical place of theological education for the contemporary mission in Southern Africa?

The goal of this contribution is to highlight the strategic service of theological education within the mission of the African church. It is not a compre-

hensive defence for biblical mission as the heart of theological education. Nor is it an exhaustive history of theological education within African missions during the past two centuries. While there is need for both, our present focus is more modest.

In this chapter, we first briefly outline the mission of theological education from biblical and historical perspectives. We then consider relevant motivations for the promotion of theological education in the service of mission within Southern Africa. We conclude with a practical reflection on how missional theological education is contextualised in Africa today.

The mission of theological education

What underlying philosophy and methodology shapes the church's understating of theological education, and are these subtle shaping influences grounded in sound theology? There are various options: Following Kelsey (1993) and Banks (1999), Brian Edgar outlines four common models of theological education (2005). Others have expanded this thinking (for example, Das 2015: 10-18). Bernhard Ott gives a comprehensive review of theological education's biblical-theological foundations (2016: 137-198).

How should we shape and practice theological education in Southern Africa? A number of different models are common, the most prominent in the African context being (1) a long history of Bible schools in mission; (2) the university model (that has become secular and humanistic in most cases); (3) seminaries of local churches and denominations; and (4) a diverse collection of private education providers of theological education.

What is the best way forward for our churches and mission? A consideration of the mission of theological education in biblical and historical perspective will help guide us forward.

Making disciples

First, consider several examples from Scripture that are related to theological education today. As Christ concluded his earthy mission, He commissioned the New Testament church to make disciples from all nations by teaching them to obey his Word (Matthews 28:19-20). This command engenders many "disciple-making" activities: evangelism, apologetics, preaching, church planting, teaching, mentoring, etcetera, which all can be grouped under the teaching ministry of the church (including theological education).

Christ's command to make disciples, however, was not unique or original. What He commanded his church to do was what He had already been doing

Himself during His earthly ministry. Out of compassion for the spiritually harassed and helpless, Christ had called his disciples and sent them out to follow his example in ministry (Matthews 9:35-38 and 10:1ff).

In fact, Christ's disciple-making ministry during his earthly ministry was probably directly patterned after the prophet schools led by Samael, Elijah, Elisha and other early prophets in the Old Testament. Moreover Christ's theological education programme was much more than simply an academic study of Old Testament subjects; He trained disciples by his own example for the purpose of sending them out on mission. They were schooled in the Law of Christ (Matthews 5-7) and sent out into the surrounding communities to proclaim the gospel of Christ's coming kingdom.

The early church, in obedience to Christ's commission, continued this task of making disciples (Acts 6:7; 11:26; 14:21, 18:23; 19:9; 21:16; etcetera). Apollos, a gifted Jew from North Africa, is an example of this teaching ministry and serves as a prototype of the church's emerging theological education programme: He was eloquent and competent, but he did not know the full gospel truth. So Priscilla and Aquila "took him and explained to him the way of God more accurately" (Acts 18:26), with the outcome that he was used powerfully for gospel witness in the whole region.

Historical examples

Second, there are many historical examples at the intersection of theological education and missions. Space is too limited for a detailed treatment (see González 2015), but we must at least mention several historical examples of how theological education was used successfully in the mission of the church: The influential school in Geneva, led by John Calvin and other Reformers during the sixteenth century, illustrates the powerful reforming witness of a faithful theological education ministry. In God's providence, this single school sent about a thousand men into France (Reid 1983, De Boer 2012). These missionary-church planters (in contemporary terminology) were equipped by faithful theological education in order to give their lives for the spiritual conquest of the gospel in Europe.

Other historical examples include the Log Colleges in New England (1750-1825) – also known as schools of the prophets – that trained hundreds of men who were used by God to plant churches across the American colonies and expanding frontier (Kling 1997: 186).

Consider also the faithful theological education in Scotland during the 19th century that trained thousands of missionaries and many mission workers for urban ministry as well (Shaw 2004). Or consider the influential ministry of Alexander Duff (1806-1878) in India, a modern pioneer of the mission of theological education (Paton 1923).

Missional education

Third, theological education is a subset of the church's educational ministries that are performed in obedience to the Great Commission. As stated above, Christ's command to his church engenders many "disciple-making" activities, all of which can be grouped under the teaching ministry of the church. The training and equipping of an educated clergy has been and must also be included under this heading.

Christ's command to make disciples, however, is more comprehensive than only a teaching ministry *inside* the church – the training of our own for ourselves. It is an authoritative commission for the church's leadership to engage as witnesses in the teaching of all peoples from all nations – the education of others from other social groups for other church communities. Making disciples also includes theological education for audiences presently *outside* our own ecclesial communities.

So the goal of theological education must include an outward focus as well: just as Apollos was trained more accurately to become a powerful apologist for the region, just as Geneva trained missionary-martyrs for a neighbouring country, and just as the New England seminaries trained gospel-prophets for the frontier. Making disciples is the central ministry of the New Testament church and missional education is an essential method for fulfilling this commission.

Theological education serves the church by equipping all Christian believers for ministry work. It supports the church – both local and global – in its mission to fulfill Christ's command of making disciples from all nations. It serves the church by training the next generation of pastor-teachers, evangelists, apologists, and missionaries, for the ultimate goal of building up the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-12).

Educational philosophy

Fourth, biblical mission should serve as an underlying philosophy and methodology for theological education. There is growing support in recent literature for a missional model of theological education. In 1999, Robert Banks brought several conversations together in *Re-envisioning Theological Education* (see Niebuhr 1956, Farley 1983, Stackhouse 1988, Kelsey 1993).

Evangelical missiologists had already been pulling theological education in this direction, including many who were influenced by Ralph Winter, Ted Ward, and others (for examples, see essays in Conn & Rowen 1984, Woodbury, VanEngen & Elliston 1996, and later Penner 2005; also Greenway 2002, ICETE 2002). Now many evangelical educationists are following this multifaceted trajectory (Warford 2005, Cannell 2006, Shaw 2011, Das 2015, Ott 2016).

What does a missional model of theological education look like in practice? Simply stated, it sees the church's mission as the philosophical starting point (2 Timothy 2:2), the driving force (Matthews 28:19-20) and the context (Acts 1:8) for theological education. Missional theological education is the holistic training and sending out of passionate preachers with evangelistic zeal to preach Christ to the lost and dying, to pray earnestly for the Spirit to work with saving power, and to labour tirelessly to disciple new converts.

It is the shaping and equipping in the classroom of bold gospel apologists for the public square to expose idolatry and evil, to confront false teachers, to refute Satan's lie with biblical truth, and to equip the church with spiritual discernment. It is the inculcation of missional wisdom so that future church leaders have the necessary skills to contextualise gospel application and living in each ministry context.

Missional theological education works to build up local church communities to be faithful witness of Christ in their own cultures, and to serve for the reformation (i.e. spiritual transformation) of their own society. In short, theological education – in design, content, structure and goal – must keep central the task of gospel witness.

The church's mission must be the heartbeat of theological education. A missional model of theological education is not novel or aberrant. Rather, it is simply theological education – reconceived and realigned, if needed – under the banner of the church's mission, as has often been the case throughout church history (Ebenezer 2012).

Furthermore, not only has this model been greatly blessed by God in previous generations, but also there are several strategic motivations for a reviving of this model in Africa today, as we will consider below.

Thus biblical mission should inform and shape our practice of theological education today. This is true in many ways, as outlined above: Spiritually, we remain faithful to Christ's commission of making disciples from all peoples.

Historically, we continue the trajectory of theological education in the cause of God's mission, both locally and globally. Conceptually, we realign our education programmes under the banner of the church's mission. Theoretically, we assess our educational philosophies and methods by this higher biblical standard.

Motivations for missional Bible education

Why is missional education strategic for Southern Africa today? This philosophy of theological education is consistent with our biblical mandate as churches, and it has been proven in church history to be an effective methodology. Furthermore, there are many significant motivations for missional theological education, especially given the present challenges faced by the church in Southern Africa.

The context

First, missional education is urgently needed in Southern Africa. The vast majority of church leaders in Africa have had very little or no theological training beyond a basic level. Access to formal higher education is usually limited for various reasons, so quality theological education at all levels is urgently needed in almost all regions.

Additionally, there are countless false teachers in Africa who – simply out of ignorance or due to misguided motives – twist God's Word to the destruction of many (Acts 20:20, 2 Peter 3:16). As a result of these sad realities, contemporary examples of educational and spiritual abuse abound in Southern Africa, and all the while God's people are being destroyed by a lack of biblical knowledge.

The example of theological education in the New Testament church gives helpful guidance here (Acts 18:24-28): as mentioned above, Apollos was a passionate preacher and apologist. But he had an incomplete knowledge of the gospel, which if uncorrected would likely have led to much confusion and false teaching in the region. So when Priscilla and Aquila realised the problem, "they took him and explained to him the way of God more accurately".

Note the elements of this history with strong parallels to the present situation: a passionate preacher with incomplete knowledge of the gospel, two faithful teachers who found suitable ways to resolve this challenge, and the outcome of a powerful apologetic witness in the whole region and beyond.

Missional education is urgently needed today to serve the church in Southern Africa. The present network of theological education institutions is not able to address the vast need for properly trained church leaders, also since many institutions focus primarily on needs within a specific church community and do not have an outward-facing ministry focus on the needs beyond traditional ecclesiastical boundaries. Different models and methodologies must be employed – time-tested methods that can educate the large number of presently-serving church leaders who urgently need access to further theological training.

There are many gifted men who, like Apollos, urgently need to be taught the Word “more accurately” by faithful educators. Conversely, the number of false teachers and cases of spiritual abuse are likely to increase if the lack of biblical knowledge within church communities continues. So missional theological education, which historically has been very effective, should be used again to disciple faithful teachers and church leaders, who may in God’s sovereign providence be used to initiate the reformation of an entire region.

The purpose

Second, missional education keeps the focus on spiritual goals. The purpose of theological education is serving the church by equipping all Christians and especially ministry leaders. In practice, this means training pastor-teachers, evangelists, apologists, and missionaries to equip all believers for building up the church (Ephesians 4:11-12ff).

Evangelical education consultant Bernhard Ott summarises (2016: 197): “Theological education is undertaken with the whole horizon of God’s project (*missio Dei*) in view. Theological education serves the church in its mission. It equips people for the various ministries in (and of) the church, which is sent into the world.

“Theological education understands equipping to be about more than abilities and accomplishments. It will train people in powerlessness and dependency upon the activity of the Spirit of God. The church is the home of theological education ...”

Theological education’s purpose is spiritual service, which must be more than only an academic exercise. The goal of this education is more than only the promotion of knowledge and critical thinking, since it also includes character formation and the inculcation of moral foundations. The desired outcome of this education is more than only personal skills development or social transformation according the prevailing ideology. Theological

education is a higher calling, a spiritual ministry, which must serve the mission of Christ's church.

The content

Third, missional education promotes holistic biblical piety. Theological education must be holistic, not compromised in biblical spirituality, intellectual pursuit, or ministry practice – an approach often expressed by the well-known triad “head-heart-hands.”

This holistic approach, however, is not being promoted by some theological education institutions in Southern Africa today. For example, some institutions, which once were guided by biblical principles of Christian higher education, have become distracted by unbiblical philosophies and liberal theologies.

The content of theological education must maintain a healthy balance of spirituality, academics, and skills development. A helpful example of this balance is seen in the ministry of Gisbertus Voetius (1589-1676). He strongly supported one of the first Protestant missionary training schools (1622) and was the first Protestant theologian to develop a comprehensive theology of mission (Jongeneel 1991).

He is also known for his long ministry in both the church and the academy, and especially for his methodology of integrating Reformed scholasticism and Reformed piety (Beeke 1999). Southern Africa needs more of the missional passion and intelligent piety of Voetius. This passion and piety must be engendered in many future church leaders by a theological education ministry that focuses holistically on the “heart and heart and hands”.

The curriculum of theological education in Africa today must be carefully designed to avoid a number of errors:

It must not become an anti-intellectualism that promotes emotionalism or mysticism in place of intellectual spirituality and the careful application of God's wisdom.

Nor should it be confused by the modern secular illusion of a spiritually-neutral academy where science is not subordinated to the authority of Christ and where the pursuit of new knowledge is untethered from the final authority of Scripture.

Nor should theological education be distracted by the pragmatic production of measurable results for individual or social upliftment, a passion that when misdirected will eclipse the spiritual needs and ministry of the church.

Theological education must purposefully integrate biblical spirituality, intellectual practice and missional zeal.

The structure

Fourth, missional education strengthens the church's role. There are many ways to structure the relationship between theological education and the church. Historically there has been a spectrum of governance structures ranging from denominational seminaries directly under the control of the church to para-church theological education institutions like Bible colleges and mission schools. It is wise, therefore, to ask the question: what model and structure best serves the purpose and activity of the church?

Many have approached this question by identifying various models of theological education in relation to the philosophy of education (Rooy 1988, Edger 2005, Das 2015); such typologies usually include the following with varying labels:

- The catechistic model, which was used by the early church to prepare members for church life and ministry.
- The monastic model, which formed spiritual leaders in the context of communal living.
- The scholastic or university model, with a greater emphasis on academic study that often forced a shift away from the church and to the academy as the place of learning.
- The clerical or seminary model, with the primary purpose of theological education for the renewal of the church, usually with emphasis on vocational or professional training.
- The discipleship or apprenticeship model, which emphasises the relationship between mentor and students and the importance of practical training.

Another approach in answering the question of structure is to consider what characteristics contribute to effectiveness of theological school governance (Ferenczi 2015: 98-99).

In practice, the structural design of a theological education institution has often been pragmatic, based on various factors: what the church has always done for the past centuries; what other institutions are doing successfully; or simply an incremental response to the present need for educated church leadership along with the desire for this training being guided by a church-related ministry.

During past two centuries, most theological education institutions in Africa were developed over time, first by missionaries and later by church groups, usually following modified versions of the European university model (Pobee 2013, González 2015).

Intentional thought, however, should be given the governance model and structure of theological education. An organisational structure must be designed to serve the mission and purpose of an institution; thus it follows that theological education institutions should be structured to serve the church and its mission.

A missional structure for theological education should seek to combine the strengths of various historical models (Cheesman 1993). While the specifics of an organisational structure need to be contextualized to best serve the present situation of a particular community, the church and its mission must remain a guiding principle for structural design and governance.

The vision

Fifth, missional education aids evangelism and apologetics. Theological education institutions have often been successful in producing an educated clergy for the church and biblical scholars for the academy. In addition to faithful pastors and scholars, however, the church in Southern Africa today urgently needs many more faithful evangelists, apologetists and missionaries.

At Christ's command, we pray that He will send forth more gospel labourers (Matthews 9:37-38) and we work to train the next generation of disciple-makers (Matthews 28:19-20). So a philosophy and model of theological education is required that serves the church by producing a broader and larger team of well-equipped ministry workers for outward-facing ministry.

The church also has a prophetic role within society at large. Evangelists must be equipped to promote gospel witness within pluralistic societies that are increasingly opposed to the Christian worldview and biblical morality. Apologists must be trained who winsomely defend God's truth in the marketplace and academy, and who boldly expose the lie of prevailing ideologies and idolatries.

Missionaries must be mentored who thoroughly know both God's truth and the sociocultural contexts to which they are sent. Church leaders – and all Christians – must be empowered to speak God's Word prophetically within society both as a gospel witness of God's mercy in Christ and as a solemn warning of God's pending judgements for all law-breakers. Missional

education keeps this vision in view – the urgent need for more gospel workers.

The legacy

Sixth, missional education protects the integrity of the church. Unfortunately there are many examples in church history of theological education institutions that, over time, have led entire denominations away from faithful biblical teaching and practice. Missionary educator Alexander Duff stated, “The church which ceases to be evangelistic will soon cease to be evangelical” (Lee 2008:81), to which can be added: the theological education institution that ceases to serve the church’s mission will soon cease to be biblical.

Conversely, faithful theological education has often been used by God to protect his church against false teaching and to guide it back to a purer confession, ministry, and public witness. Certain forms of education have at times in history been a great hindrance to the church’s mission, but an education ministry shaped with and motivated by the Spirit of mission is one of the most strategic methods for mission in developing countries today.

A missional education ministry has the potential – as in other periods of the past and with the Spirit’s blessing – to become a powerful catalyst for spiritual growth and church expansion in the majority world, and also for the revitalisation of churches in the Western world.

Practicing Reformed missional education

The mission of theological education is to serve in the mission of the church. We have considered this concept briefly from biblical and historical perspectives. We then outlined six motivations for promoting theological education within Southern Africa in service of the church. We now conclude with practical reflection on how missional theological education is being contextualised within Africa today.

What does missional theological education look like in practice for a particular place with its unique challenges? We answer this final question with the case study of Mukhanyo Theological College, a growing educational institution in South Africa that seeks to faithfully serve in the church’s mission.

The Mukhanyo ministry was started around 1985 in the KwaNdebele region, now part of the Mpumalanga province, located about 60km north-east of Pretoria. Similar to many Bible schools in past centuries, Mukhanyo’s

ministry was birthed by the informal training activities of missionaries sent to the region by South African and international churches. Their informal church-based training was gradually replaced with multi-level higher education in theology, and the ministry developed from a small missionary association to an established academic institution.

Formal post-matric Bible education at Mukhanyo was started in 1993. A list of several significant milestones since this small beginning sketches the trajectory of the present ministry: Formal degree-level education began in 1998, at first accredited via a South African university. The missionary association transitioned incrementally into indigenous governance structures in the early 2000s, being registered as a non-profit company in South Africa and eventually led by a local board of directors. The distance education programme was designed in 2008, at first as a pilot project that was greatly expanded over the next decade.

Mukhanyo was finally fully registered in 2009 by all necessary governmental bodies (DHET, CHE, SAQA) to offer accredited higher education. The teachers' education programme was started in 2010, and a second campus opened at Johannesburg city-centre in 2011. Additional regional centres soon followed: Pretoria in 2015, Rustenburg in 2018 and Durban in 2020. In 2021, Mukhanyo served 1 150 students, with 35 lecturers teaching at five regional campuses and about 160 tutors facilitating at 86 distance centres across Southern Africa.

Mukhanyo's mission and vision

Mukhanyo is “an academic intuition with a missional heart”. This slogan, published frequently in various promotional media, captures the essence of the ministry's mission and vision. Mukhanyo's mission is clearly stated: “We give glory to God by equipping church leaders and other Christians in Africa.”

The ministry is dedicated to preparing men for pastoral leadership and all Christians for the manifold ministries of Christ through his church, by providing holistic in-depth Bible teaching and in-service training to church leaders, pastors, teachers, missionaries, young people, and many others.

The vision of Mukhanyo's ministry is less explicit in its promotional material; but it can be summarised by the example of theological education in Acts 18:24-28: Mukhanyo comes alongside believers like Apollos, who are called by God and gifted to teach, but who must be taught “the way of God more accurately”.

God's method for reformation has usually been to raise up leaders in His church who are prepared to speak his Word with accuracy and boldness. So Mukhanyo seeks to cooperate with God by faithfully training all potential leadership-candidates who are sent to the college and who make a credible Christian profession.

In practice, Mukhanyo's mission and vision is realised by providing theological education that is accessible to the majority of churches in South Africa. This is accomplished by another frequently published statement: "We are a decentralised network of biblical training." An extensive decentralised network of 86 learning centres, supported by centralised management, promotes semi-autonomous mentorship in many local churches for contextualised learning.

This structure provides flexibility to continue the 200-year trajectory of Bible education in Africa, but now with a new model in response to changing global and social factors, and one that harnesses newer efficiencies of technology and other economies of scale. This unique model, within a growing network, aids Mukhanyo in advancing the biblical mission of theological education in Southern Africa.

Mukhanyo's passion is to serve the local church and its educational mission. The vision and desire of decentralised training is to empower local churches with their leaders. Thus a goal of this model is to relocate theological education within the local churches itself – not only physically within the church's building, but also conceptually among the church's leadership and community

Furthermore, while Mukhanyo's theological position is strictly prescribed by God's Word, the college seeks to serve all local churches from all local communities and all backgrounds and all historical trajectories and all theological persuasions in all locations across Southern Africa (Canons of Dordt: head 2, article 5).

The college leadership is convinced that the faithful teaching of God's Word is the most powerful and most effective method for reforming all churches and peoples – for all those who are willing to submit to the teaching of Christ and His Word.

Mukhanyo's philosophy of education

Several practical characteristics highlight and describe the philosophy of education that Mukhanyo has found to be effective in southern Africa.

First, Mukhanyo's teaching and learning environment is holistic. Teaching is more than simply conveying facts or reviewing a checklist of objectives; rather lecturers in theological education must serve as godly mentors in the lives of their students. As indicated above, teaching must be holistic: moulding the mind (head), shaping the character (heart), and training in ability and skill (hands).

Learning must also be holistic, not only academic achievements, but especially a growth in piety for service in the church, as the Apostle Peter encourages: a growth in the grace and knowledge of Christ (2 Peter 3:18).

Second, Mukhanyo's method equips students for ministry. The primary task of theological education is to serve church by preparing church leaders and ministry workers. This is done at Mukhanyo by equipping all Christians to understand and apply the Bible in their own communities, by developing church leadership skills to support church growth and inspire kingdom vision, and by empowering ministry leaders and their churches in diaconal ministries.

So Mukhanyo strives to motivate consistent intellectual, spiritual, and practical growth through spiritual mentoring and experience-developing opportunities. Ultimately, the final test of successful theological education is the student's ministry faithfulness for many years after graduation. Although such success is difficult to quantify and more difficult to consistently achieve, this goal must be kept in mind at all times by the academic team.

Third, Mukhanyo's model promotes group learning. The classrooms and distance centres are structured around learning that takes place within student cohorts. Often these cohorts are multi-ethnic groupings, with a diversity of social, ecclesial, and economic backgrounds represented in each classroom.

The frequent result is a community of trust among students that serves to breakdown former misconceptions and prejudices while also creating spaces for intense dialogue and mutual growth. It is common for such cohorts to become catalysts for mutual spiritual and academic support, forms for sharing ministry needs and challenges, and the formation of life-long friendships.

Fourth, Mukhanyo's model promotes in-service training. While there are some advantages of formal theological education following the university model, a great disadvantage is the common tendency to separate learning from ministry and theory from practice.

An in-service training model tries to keep the learning as close as possible to the practice. This is accomplished at Mukhanyo with a decentralised network that brings theological education to the students' locale (rather than expecting the students to come to a centralised learning facility) and by strongly encouraging all students to be actively engaged in gospel ministry while studying.

The disadvantage of in-service training is that students often need extra time to complete a theological qualification; but the advantages are much better: learning theology and theory while practicing ministry. The qualification itself as an academic achievement must not be seen as the ultimate goal; it is only a significant milestone in the journey of faithfulness in lifelong ministry and service within the church.

Mukhanyo's people and ethos

Finally, we discover the heart of missional theological education as we consider Mukhanyo's people and ethos. It begins with Mukhanyo's theological position and leadership that are grounded upon God's Word.

As a confessional institution, Mukhanyo's entire community professes salvation through faith in Christ alone and a desire for many people to experience the joy of actively living out this confession. Each year, all directors on the board, all employees serving in key positions, and all lecturers in all locations are required to publicly sign Mukhanyo's Statement of Faith, a document that affirms and is based on the historic creeds and confessions.

This annual event is symbolic, and it is reinforced by hiring practices and assessment policies that enshrine God's Word as the final authority for all faith and life (Westminster Confession of Faith: 1.2).

The people who serve in theological education are a strategic asset since they embody and promote the mission of the institution. At Mukhanyo, all staff members are required to live as Christians, as specified in all job descriptions: "Demonstrating faith in Jesus Christ as defined by the Bible and as expressed consistently through a godly lifestyle that radiates the fruits of the Holy Spirit with active participation in a Christian church."

Organisational piety is consistently promoted, especially by the leadership, which includes weekly devotions, prayer meetings, and spiritual support for all staff.

Most lecturers at Mukhanyo also serve as ministers or church planters in their local communities. This is strongly encouraged even though many lecturers can only teach part-time as a result. The advantage, however, is

that the classroom usually has a more practical ministry orientation, and it is demonstrated implicitly to students that the church's ministry is a high calling and of central importance.

The lecturers at Mukhanyo are encouraged to grow in ministry experience and academic outputs; they also continually seek to gain a better understanding of the communities in which the students serve so that they will be better equipped to address contemporary and urgent needs.

Some core modules of the curricula offer specialised studies in areas such as African Spirituality and African Church History, and all modules integrate contemporary issues into theological instruction for classroom discussions, theological study, and support for practical teaching.

Mukhanyo's zeal is unashamedly evangelistic: We desire to see students grow in their spiritual relationship with Christ and their knowledge of his Word, and even – in some cases – to come to a genuine faith in Christ for the first time, if for whatever reason they had previously been deceived.

We desire to see more people bow the knee before King Jesus and to see whole communities reformed according to biblical principles – this is the social transformation for which we pray and work.

We share Christ's heart of compassion for the harassed and helpless, so we urgently pray the Lord of the harvest to send forth more ministry workers (Matthews 9:35-38), even while we also labour to train the next cohort of faithful servants. In short, Mukhanyo's theological education ministry is wholly dedicated to serve the mission of Christ's church within Southern Africa, for God's glory.

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13. Reflections on an ambitious Bible translation project

Background

This article reflects on the development of an oral Bible translation project focusing on selected San languages across Southern Africa – its origins, design, challenges and outcomes. The story demonstrates the ability of the universal church to utilise its giftedness in a coordinated manner for the glory of God and illustrates how mission work (loving your neighbour) can unite the church.

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Indirectly, this project also benefited from the earlier work of anthropologists, linguists, missionaries, churches and non-governmental organisations such as WIMSA, the NyaeNyae Development Foundation and the Kuru Family of Organisations (e.g. Bokamoso and TOCaDI). Without their work, communities might have been more unstable and some languages possibly less viable for translation work.

The project (we) profited from organisational contacts and leadership structures that were already in place to advise us on how to proceed with the work. The tribal kgotla system in Botswana also greatly assisted us.

We benefited much from the infrastructure and community leaders of Word2Africa Botswana, a missions organisation – especially amongst the Ju|’hoansi and Khwe. In the same way, from the language projects, we gained indirectly from the heritage and experience of the works of Rev. Ferdi Weich amongst the Mangetti Dune !Xun, and Rev. Flip van der Westhuizen’s work amongst the Ju|’hoansi of the Gobabis area, the work of Patrick Dickens (1994) amongst the Ju|’hoansi of Tsumkwe (Dahm Xixae received his training in this manner), also emphasising adult literacy and teacher training. In the same way, the Naro Language Project assisted with its wealth of experience and support for translation, literacy development and Scripture engagement work.

The Reformed Churches in South Africa (GKSA) also played a vital role in the development of this project (especially during the time when Rev. Braam le Roux and his church council started the first efforts at writing scripture and transcribing songs in Naro. This resulted in the calling of Hessel & Coby Visser from the Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, in close cooperation with SIL International, to assist with the translation of the Bible into Naro. As you will see, the dedication of this Naro New Testament in 2012 acted as catalyst for this project.

Introduction

The San people (or “Bushmen”, as some prefer) are acknowledged as being amongst the first peoples living in Southern Africa. However, until recently, there have been only a few efforts to translate the Bible into San languages¹ apart from the Zambezi region Kwhedam translation facilitated by Father Kapp of the Roman Catholic Church, and an earlier Ju|’hoansi translation by Rev. Van der Westhuizen of the Reformed churches in the Gobabis/Sandveld region. Sadly, these works were not authorised due to several shortcomings.²

Why were the San language groups left behind when other languages of wider communication in Southern Africa have had approved translations for decades? The answer ranges from the economics of Bible translation for

¹ *This reference is not to “Khoi” languages, such as Khoekhoegowab / Damara / Nama for which a Bible translation already existed, but to the San languages, which sound similar, but are typically spoken by much smaller populations.*

² *In the case of both these projects, external accountability structures (e.g. Bible societies) were not sufficiently involved, and there were design and accountability problems. In the case of Gobabis (an area where much Khoekhoegowab is spoken), translators were not all mother-tongue speakers, resulting in translation misunderstandings.*

small language groups to national politics, or even racism, or perhaps because previous mission work amongst the San always took place in languages of wider communication, such as Afrikaans or English or Setswana, due to the difficulty of the San languages for outsiders. Too few people have questioned the existing reality, but if the indigenisation of the church is important (and doesn't the Great Commission talk about 'ethnic' groups?), then people need to be able to hear the Word of God in their heart language.

There is significant evidence globally (De Vries, 2012; Maxey, 2009), especially amongst groups that prefer oral modes of communication, that oral Bible translation, together with oral Bible storytelling, can be an effective tool for spreading the gospel. God's Word in your heart language means that the God of the Bible is no longer a God who speaks a foreign language. He is also interested in "us" (i.e. our ethnic group).

With this global awareness as a backdrop, all that was needed in the context of the San was a catalytic event, responded to by strong leadership in the right places. The 2012 dedication of the Naro New Testament in D'Kar, Botswana, was a milestone event for the Naro people, and for the San in general. For many San, receiving the Word of God in their heart language was also a moment of social and political recognition.

Bible translation can be a ministry with potential to touch the heart of a nation or tribe on an emotional level, especially the marginalised. Not only is Bible translation a powerful investment in a people group, but for the church it is a call for greater witness, giving sincere believers access to the Word of God.

After the Naro New Testament dedication, other San/Bushmen tribes cried out to also receive the Bible in their languages – especially in printed form. The time seemed right to pursue a project to identify feasible languages for Bible translation amongst the San people.

But what would such an investment in Bible translation into "more of the San languages" look like? Although many would crave a printed Bible, the huge investment in time needed for developing orthographies, and language dictionaries, and community literacy classes would neither be effective nor feasible in this context. Project partners decided that an initial approach should be oral – also because San people are primarily oral communicators. For this reason, even the existing Naro translation also utilised audio recordings in addition to the written translation.

This new project envisaged an oral translation project that had to be

accurate but communicate effectively to San people, to promote life transformation, which was going to be practically challenging, considering the widely dispersed areas in which the small San communities were located. In addition, it was evident that despite the decline in San languages in recent decades, there were still a significant number of active or vital³ San languages in Southern Africa (Le Roux & White, 2004). Note that these are languages and not dialects, as is often assumed.

The project originally focused on eleven languages of which four were ‘cross-border’ languages: Botswana/Namibia, Zimbabwe/Botswana and South Africa/Namibia/Botswana. During the second phase (2016 onwards), it continued with nine languages, as indicated on the map. In the simplified second phase of the project, the decision fell on taking on only one cross-border language: Ju|’hoansi.

The map on the next page shows the language groups that were part of the second phase of this project. Note that some of these languages also have counterparts in neighbouring countries like Angola and Zambia (like Khwedam and SE !Xun), but we did not interact with these communities during this project.

The formation of partnerships

In 2012, discussions by Sebastian Floor, The Seed Company Area director for Southern Africa at the time with Bible translation partners, eventually involved the following partners and contributors:

Funding and prayer support

The Seed Company from Arlington Texas, an affiliate of Wycliffe Bible Translators, agreed to source funding and prayer support from organisations and individuals in the USA.

Governing partners

Wycliffe South Africa became the administrative and governance partner, together with the Bible Societies of Botswana, Namibia and South Africa.

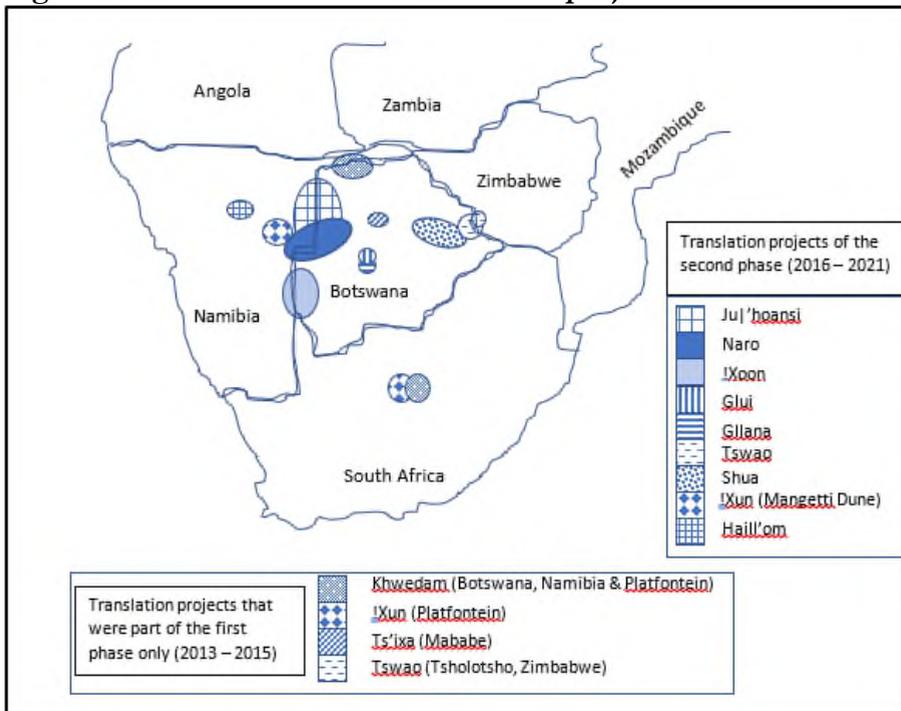
Key representatives:

- From WycliffeSA, Roland Seiler and Tshegofalo Siele
- From the Bible Society of South Africa, Ephraim Baloyi
- From the Bible Society of Namibia, Schalk Botha
- From the Bible Society of Botswana, Gabriel Tshuaneng and Portia Baloyi

³ *According to linguists and anthropologists, there used to be about 25 distinct San languages in Southern Africa.*

- The Summer Institute of Linguistics made available their translation consultant (Hessel Visser) and Scripture engagement coordinator (Coby Visser).

Figure 1: Relative locations of translation projects



Impact partners

Not all individuals (e.g. translators) are listed, only organisation representatives and coordinators.

- Naro Language Project in Botswana – Marea Camm and Osego Serame
- Sudan Inland Mission (SIM): Dave & Ginny Long, with significant support from Mmamoeti Moabe from Ukhwi
- Botshelo Trust (Shakawe, Botswana): Dahm Xixae and Robert Motinka
- Reformed Church Sanveld (Gobabis, Namibia): Rev. Tshidiso Moletsane, with significant support from Johannes Abusema
- Dutch Reformed Church (Tsumkwe, Namibia): Rev. Gerrie Cwi
- “DEGNOS” ministry (Grootfontein, Namibia): the late Rev.

- Hendrik van Zyl and Rev. Lucas van Vuuren
- “Tora Dao” non-profit trust in Nata: Blesswell Kure, Kgosi Kgaswa and Kgosi Tlwaelang from Dukwi
- In the case of the Tswao language between Zimbabwe and Botswana, Davy Ndlovu needs to be commended for his efforts to support the translation work, even after it was decided to continue only on the Botswana side.

Other organisations and individuals

Key players in the different geographic areas included tribal chiefs, translators, exegetes and review committees, as well as numerous churches and individuals who gave their support for the project. People who were involved practically in all of the localities, were the following:

- The translation consultant Hessel Visser and Scripture engagement coordinator Coby Visser
- The coordinators of the San Bible Partnership – Moronga Tanago and Eben le Roux
- Jacobus and Darine Conradie, field coordinators of The Seed Company during the 2nd phase of the project
- Franz and Brenda Bense provided Bible training in each of the different settings amongst translators utilising the Firm Foundations training, typically over three to five days at a time
- Durk Meijer, vernacular media and orality specialist, trained translators in orality principles and skills, joined later by his colleague John Stark from Spoken
- Para-church organisations such as Global Recordings Network⁴, DAVAR Partners International⁵ and MegaVoice⁶)
- Global Recordings Network (GRN) became a vital contributing partner during phase 2 (2016-21). GRN provided recordist training and helped equip the teams with state-of-the-art recording equipment
- Dalene Joubert needs to be acknowledged for the endless hours of editing and mastering recordings and enabling a web platform for the distribution of the Scripture passages in all the languages of the partnership.

⁴ <https://globalrecordings.net/en/za>

⁵ <https://davarpartners.org/>

⁶ <https://megavoice.com/>

Project design

Project design proved challenging, given the large number of partners. After significant discussions a new platform, the San Bible Partnership, was established to guide the project. In good fellowship different partners hosted meetings in Botswana, Namibia and South Africa.

Implementation required long hours on the road and multiple meetings with stakeholders in language communities. Numerous translator training workshops were held in the various localities. Where we had no impact partners, local project coordinators were appointed and trained to facilitate translation workshops and provide financial and narrative reports to the funding organisation.

As for the scope of the translation work: we decided on a set of forty key passages from the Old Testament and the New Testament, similar to selections by New Tribes Mission, in their chronological evangelistic programme called Firm Foundations (McLlwain and Eversen, 1991). A second and third set of chronological Bible passages were added, totalling over a hundred passages.

Methodology

As mentioned above, there was the dual aim of 1) producing *an accurate translation* and 2) focusing on *how effectively the passage is communicated orally* with local people.

But how did this work in the real world?

Typically, the process started with exegesis of a passage, followed by orally producing a draft translation which would be recorded, back-translated and checked by the exegete. Exegetes and consultants are not usually mother-tongue speakers and need word-by-word back translation into the language of wider communication to follow exactly what the translation communicates.

The translators went into the communities to share the passage and check its ability to communicate naturally and effectively (where possible, they were supported with mp3 recordings of the drafts they tested), and then returned with feedback.

During the next translation workshop, improvements would be made, and the second draft would be developed collaboratively, and recorded. This second draft would then be ‘transcribed’ if this was an option (not all languages had orthographies). A (sometimes word-for-word) back-translation would also be prepared, to assist the translation consultant with

checking the translations. Consultant comments often resulted in revised recorded drafts which had to be community-checked again. Some translation teams met monthly; others fortnightly. Community checking took place in-between these translation sessions.

During the second phase of the project, translation teams started using the Paratext translation software.⁷ This was a game changer, because not only did it provide a more effective way of organising translated passages, offering a wealth of resources through access to translations, but it assisted greatly in getting more frequent feedback from the translation consultant, which significantly reduced the time it took to finalise translations.

A real challenge in oral translation is that if the translation of a key term changes in the course of the translation work then all previous uses of the term need to be changed. Paratext makes it easy to locate instances where such key terms occur, whether in back-translations or in transcriptions, and makes changes consistently.

Doing re-recordings was a responsible task, however, and every recording had to be back-translated and transcribed (if possible) to verify that changes were correct, and that no new errors crept in.

Once the translation consultant approved a translated passage, the recording would be sent to Global Recordings Network (GRN) in Cape Town for it to be “mastered” or audio checked, prior to transferring it to the GRN server in Sydney, Australia.

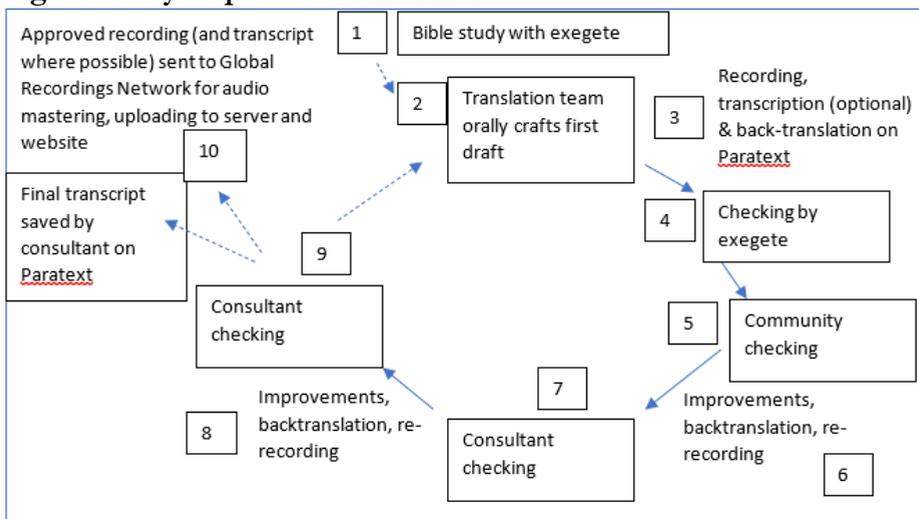
Final sound files were uploaded on the GRN website, for immediate access and download by anyone in the form of mp3 files. Towards the end of the project the approved Scripture portions were reproduced on solar powered Audible and MegaVoice players for use in the communities. In Platfontein, South Africa, passages were also shared on radio – XK FM.

The development of the process described in Figure 2 is similar to the “Himba approach” as described by Floor (2018) which is a good illustration of the interaction between written translation and oral translation – something that this project also grappled with. Making use of print was not a concern here, since the translation work was developed based on authoritative print translations, and there were transcriptions during different stages – particularly once we started using Paratext.

The following diagram is an attempt to capture this process.

⁷ <https://paratext.org/>

Figure 2: key steps in oral translation



However, the oral crafting process ensured that the passages that were translated and checked (told and listened to) by people communicated well orally also. Written transcriptions were a by-product in some cases, but the main emphasis was on producing a recording that communicated well. After all, this was the goal from the beginning: accurately transferring biblical concepts in a local way.

The head of Scripture engagement for SIL in Southern Africa, Coby Visser from Gantsi arranged several Scripture engagement workshops to teach people more effective Bible “storytelling” with Bible passages. Orality consultants such as Ruben Dubei and Durk Meijer also helped to equip translators and storytellers or narrators.

In most areas, storytelling or drama was mainly used by translators during community checking. However, in the Gantsi area, a team of storytellers told stories in surrounding communities, regularly reporting true engagement by the communities with the translation work as well, as these brought closer collaboration between churches due to the emphasis on Scripture.

Coby Visser gives feedback about two noteworthy occurrences from storytelling workshops in the Gantsi area: One day a man named Cg’ase came to the clinic in town for treatment. He had to wait. He then discovered that there was a workshop close by and he decided to attend, even though he did not know what it was about. He enjoyed the workshop so much that he stood up and said “I came here to be helped for a health problem, but

instead, I received so much more. I ask you please to come back and hold this workshop in my town, where there are still many people who do not follow God.”

A chief of a certain village attended a storytelling workshop even though he himself was not San. At first, he was not interested in what was shared. However, in the consecutive days of the workshop, his attitude changed, as he learned about the application of the Bible on his life. This discovery was so profound for him, that he then indicated that he would ensure that a group meet on a weekly basis to listen to the Word of God, and then to share these stories with others.

Scripture engagement was not limited to storytelling and drama, however. The positive impact of the literacy classes of the Naro language project had been known for years, as well as the contribution of the Naro choir to teach people Scripture passages in song, since the 1980s and 1990s.

As a result of the powerful effect of songs and music, the Naro language project continued conducting song-writing workshops, which inspired the translation group in the north of Botswana to do the same. The powerful effect of songs was also experienced by Eben le Roux and Moronga Tanago in the north of Botswana when numerous Khwe people attended a gathering where scriptural passages were sung by a local choir.

Results

The passages listed in the table on the next page have been uploaded onto GRN’s website (www.globalrecordings.net) and can be downloaded onto a computer or smartphone. GRN developed a smartphone App called “fish” which is available on Google Playstore and Itunes, and which makes it easy to download, store and access these translations.

The link will give you an experience of one of the translated passages - in this case, 2 Timothy 3:16 in Ju|’hoansi, narrated by Gagotswegope Xao in Shakawe: <https://globalrecordings.net/en/program/66255>

Table 1: Production outcomes (at the time of writing, June 2021)

Locality	Languages	Total verses	Number of Bible passages approved
D'kar, Gantsi, Botswana	Naro		159 Scripture portions
Gantsi, Botswana	G ana		89 Scripture portions <i>Combined project due to similarities between G ui and G ana</i>
	G ui		
Nata, Botswana	Shua		12 Scripture portions
Nata, Botswana	Tswao		12 Scripture portions
South western Botswana	!Xoon		62 Scripture portions; (!Xoon also has an oral translation of Gospel of Luke. The translation preceded the San partnership but was revised and re-recorded)
North-West Botswana	Ju 'hoansi (Shakawe, Botswana)		23 Scripture portions
North eastern Namibia	Ju 'hoansi (Tsumkwe, Namibia)		Genesis 1-14 (complete chapters) plus 9 other Scripture portions.
Namibia North	Hai 'om		Genesis 1-3
Namibia North	!Xun (Mangetti Dune)		Genesis (11 selected chapters between Genesis 1 and 41, plus 3 portion of chapters); Exodus (3 chapters and one chapter portion); Numbers - two portions.
Namibia East	Gobabis Ju/'hoansi language		15 Scripture portions
<i>Caprivi area of Namibia</i>	<i>Khwedam</i>		<i>Terminated in 2017 due to opposition from another Bible translation initiative in the same language.</i>
<i>Mababe, Botswana</i>	<i>Ts'ixa</i>		<i>Only 2 passages translated. Project was terminated due to limited community interest.</i>
<i>Zimbabwe</i>	<i>Tsoa</i>		<i>Did not start - language almost identical to Tsoa spoken in Nata, and logistically it was difficult to work in Zimbabwe.</i>

Challenges experienced

This project encountered four main challenges – misunderstandings about orality, partner expectations, community dynamics and project management issues.

Misunderstanding orality

The idea of orally translating the Bible was a relatively new concept and it challenged traditional ideas about Bible translation, initially leading to mis-

understandings.

Some thought translating stories was not real Bible translation. As a result, for example, the Board of the Bible Society of Botswana forced it to withdraw from the San Bible Partnership; the Platfontein community in South Africa was also not interested in orality and pushed for a written translation. This led to the development of a written translation project for !Xun and Khwedam in Platfontein, which is also open to these language communities even in Botswana and Namibia.

This was perhaps the greatest challenge that affected the project: people had different understandings of orality.

Differing partner visions / expectations

As mentioned above, we highlighted two approaches to translation. Some partners who emphasised ‘life transformation’ believed that the internalisation of passages before translation was important – not just for producing a natural translation, but also to empower translators to be more effective witnesses. Others emphasised translating passages in a live fashion from a language of wider communication (such as Afrikaans or Setswana), without emphasising internalisation of passages. These differences created tensions, especially in terms of measuring success.

Another example: The San Bible Partnership tried to work with another Bible translation partner which was doing a written translation into Khwedam. We focused on passages that they had not yet translated, and used their translators as a review committee for the oral work. After several passages, however, the partner said they did not want us to translate orally into Khwedam anymore, since there were too many misunderstandings, and they encouraged us to focus on Scripture engagement only.

Challenges relating to community dynamics

Political challenges and assimilation

Working with marginalised minority groups is always difficult, and in several areas the project was not welcomed initially. Often, tribal chiefs were not San, and local San leaders had to convince these chiefs of the benefit of the project.

In Zimbabwe, this project was treated with a lot of skepticism especially by local police at the beginning, since the San group there had been extremely marginalised. In other areas, such as the East of Botswana, the chiefs were supportive, but the people reluctant, satisfied to embrace the language and culture of wider communication.

Local opportunism

In local areas, it is difficult to know who the right people are to work with, and we were at the mercy of local dynamics, especially where there was no local impact partner. Often, opportunistic individuals tried to get access to the project funds.

In one community, an individual appointed by the community to coordinate the project pocketed the funds himself instead of paying the translators for work done during translation workshops. The case was opened with the police but there has been no progress nor prosecution up to the time of writing.

Often opportunistic community members were voted onto translation steering committees and review committees, causing endless debates about payments and food.

Working with unbelievers

Bible translation often involves working with communities and individuals who are essentially unbelievers. This can be very difficult, due to the differences in values and expectations. There were numerous occasions when the coordinators of the project nearly gave up on language groups during conversations at community level, due to local dynamics and opportunism.

Perhaps a brief account of how things can quickly go wrong can be shared: Sometimes, there was a sentiment in communities that people were making money somewhere utilising their pictures. We once had a visit from photographers of The Seed Company in the north of Botswana, to take pictures of the work that they were sponsoring. It was a blessed visit, for the most part.

However, one photographer took pictures of village children outside of our “safe space” of workshop participants, and upon her return to the USA, wanted to print a picture of one child with a bow and arrow onto T-shirts, to sell towards raising funds for Bible translation. She wanted to donate the profit of the sale towards the child’s education, which was about R7 000. The ensuing discussions with the alcoholic mother led to significant challenges, and ultimately the child did not benefit from the funds paid for use of the photo, as was the intention of the donation.

However, even though challenges faced by impact partners (working with opportunistic, jealous people, interested in money, power and politics) can be daunting and easily threaten the work, they also present wonderful opportunities for witnessing and discipling. The translation work is a good

example: Many translators are there for their language skills but need support on their journey of being confronted with the Word of God during translation or Scripture engagement.

A perception that written translations were more important

To many in language communities, Bible translation has socio-political ramifications. Therefore, in some language communities, like Platfontein, South Africa, we were told that the community was not interested in an oral translation – which to them seemed to not have the same value as a written translation. A community member made a comparison in the following way: “What we are being offered is a small vehicle; while what we need is a stronger and more capable 4x4 overland vehicle!”

Despite explaining that oral translations were often precursors to written translations, skeptical perspectives about orality persisted. Unfortunately, earlier on people were told that Bible passages will be translated and shared as “stories” for community checking, which led to perspectives that orality was about storytelling, without the same “accuracy” level as written translations.

It was difficult to explain that an oral approach to translation can be equally accurate and can lead to a translation that communicates naturally and effectively. Once a recording is made of an oral translation, it can then be written down on paper.

Project-related challenges

Translation challenges

Translation is a part of everyday life – it is utilised during meetings and on the streets, assisting people to communicate more effectively. This type of translation, however, is not good enough when it comes to translating the Bible.

Therefore, one of the first challenges entailed assisting translators to unlearn what they understood about translation, by demonstrating that 1) such translations may bring about theological errors (if the passage is not properly understood in its context), and 2) translating on paper too quickly can influence the ability of a translation to sound natural, the way people speak in a local context.

We soon realised that we needed to capture (i.e. record) rough drafts – even though it is often astounding to see the capacity of people from an oral background to repeat passages in the correct order, without omitting important information.

Durk Meijer, orality specialist, assisted us greatly, with frequent follow up visits, and helped us understand the importance of translating orally and not being bound to paper. We sometimes utilised drama, or even drew pictures on the ground, to assist memorisation or internalisation of passages.

In the end, the translation approach in some of the languages was a blend between written and oral. We tried to be accurate, and therefore recordings and transcriptions and back-translations became increasingly important; but we also still wanted the translated passages to communicate effectively, and therefore we still encouraged memorisation and story-telling.

We found ourselves learning from other projects that were also grappling with having oral and written elements, such as the Thimbukushu translation project between Namibia and Botswana, and the Himba project, as was mentioned earlier (Floor, 2011; 2018).

We do not have enough space to go into details on the following project-related challenges:

- ii) Financial reporting and administration
- iii) Transport logistics and the vastness of the area
- iv) Technological challenges
- iv) The need for impact partners

Outcomes and the way ahead

Bible translation glorifies God and demonstrates love for our neighbours. It transcends boundaries, it forces different parts of the body of Christ to work together and to practice good stewardship to the glory of God. It unites believers from across the globe, working together for the sake of the Great Commission.

A project like this can be a catalyst for future work in language communities. For example, the two San language communities in South Africa (Platfontein, Kimberley), started a written translation project with the Bible Society of South Africa. The Bible Society of Botswana is also planning to become involved again in the Ju|'hoansi project in the North of Botswana.

Another indirect consequence of the oral translation amongst the Ju|'hoansi in Botswana was the prospect of a printed version of the translation. Dahm Xixae, trained by Patrick Dickens and fully literate in Ju|'hoansi, transcribed all the oral passages with the intention of printing booklets as an additional contribution towards Scripture engagement and Ju|'hoansi language resources.

Inevitably, work in some languages will end after this project. This was an initial goal project with the intention of providing these nine languages with at least some orally translated passages of the Bible, in the form of recordings.

Further translation projects among some groups will depend on viability of languages, the financial costs to date, and production of translation teams during this initial project.

Note of appreciation

In this project God was working through people, utilising their various gifts for his glory and reminding us how we are all connected globally in Christ. The details of the project could sometimes be challenging, but we could work towards solutions; an example of how, if managed well, the meeting between international and local family members can be a blessing for all.

God should be praised for his work amongst the Naro, which inspired this project into a reality and for all participants in this story who all played an important role. There are various financial or prayer partners that we do not know about, who became involved because of the work of organisations like The Seed Company, Wycliffe SA or the Summer Institute of Linguistics, or churches abroad or in Southern Africa. May God bless them all.

We do not know what the long-term direct or indirect consequences of this work will be, but we thank the Lord for having mobilised his church so far in such a concerted effort. We pray that good work will continue amongst the San – whether in the form of Bible translation or other forms of Kingdom related work – for his glory.

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Simon Jooste serves the Reformed Church Southern Suburbs, a church plant in Cape Town

14. Re-form-ation and translation Commissioned to confess the cross in Cape Town

The Reformed Church Southern Suburbs (RCSS) was born in 2012 as a Bible study group in Rondebosch, Cape Town, under the oversight of Reformed Church Bellville (of the Reformed Churches in South Africa). She entered a unique world deeply complicated by intertwining legacies of political, economic and religious ambitions. RCSS officers and members alike have sought to wisely engage this cultural context while fulfilling their Christian duties both inside and outside the church.

Integral to this wisdom has been to clearly distinguish the Great Commission of the local church from various activities of secular institutions and communities common to everyone. This mission may sound compelling in theory, but how exactly has it been worked out on the ground at RCSS for almost a decade now?

In this essay I seek to distil certain doctrines and practices that have been at the heart of RCSS in her spiritual commission at the Cape of Good Hope. What is to follow may at times strike the reader as both unduly negative and complex. Yet, the contemporary theological and cultural climate of Cape Town necessitates such an approach. Not unlike the Apostle Paul's encounter with the church in Corinth, Christian life in Cape Town exists amid a culture that could be described as one of self-promotion for personal pleasure and political gain.

In view of her place in a broader social and political story, RCSS has sought to give an informed apologetic for and witness to the folly of Christ and him crucified for sinners (Acts 17; 1 Corinthians 1-2). This apologetic is

given especially in a context where the Great Commission has been in danger of being exchanged for various versions of social justice.

In the first part of this essay, I situate RCSS amidst a legacy of various political ideologies that have challenged the historic form and content of the Reformed tradition in South Africa. Second, I provide some insight into the power dynamics that have tempted the church to exchange her spiritual polity for a politically activist agenda. Third and finally, I set forth a recovery of the church's unique Great Commission mandate through the lens of the Reformed confessions in its cruciform key. Along with the best of the historic Reformed tradition, RCSS has sought to manifest the three marks of a true church by exercising the keys to the kingdom through her counter-cultural Word and sacrament ministry.

Ideology and deformation

Corinthian and Capetonian chaos

One way to describe the problems that Paul confronted in Corinth is a culture of self-absorption, self-inflation and self-recognition (1 Corinthians 5:6-8; 12:1-26; 14:38). The spiritual elites in this church – otherwise known as pneumatics – cared little for moral boundaries. Apparently the truly spiritual had freedom to bypass sexual, gender and worship forms (or patterns) ordained by God for the holiness and unity of the church. Hence, Paul spends a good deal of time in his first letter reigning in the self-centred “liberties” of the Corinthians. These so-called freedoms were centred predominantly around the uncontrolled sensual excesses of the body: escaping particularly through the genitals and the mouth (1 Corinthians 5; 8; 10-12; Neyrey 1986). Less pronounced was a thread of asceticism that devalued the institution of marriage (1 Corinthians 7).

Important to understanding the loosely chaotic use of the body in the Corinthian church is the phenomenon of the ancient Greco-Roman pagan religions out of which many of the believers had converted. Overlapping features of these religions that included the mystery cults and the religion of Apollo were an emphasis on ecstatic feelings that could be aroused through sexual expression and speaking in tongues (House 1983). In addition to the pagan spiritual element, the Corinthians were living in a city known for its hedonistic individualism, socio-political exhibitionism and selfish ambition for political gain (Thiselton 2000:12-13).

In a very profound sense, the spiritual deformities at Corinth served an intersection point for the idolatry of the Israelites that preceded them as well as the various iterations of a theology of glory that followed (1 Corin-

thians 8; 10). The sidelining of the Word of God that came after the spiritual ingenuity of the super-apostles and pneumatics in Corinth can be traced forward into post-Apostolic church history by way of various unbounded (read: anti-church establishment) spiritual movements. These movements have included mysticism, anabaptism, pietism, revivalism, evangelicalism, theological liberalism and Pentecostalism (Hart 2013; Clark 2008). These latter religious expressions have in turn been textured by the philosophical and political revolution otherwise known as postmodernism.

Like most Western cities today, Cape Town echoes many of the social, political and religious impulses toward personal gain that so animated first century Corinth and beyond. For one, the mother city is replete with religions, Christian and otherwise, that major on the expression of personal and communal experience (whether out of fear or fancy).

This spiritual dimension is embedded within a broader cultural where politicians, business leaders and social justice activists are bent on furthering their individual or group interests at the cost of the common good. In short, just as spiritual and civil deformities helped map the body of Christ in Corinth, the same has more or less happened in Cape Town. RCSS has attempted to resist this trend by believing and confessing the counter-cultural Word of God.

Legalism

While a libertarian form of spirituality where hedonistic self-indulgence predominated, Corinth was also known for its ascetic practices, specifically the withholding of conjugal rights (1 Corinthians 7). This kind of sensual self-deprivation, however, is not uncommon in the New Testament witness. Beyond the hypocritical and outdated discipline of the Jews that Jesus confronted, Paul addresses dangerous spartan acts of piety in his letter to the Colossians (Matthew 23; Colossians 2). It is these kinds of rigid and regulated forms of spirituality that are ordinarily associated with legalism. That is substituting God's law or any human law for Christ crucified as the grounds for salvation (Galatians 3:10).

Yet, a legalistic eclipse of justification by faith alone can happen not only through disciplined deprivation in private or in the church. It can also happen through organised spiritual chaos, as in the case of Corinthian church at worship (1 Corinthians 10-12). Also through political ideologies that shape Christian identity inside and outside the church. In short, legalism can be chaotic or regulated, emotional or stoic, reclusive or highly politicised.

Theocracy, ideology and Christian nationalism

The term “ideology” is often used in modern political discourse. Yet, if understood as a belief system, it most certainly can be applied to the religious realm as well. I use the term to highlight the troubling intersection of religion and politics in the history of South Africa. (A phenomenon that has impacted the church into the twenty first century, including RCSS.)

To be sure, the marriage of the sacred and civil, church and state, have enjoyed God’s blessing at times throughout human history. Following Adam’s fall into sin in the temple of Eden and after the period of the patriarchs, God made a covenant with Moses that was in important respects like the covenant at creation. In this covenant set forth in Deuteronomy, God curbed the stubborn reality of sin through judicial laws and sanctions that prefigured final judgment. Unlike during the time of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob’s sojourn, Israel’s enjoyment of the Promised Land mirrored that of Eden insofar as there was no separation of church and state. The land of Canaan was a theocracy (holy sanctuary or temple) flowing with milk and honey in anticipation of heaven (Kline 2000).

When Jesus established the New Testament church there is a return to something like the exile experience of the patriarchs in the book of Genesis. This is because Christ brought the Old Covenant to fulfilment, including the judicial and ceremonial laws of theocratic Israel (Matthew 5-7; Hebrews 8). This means that the church no longer reigns over or colludes with the state. Civil government has her own God-ordained authority and mandate that is distinct from the church. It has in view the well-being of all people in common, believers and unbelievers alike (Genesis 8-9; Romans 13; VanDrunen 2020: Part 1).

With the end of the Old Covenant era and the inauguration of the New, God’s covenant of grace now unfolds against the backdrop of his common grace covenant with Noah. This covenant is understood as a temporal arrangement “housing” the state and all other institutions and communities outside of the church (Genesis 8-9; 15-17; VanDrunen 2020: Part 1). Yet, it is easy for the church to confuse the cultural mandate with the Great Commission. It is tempting for the church to co-opt the Bible to further civil agendas, both noble and otherwise.

Examples of this politicising of the faith in post-apostolic times have been numerous. Most famous perhaps has been the socio-political experiment of Christendom that dominated the church for a good one thousand years. Only to be destabilised by the sixteenth century Protestant Reformation.

Not to be missed is the fact that both the politically active Roman Catholic Church and the privatised movement of medieval monasticism practiced a kind of piety that sought to transform all of life into the one kingdom of Christ (VanDrunen 2010). The former did so by advancing into society to take it over for Christ. The latter, disillusioned by the established church and against the world at large, sought to establish a counter Christian culture by retreating to the fringes.

In the mid-sixteenth century Martin Luther played a pivotal role in the recovery of an Apostolic and Augustinian vision of giving Christ and culture, church and state, each their own distinct authorities and boundaries (VanDrunen 2010: chap. 2). Yet, a tendency to keep separate has survived into the present day. From the Anabaptist revolt of the counter-reformation and Puritanism on both sides of the Atlantic to Kuyperianism in Holland and the Christian nationalism of apartheid in South Africa, the church has had no shortage of forays into politics (VanDrunen 2010b; Hart 2013).

On the surface, the church's attempt to reform broader society appears to be both pragmatically useful and admirable. This especially in the South African context where poverty, crime and all other forms of injustice run rampant. Yet, upon closer scrutiny it becomes apparent that to ascribe to the church as an institution the mission of fulfilling the mandate of cultural institutions like the state is to at worst put in jeopardy the very gospel itself. For Jesus Christ, as the Second Adam, came to fulfill the covenant that the first Adam broke. This covenant (of works) includes the cultural mandate (Genesis 1-3; 8-9; Romans 5; 1 Corinthians 15). In other words, transforming institutions outside of the church into the kingdom of heaven – as if “Christianising” society is official church ministry – is to run the risk of denying the finished work of Jesus Christ.

The mission of the church is not to call Christians to step back into the shoes of the first Adam and work toward heaven. Rather, she is called to preach new obedience out of gratitude for eternal life already earned by Jesus (Colossians 3; Heidelberg Catechism Part III). While the state and other institutions like commerce are legitimate, they are not only temporary, but also include both believers *and* non-believers alike who are to work side-by-side for the common good. When the church interferes with civil affairs, not only does she risk obscuring the gospel, but also introduces unnecessary antagonism into relationships with non-Christians.

RCSS has sought to be aware of the above history of temptations. Complicating the church's ministry in today's Cape Town context is that while race-based nationalism and Marxist-socialism may be waning, post-modern identity politics has presented a fresh set of temptations for sinful men bent toward promoting self- and group-interests.

Postmodernism and power plays

Political liberalism and Marxism take a postmodern turn

Important to understanding the broader anti-apartheid movement are both the insights of political liberalism and classical Marxism. More dominant within the Reformed family of churches in its anti-apartheid role has been the prophetic critique of Marxism by way of liberation theology. While liberation theology lives on to some degree behind the activist impulse within progressive churches in South Africa, more pronounced in South Africa's new political dispensation is the influence of the postmodern notion of social justice.

Like the social critique of classical Marxism, the postmodern ethics represent the latest secular ideology to make inroads into the church's conception of morality and the kingdom of God (cf. Du Plessis 2018; Resane 2021; Marais 2019; Punt 2006). Simply put, postmodernism is a radical revision of the notion of "objective truth" away from reason and embodiment to social constructions based on language. For the postmodern activist, ethics or justice are the subjective and destabilising invention of the oppressed to cut down the oppressor to an equal or lesser standing in relation to everyone else (Pluckrose and Lindsay 2020).

Power plays

Like many philosophical and ethical frameworks throughout human history, postmodernism represents a mixed bag for Christian apologetics. Among its redeeming traits is its exposure of the layered power plays embedded between persons, communities and institutions. This insight is very much in keeping with the biblical narrative. If the propensity of the fallen human heart is toward usurping the sovereign rule of God through self-worship or worship of the other, then it makes sense that history is peppered with one chapter after another of subjugation and oppression.

From Adam and Eve's attempt to co-reign with God and Cain's murder of Abel to the slew of wicked Israelite kings and the jockeying for social superiority in Corinth, fallen man has been bent on getting the upper hand in all realms of life, especially the religious. In fact, religious grandiosity

feeds all attempts to snatch power, whether through one's own person or vicariously through another (Genesis 1-3; 11; Romans 1).

Yet, it is not as if postmodernism has been the first secular philosophical or political movement to expose the way individuals and groups seek to dominate each other. Political liberalism has a rich history of exposing the disparities of power and privilege between the likes of races and genders. Furthermore, socialism has been helpful insofar as it has unmasked the material inequities between classes and ethnic groups due to the excesses of capitalism driven by human greed.

All three of these political theories, still more or less operative in the South African context, have helped in their own ways to critique the legacies of colonialism, nationalism and prejudice that have fed racism and a multiplicity of other social ills. For this, every South African should be grateful. Every Christian can rejoice in this evidence of God's common grace at work (Romans 2 and 13; Matthews. 5:45).

When civil justice becomes oppressive ideology

It is not difficult to convince anyone that civil governments through world history have struggled to use their power wisely for good. Again, this is because of man's sinful propensity is to covet glory for himself instead of giving it to God (Isaiah 40). All human beings that bear God's image have an innate sense of moral justice. This enables an ability to exercise civil governance in a relatively righteous way (Genesis 1:26, 9:6; Romans 2 and 13). Yet at the same time, there resides in the human heart an irrepressible desire for self-aggrandisement. We love to lord it over God and our neighbours.

Evidence for the above claims abounds in human history. There has been the outright pagan domination of the likes of Egyptians, Babylonians and Romans. More sanitised has been the social "good" of Nazi nationalism and communism. Then there have been the instances of church grabs for power like those by the medieval Roman Church and during South African Apartheid.

The latest addition to the catalogue of oppression that has gripped the West since the mid-twentieth century has come by way of postmodern identity politics. Not to be overlooked in this development in both philosophy and ethics is an early nihilistic deconstructionism that has in recent decades been replaced with a "social justice", a program now regarded by the left as the

“truth” to live and be judged by. This “reified”¹ postmodernism has taken the noble agenda of modern political liberalism, which seeks to create an equal society based on the insights of science and reason and twisted it into an oppressive ideology of identity foreign to the 1960s civil rights movement and subsequent successes of political liberalism (Pluckrose and Lindsay 2020; Hicks 2011).

Things are complicated further for the contemporary church amid this socio-political history. This happens when otherwise good civil endeavours become part of her mission. When the body of Christ tries to act like, appropriate or meddle in the affairs of organisations like the state and commerce, she undermines her uniquely countercultural way of life. Perhaps the most striking indication of this incongruity from Scripture is that the state has been entrusted with the sword to punish wrongdoers in society (Romans 13).

In sharp contrast, Christians in the church are called to turn the other cheek when wronged and extend mercy to the sinner (Matthew 5-7). Other profound instances of the church’s counter-intuitive spiritual order include an abundance of resources that transcends economic scarcity; the free offer of the gospel without coercion; and honour extended to the social outcasts (1 Corinthians 1-2; 8; Heidelberg Catechism 31; Belgic Confession 30; VanDrunen 2010a).

Hence, to avoid the above temptations, it is imperative for the church not only to better understand her mandate and authority. But to also avoid the subtle seductiveness of the postmodern social justice program that parades under the guise of pious inclusivity. Here is yet another layer of social and political complexity that defines church life in Cape Town in particular and South Africa in general.

The deconstruction of forms

One important way in which postmodern theory has exerted influence has been through the deconstruction of forms or patterns rooted in the created order. Examples of these supposedly outmoded categories include the historic solids of reason, science and biological sex. What politically left postmodernists have enjoyed great success in lobbying for (based on a sophisti-

¹ *Reified: make (something abstract) more concrete or real*

cated theory of knowledge coupled with pragmatic politicking) is dismantling these forms as malleable social constructions.

For the postmodern activist, universal objective truth is the fictional creation of words spoken by those with a monopoly on power, especially white heterosexual men. There is however one critical (albeit inconsistent) exception to this relativisation of moral truth. That is the universal quest for equality for all at any cost. A cost to be paid especially by the white capitalist patriarchy (Pluckrose and Lindsay 2020; Murray 2019; Hicks 2011).

This spirit of deconstruction has not left the church untouched. Especially attractive to believers inclined toward political activism has been the emphasis in postmodern identity politics upon “justice” for the oppressed or queer through pragmatic means.

Re-*form*-ation and translation

Protestant Re-*form*-ation

The Protestant Reformation was at its heart a recovery of the gospel content of justification by faith alone. This doctrine had almost been altogether lost to ingenious man-made forms. On one extreme of medieval self-constructed spirituality was the church-centred rigidity of Roman Catholicism, reminiscent of the apostate legalism of the Israelites, Pharisees and the Judaisers (Horton 2011). On the other extreme were the church-free reclusive fanatics of the monastic movement reminiscent of the mystical individualism found in Corinth (Clark 2008).

Hence, critical to an appreciation of the sixteenth century Reformation is that it did not abandon church forms. Martin Luther and his successors deconstructed both the dead formalism of Rome and the unfettered freedoms of Anabaptism. Men like Luther, Calvin and Knox helped clear away the obstacles of Christendom, the mass, works of penance and multiplied sacraments on the one hand and a legacy of a privatised quest for the beatific vision through monkish asceticism and Anabaptist anti-establishment on the other. In short, as we confess in the Three Forms, these ambitious attempts to bring heaven down to earth on man’s terms, were replaced with the Apostolic forms of Word and sacrament ministry embedded in a spiritual polity ordained by Christ (Romans 10; Heidelberg Catechism 31; Belgic Confession 27-35).

But, again, it is not as if Calvin and the confessional Reformed have been content with getting the forms right only. They have understood that while no-one can have God as their father without the church as their mother, it is indeed possible to have the appearance of maternal spiritual care while

being a false church (Matthew 23-26; Galatians 1-2; Belgic Confession 28-30). To be a church in the Apostolic sense is to have both legitimate church forms and the content of Word and Spirit. In fact, form and content are inseparable in a sacramental sense. The content of the Good News is delivered through the right forms. That is, through the organisation of the church in general and her official ordinances (Heidelberg Catechism 25).

Re-formation in Cape Town

Any church that seeks to be faithful to the tradition of the Protestant Reformation will find ministry in the mother city of Cape Town to be a challenge. For she has a rich and conflicted history, one where both spiritual and political aspirations have been interwoven. One way to describe the immense social, political and religious difficulties presented by life in Cape Town is a society simultaneously fixated with and fatigued by social forms. Perhaps because of a history of European Enlightenment values, African tribalism and conservative religions, certain enduring “solids” such as rites of initiation, socialism, political liberalism and ethnic nationalism have endured into today.

At the same time, the Cape of Good Hope – like any large Western city – evidences an increasing disillusionment with traditional forms. More and more, historically anchored givens are giving way to fluid and intersectional expressions of postmodern identity politics: language constructions that transcend the boundaries of the reason, sex, gender and sexuality, and other social hierarchies.

How then does a church give witness to Christ and his Gospel in a society that makes gods out of traditional forms (moral or otherwise) as well as deconstructs them into a heap of meaningless relativism?

Translating the Great Commission in a “pink city”:

Guilt, grace and gratitude

RCSS is not unique insofar as it has the Great Commission call common to all churches in the postmodern West. Both law and gospel must be proclaimed. Autonomous human attempts at self-deification are to be unmasked, named and rooted out. For example, dependence upon reason and science for salvation must be translated as a futile attempt to take the folly out of the cross. Marxist-socialism, when consumed by the church under the guise of liberation theology is to be translated as a social gospel. Classic political liberalism, when adopted by the church is to be translated as a confusion of Romans 13 civil justice with the beatitude of grace. Postmodern social justice activism, with its promise of liberation for the “queer”, when adop-

ted by the church under the heading of Galatians 3, is to be translated into disembodied secular ideology. In short, the church is called to pull back the mask of all human aspirations that parade as easy exits from sin and God-ordained forms that endure into eternity: the physical body and the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12-15).

The mission of churches like RCSS is to reframe individual and group Capetonian stories into the grander narrative of man's plight in Adam. Sinners on the southern tip of Africa are no different from Cain and David, Rahab or Peter. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). The law that is proclaimed each Lord's Day exposes the lusts of every human heart. The law in its first use is to be translated from something to live by and impress God with into a sentence of death (Heidelberg Catechism Part 1).

The moral law found in Scripture is a revelation that every human being knows by virtue of bearing God's image, albeit refracted due to the reality of sin. It is this knowledge that has enabled the cultural mandate to go forward through the affirmation of the interrelated foundations of reason, embodiment and natural justice. But it is also, more importantly, the soil for conviction of the law (Genesis 1-3; 8-9; VanDrunen 2020). This is so that, in turn, the new life of the gospel may germinate. It is this gospel that affirms the scandalous particulars of Christ's incarnation, sufferings and resurrection (Heidelberg Catechism Part 2).

The ministry of this foreign Good News, which trumps all other domesticated "words", must be appropriately translated into a vernacular that is as far as possible accessible to all (1 Corinthians 9:19-22; 14:1-12). This does not mean giving people the impression that there is an insurmountable chasm between the ancient text and modern hearer, which must be overcome by making the Word "relevant" to the contemporary audience. Rather, the modern sinner in the pew is drawn into the drama of redemption by Christ's Holy Word, which is living and active (Isaiah 55; Hebrews 4:12; Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 25).

After having received God's gifts every Lord's Day, Christians are in turn to go forth as witnesses to the gospel while fulfilling their vocations as living sacrifices out of gratitude (1 Peter 3:15; Romans 12:1; Heidelberg Catechism Part 3).

Confessional Re-form-ed and cruci-form

In addition to power struggles fed by biases (conscious or otherwise) that lie behind human relations, another important insight of the postmodern turn is the idea that grand narratives can be deconstructed into meaninglessness. To be sure, Christians will heartily concur that no universally accessible human faculty, like reason, can lead to salvation. Yet, sadly for the postmodernist this deconstruction process has swept away all claims to traditional objective reality. Except for the “truth” that only the oppressed can apparently access. That is, the “gospel” of equalising social justice (Pluckrose and Lindsay 2020).

The beauty of the revelation of Christ crucified for sinners is that it is a story that eludes both rational mastery as well as postmodern relativism. It is the grand story that is at once particularly contextual while being universally applicable. Yet, its relevance is neither based on logical human wisdom nor political pragmatism.

Yes, the message of Christianity does equalise the playing field for all sinners. But its profound worth is not in helping the oppressed turn the tables on their oppressors. Rather, it casts everyone – rich and poor, young and old, black and white, male and female – as hungry for dominating God and one’s neighbour. It turns out that God does not necessarily prefer the materially poor or the marginalised identity in isolation. Instead, he is pleased to “hide” himself in places where fallen human reason would least expect to find him, where concentrations of social and political power are lacking (1 Corinthians 1-2).

Most of the inhabitants in Cape Town can be described as those receiving little attention from the power brokers of this age. They are very much like those the Apostle Paul describes as last and least in the church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:28). Their humble outward circumstances are symbolic of the conditions necessary to enter heaven: nothing. In this regard, the harvest field in the Western Cape would appear ripe.

Ironic, however, are some historically oppressed groups in Cape Town, and in South Africa more broadly, that have enjoyed attention and upliftment due to their very nature as victims. In a sense these people have in recent decades not been unlike the materially privileged in terms of access to social and political power. The temptation for Christians in the new South Africa is to equate this kind of upward mobility – especially among people of colour – with God’s favour. Yet, the way of the cross confounds such logic. The gospel has a built-in critique of any human attempt to coordinate God’s

saving potency with socio-political programmes of equality and upliftment (Romans 1:16; 1 Corinthians 2:1-5; Belgic Confession 29).

The Bible's aversion to coordinating salvation with those in power – be it rich or poor, political left or the right – extends beyond the recipients of grace to how God is pleased to bestow salvation upon them. It is not through polished rhetoric by a self-confident man that God is pleased to build his church. Instead, he uses a weak preacher filling a potent office to confound golden lips and itching ears. In turn, he calls these treasures in jars of clay to exercise the unimpressive and seemingly impotent ordinances of preaching, baptism and the Lord's Supper to extend his kingdom (1 Corinthians 1-2; 10-11).

It is these seeming outmoded means in an age of instant technological gratification that are the power of God unto salvation. For they are the channels or forms by which God puts to death and gives new life. It is this order that shapes the liturgical dialogue between God and his covenant people every Lord's Day. It is in the divine worship service where believers rest and receive God's gifts of grace. And then with such gifts in the heart and hand love the saints and give witness to sinners.

Such is the shadow of the cross and its covert power in the Christian community. All other man-made power-plays, performances and ambitions are checked at the door. In church, believers are first and foremost served by God on his terms. These terms are summed up in the three marks of a true church and are fulfilled by the officers exercising the keys to the kingdom (Heidelberg Catechism 31; Belgic Confession 28-30). Hence, there can be no place for pragmatic politicking or moral activism. God's covenant community is above all a place to humbly receive God's gracious bounty. Only then can God gifts of love be shared without prideful ostentation (1 Corinthians 12-13).

Such is what we believe and confess along with the best of the historic continental Reformed tradition. This is the vision that we at RCSS have very imperfectly sought to realise by God's grace in Cape Town. In the end, true reformation and renewal are not about destabilising the past to introduce something spiritually novel in the present. But rather a retrieval of the past in conversation with the present while translating our cultural context into the grand narrative of the Word through the lens of the cross.

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15. Church planting in the Reformed tradition: Recovering the old paths

Much of the conventional wisdom regarding contemporary church planting methods is rooted in pragmatism: employing any methods, regardless of how informed they are by Scripture, as long as they deliver results. If the church is grown in size, that is all we should care about.

Pragmatism therefore leads church planters to do whatever it takes to attract people to the church plant. This may be in the form of offering a slick, production-like worship experience that is musically excellent and appealing to the senses, preaching non-offensive sermons, offering good coffee after the service, and establishing various interest groups in the community in order to win their trust.

There is nothing necessarily wrong with some of these ideas. However, when they displace the God-ordained means for church growth, then there is a problem.

Pragmatism is to be expected in the broad evangelical church culture. What is unexpected is how much these ideas have started to take root among Reformed church planting movements. Pragmatism trumps theological convictions, leading to a disconnect between our rich theological Reformed tradition and how this is translated in planting Reformed churches. Essentially, the approach is to plant a church like a broad evangelical, and then expect it to magically be a Reformed church.

What is so important about being faithful to our Reformed theological tradition in terms of church planting? It is not that we should keep tradition

for tradition's sake. Instead, it is to recognise that at the heart of Reformed theology is a deep commitment to the Word of God.

This is our motivating factor. The way in which we plant churches should be informed by Reformed theological convictions, precisely because we believe these convictions are scriptural convictions, as opposed to pragmatism.

Reformed theological convictions, specifically Reformed ecclesiology, have to inform the way we plant churches. Why? Because pragmatism begets pragmatism. Our methods cannot be just a means to an end, they need to be theologically informed, and ultimately rooted in the Word of God.

This contribution focusses on my current experience of planting a Presbyterian church in the suburbs of Durban. I first outline key Reformed theological convictions for church planting, then I share my experience in applying these theological convictions in the mission field.

Broad evangelical ecclesiology

Today's broad evangelical church derives much of its ecclesiology from the Anabaptist, radical reformation movement, of the sixteenth century. Here, the church is seen primarily as the ongoing incarnation of Christ. The idea that the church is an institution, or that it is defined by its official ministry of preaching, sacrament and discipline, is rejected. Instead, the church is defined in its entirety by the people in the church; hence the oft-repeated phrase, "we are the church."¹ Evangelical pastor Jason Zahariades writes, "The Church is the people of God. We don't go to church. We are the church. We don't have church. We aren't even Pastor So-And-So's church. We are God's people."²

We certainly agree that when God's people gather together to worship God on the Lord's Day, they do constitute the church. However, this is only half the picture. This focus on the church being exclusively "the people" is why the main pre-occupation in the broad evangelical movement is that Christians are to "live the gospel", to live incarnationally – to "be Christ" to their neighbour. The words that have been attributed to St. Francis of Assisi

¹ *Michael Horton, The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 835-837.*

² *Jason Zahariades, 'Being the Church vs. Going to Church' in The Relevant Church: A New Vision for Communities of Faith, ed. Jennifer Ashley, Mike Bickle, Mark Driscoll, Mike Howerton (Orlando: Relevant Books, 2005), 110.*

are often used to justify this view, “always preach the gospel, and when necessary use words.”³

Because the focus is on “living the gospel” and “being the church”, evangelicals tend to have a low view of the church itself. The Sunday worship service, preaching and the sacraments are not central to the evangelical idea of the church – these things are merely seen as human responses to God’s grace, instead of the ways that God primarily communicates his grace to his people. What is seen as more important is being a disciple of Christ during the week. And this is how the church is grown, according to evangelicals.⁴

Karen Ward, the pastor of what she calls a “missional community” in Seattle, writes: “As far as I know, Jesus did not ask his disciples to run modern churches or make cultural commutes. He did ask them to love God above all things, to love their neighbours as themselves, and to go make disciples. It feels good to not run a church and to pastor a missional community instead and operate an Internet tea bar on the side. We love God and love our neighbours. We love mentoring new postmodern disciples and forming new urban monks.”⁵

It is this low view of the church that makes pragmatism attractive. Because the biblical elements of the church worship service itself (i.e. the preaching of the Word, the sacraments, prayer, confession etc.) are not seen as sufficient in themselves; flashy extras (read: an Internet tea bar, good coffee, lights and smoke, etc.) need to be added in order to attract and keep people in the church.

Reformed ecclesiology: the centrality of the Word of God

In contrast to broad evangelical ecclesiology, Reformed ecclesiology teaches that God builds and grows his church through his Word. The very nature of the Word of God is that it creates something out of nothing. God spoke the universe into existence through his Word (Gen 1:3). The Word of God is effectual – it always accomplishes God’s sovereign purposes (Isaiah 55:11) – it creates and destroys (Psalm 29:5-9). The Word of God is also

³ Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 835-837.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Karen Ward, *The New Church: Artistic, Monastic, and Commute-Free* in *The Relevant Church: A New Vision for Communities of Faith*, ed. Jennifer Ashley, Mike Bickle, Mark Driscoll, Mike Howerton (Orlando: Relevant Books, 2005), 86.

“living and active” (Hebrews 4:12), and “at work in you believers” (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

It is because of this living and effectual nature of God’s Word that it is through God’s Word that his church is built and grown. Nowhere do we see this more vividly than in the book of Acts: God’s Word is preached and his church is established and grown throughout the world.⁶

God, in his sovereignty, by the preaching of his Word, in the power of the Holy Spirit, draws sinners to himself, convicts them, forgives them, regenerates them, gathers them in a community of saints and continues to strengthen and grow them by his grace (Westminster Larger Catechism 155). It is through the preaching of the Word of God – and *only* by preaching of the Word of God – that sinners are awakened by faith to Christ. As Romans 10:13-17 declares:

“For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’ How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!’ But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?’ So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.”

Edmund Clowney explains the effectual and life-giving nature of God’s Word in terms of building Christ’s church:

“In every task of the church, the ministry of the Word of God is central. It is the Word that calls us to worship, addresses us in worship, teaches us how to worship and enables us to praise God and to encourage one another. By the Word we are given life and nurtured to maturity in Christ: the Word is the sword of the Spirit to correct us and the bread of the Spirit to feed us. In the mission of the church, it is the Word of God that calls the nations to the Lord: in the teaching of the Word we make disciples of the nations. The growth of the church is the growth of the Word (Acts 6:7, 12:24, 19:20): where there is a famine of the Word, no expertise in business administration or group dynamics will build Christ’s church.”⁷

It is often a lack of confidence in the Word of God that leads to the embracing of pragmatic techniques in order to grow the church. God has

⁶ E.g. Acts 2:41, 4:4, 6:7, 8:25, 12:24, 13:48, 19:20.

⁷ Edmund P. Clowney, *The Church* (Donners Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 200-201.

clearly promised us, however, that the way He will build his church is through the ministry of his Word.

The marks of the church

In Reformed ecclesiology, while people constitute the gathered church, the church is more than just people. The Belgic Confession defines the church as being recognised by the pure preaching of the gospel, the pure administration of the sacraments and practicing church discipline (Belgic Confession Art. 29). The Sunday worship service is therefore the highpoint of the church's earthly existence, as it is here where God's Word is preached, the sacraments administered and discipline exercised.

To be sure, Christians ought to live in obedience to Christ throughout the week. But this living in obedience to Christ does not constitute "the church". One cannot "be the church". Why not? Because the church is where God's people gather to worship him on the Lord's Day, hearing the faithful preaching of the Word of God, receiving the sacraments and falling under the discipline of elders.

The ordinary means of grace

Reformed theology also places great emphasis on the ordinary means of grace as the way God chooses to use to feed, nurture and grow his church.⁸ What are the means of grace? The faithful preaching of the Word, the correct administration of the sacraments, and prayer (Westminster Shorter Catechism 88). It is through these means that God promises to work in his church by the power of the Holy Spirit.

This is why the Westminster Larger Catechism states the following:

"Q. How is the word made effectual to salvation?

"A. The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the word, an effectual means of enlightening, convincing, and humbling sinners; of driving them out of themselves, and drawing them unto Christ; of conforming them to his image, and subduing them to his will; of strengthening them against temptations and corruptions; of building them up in grace, and establishing their hearts in holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation." (Westminster Larger Catechism 155)

⁸ *Herman Bavinck, Reformed Dogmatics, vol. 4, Holy Spirit, Church and New Creation, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 441-442.*

God by his Spirit “especially” uses the preaching of the Word in the church as the primary means by which people are convicted of their sins and drawn to Christ, sanctified according to Christ strengthened, encouraged and comforted in their faith.

Further, the sacraments (baptism and the Lord’s Supper) administered in the church are the means by which we receive Christ and his benefits. The Holy Spirit uses these signs and seals to strengthen and feed our faith and to draw us closer to Christ. God has given the church prayer too, as the means by which his people bring their requests to him, praise and thank him and confess their sins to him, enabling them to be strengthened and built up in their faith.

Nowhere but in the context of the church are these God-ordained means of grace found. These are not merely human responses to God’s grace, but they are the means through which God communicates his grace to us, building and strengthening his church. The Holy Spirit is active wherever the means of grace are administered. This should caution us against pragmatism and reliance on various sorts of gimmicks to grow the church, and instead rely on the very means by which God has promised that he will use to build his church.

Planting a church

Covenant Waterfall Presbyterian Church

What we will turn to now is the application of these theological convictions in the process of church planting. Specifically, the church plant that I have been involved in since 2017, Covenant Waterfall Presbyterian Church. I use the example of my church not so much as a model to emulate, but rather to reflect on my experience of applying Reformed theological convictions in church planting.

The beginnings of the church plant

Through a series of events, guided by God’s providence, I became Reformed after ministering for nearly ten years in a theologically progressive, charismatic congregation of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa (Church of the Province of South Africa). Subsequently, I went to study theology at Westminster Seminary California. I returned to South Africa in 2017, with the intention of planting a Reformed church in my home town, Durban.

This city has a population of four million people, but there are remarkably few biblically-faithful, gospel-preaching churches – let alone Reformed churches – compared to other parts of the country. Pentecostalism, New

Apostolic Reformation-type churches, hyper-charismatic movement, prosperity gospel and broad evangelical pragmatism are the predominant flavours.

It was this great need for a Reformed witness in Durban that motivated me to plant a new church. Having been a member of a congregation of the Presbyterian Church in America while I lived in the USA, and involved in this congregation's church plant in downtown San Diego, I set out with the aim of planting a Presbyterian church.

Providentially, I got connected to a small presbytery in Cape Town, made up of a few biblically orthodox Presbyterian churches. Unwilling to associate with the mainline Presbyterian denomination, due to theological differences, I pursued a relationship with the Cape Town presbytery who agreed to help support my church planting efforts and ultimately ordain me and include the church plant in the presbytery.

The great challenge though, was that because there were no other biblically orthodox Presbyterian churches in Durban, I would have to plant a church from scratch. I decided to plant the church in a suburb called Waterfall, which is in the western part of the Durban metro area. It was the area in which I grew up, know well and have most of my networks.

Waterfall has a lot of potential: it is an up and coming, developing suburb, with many young families moving there. Historically it is a white English suburb, but it has become increasingly multi-cultural. Many blacks, Indians and Afrikaans people have settled in the suburb in recent years – great potential for a multi-cultural church! There were also relatively few churches – only five – considering its population and growth potential.

In late 2017 I began to gather some friends and we began a midweek Bible study at my home. This was to be the small beginnings of the church plant. Holding on to the conviction that it is God's Word that builds his church, I taught through Colossians for the first few months. Then during the course of 2018, we combined our group with another Bible study group from another church in the area, led by one of my friends. This started out well and at one stage there were nearly twenty of us.

However, at the end of 2018, disaster struck. The combined group imploded due to major theological differences within the group. What I had envisaged as the core group of the church plant, suddenly collapsed. Yet God is sovereign, and it is He who builds his church!

Trusting in God's promises in his Word, the five of us that remained decided to re-establish the core group at the beginning of 2019, and work towards launching Sunday worship services at the beginning of 2020. Our little remnant was on the same page theologically and took God's promises seriously that when his Word is faithfully taught, He will build his church.

We started teaching through the Gospel of John and going through the Westminster Shorter Catechism during our midweek Bible study. As we did this, God was faithful in bringing us new people. Some stayed with us, others didn't. Yet our group slowly began to grow in number, in depth and in eagerness to plant a new church.

By March 2019, seeing that we had real momentum going and sensing the Lord's blessing over us, we decided to move our launch date forward, to September 2019. We also settled on a name, Covenant Waterfall Presbyterian Church. Why "Covenant"? Being Reformed, we greatly value the glorious covenantal promises that run throughout Scripture, which ultimately show that God is our God and we are his people.

Very quickly we were able to secure the use of a venue. In our Bible study, we began to teach on the distinctives of a Reformed, Presbyterian church. We looked at topics such as the gospel, God's sovereignty, the Reformed view of Scripture, God's covenants with man, the doctrines of grace, the nature of the church, the Reformed confessions, and the ordinary means of grace.

We also began to have monthly community events in order to get the word out that we were planning to launch the church in September. In May we hosted a pasta-making day. In June we hosted a speciality coffee morning. And in July we hosted a final vision breakfast, explaining what the church was all about. In all these events, we shared God's Word and were up front about our intentions.

On the 1st of September 2019, we held our very first Sunday worship service and Covenant Waterfall was launched! It was a special evening, and the culmination of months of prayer and planning. We were encouraged that forty people joined us, a wonderful mix of young, old, church-ed, unchurch-ed and different cultures.

The church itself

Now began the work of establishing, leading and pastoring a functioning, sustainable Reformed church in our community. How does this look in practice?

The worship service

Because of our Reformed theological convictions, we knew that the Lord's Day worship service would have to be the focal point of the church's ministry. The Word of God works with the Spirit of God, in the context of the church, to grow, convict, feed and strengthen God's people in grace. Therefore, we had to be intentional in how we ran our worship services. How then were we distinctly Reformed in our worship?

The Word of God is central in our worship services. Historically, the Reformed churches have embraced what is known as the regulative principle of worship (Westminster Confession of Faith 21.1). This means that every aspect of our worship must be regulated by the Word of God – we may only worship God as he has expressly commanded us in Scripture. It is the practical application of *sola Scriptura* in the context of worship.⁹ This guards us from the temptation to worship God on our terms, which ultimately ends up in some form of idolatry.

A vivid example of this in the Bible is Israel's worship of the golden calf in Exodus 32. It is clear from the text that their intention was to worship Yahweh (Exodus 32:5), yet they did so according to their own sensibilities, and not according to how the Lord had commanded them to do so. We all know how that ended up. It is precisely for this reason that all aspects of our worship must be regulated according to Scripture, and not informed by the latest trends in evangelical culture.

What then does this look like in our worship service? Like the Reformed tradition, we believe that Scripture very clearly reveals to us that the following elements must form part of worship: singing praises to God (Psalm 96, Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16), reading of Scripture (1 Timothy 4:13), preaching of the Word of God (Acts 2:42, 2 Timothy 4:2), prayer (Acts 2:42, 1 Timothy 2:1-2), confession of sins (Ezra 9:5-15, Nehemiah 1:5-11, 1 John 1:9-10), the administration of the sacraments (Matthew 28:16-20, Acts 2:42, 1 Corinthians 11:17-34), and offerings (1 Corinthians 16:1-2).¹⁰ Hence all these elements form part of our liturgy.

Our worship service follows the basic pattern of most Reformed and Presbyterian churches: God always initiates worship by calling his people to worship Him through his Word (the call to worship). This is followed by

⁹ R. Scott Clark, *Recovering the Reformed Confession: Our Theology, Piety, and Practice* (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2008), 229.

¹⁰ Michael Horton, *A Better Way: Rediscovering the Drama of Christ-Centered Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002), 148-160.

the reading of the law, which convicts us of our sins and our need for Christ. Sins are then confessed corporately, followed by the proclamation of the gospel and declaration of assurance of salvation in Christ.

Psalms and songs (informed by Scripture) are also sung, and prayers (based upon Scripture) are made. Scriptures are read, the Word of God is preached, the sacraments administered, and the benediction (from Scripture) given. In short, the ordinary means of grace – the ways in which God has promised to grow, feed and strengthen his church by his Spirit – are administered.

We don't follow this pattern of worship just because it is rooted in our tradition. Rather, we follow it because it is informed by Scripture and saturated by the truth of the gospel. Because the gospel – the truth that sinners are redeemed by the finished work of Christ – is reinforced throughout the entire liturgy, there is a reality that the Living God is truly present in our worship. We can approach God freely because Jesus has taken our sins upon himself on the cross. Forgiven in Christ, we are ushered into our Father's presence by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is the reality of this truth that the liturgy brings home.

Another important feature of Reformed worship practiced at Covenant Waterfall is that the liturgy is structured in form of a divine dialogue. God initiates the conversation by calling his people to worship, by speaking to us through his law and gospel and the sacraments. We respond in praises, confession and prayer. This means that the congregation is involved and engaged throughout the worship. They are not passive spectators watching a slick production, which is what many broad evangelical services have tragically become.

The preaching of the Word of God is undoubtedly the highpoint of the service. How do we approach the ministry of the Word at Covenant Waterfall? We deliberately chose to preach almost exclusively expository sermons. In other words, we preach through entire books of the Bible (*lectio continua*), verse by verse, hoping to faithfully and clearly explain the original God-intended meaning of the Bible.

This was the pattern of preaching followed by Church fathers Chrysostom and Augustine, the Reformers Martin Luther and John Calvin, the Puritans Joseph Caryl and Thomas Manton, and the twentieth century British evan-

gelical, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones.¹¹ Like our faithful forebears, we aim to preach the “whole counsel of God” by expository preaching (Acts 20:27). Ultimately expository preaching points us to Christ and his gospel in every sermon.

Our first sermon series was the letter to the Ephesians, which took six months to preach through. To keep some balance between Old Testament and New Testament, a psalm is preached once a month. Currently, we are nearing the end of a sermon series through the Gospel of Mark, which has taken a little over a year.

Perhaps this sounds too tedious for some. Yet what we can testify to is that our small congregation is consistently receiving a healthy, balanced diet of God’s living Word. They are growing in their knowledge and love of the Word. As we go through whole books of the Bible at a time, as they start to see seeing the bigger picture emerging, the overarching covenantal themes that run through Scripture, that would be missed if we only stuck to topical preaching or bits of books here and there.

They are also not subjected to my theological hobby-horses, as my sermons have to be restricted to the text of Scripture that we are working through. Overall, it is such a blessing to see people in the congregation grow in love for God and his Word, and even come to faith in Christ, directly as a result of hearing the preaching of his Word, week in and week out. Indeed, faith comes from hearing the Word of Christ!

Discipleship

Outside of the Sunday worship service, we provide opportunities for the congregation to grow in their faith in Christ. These include a catechism class each Sunday, before the worship service. We are currently teaching through the Westminster Shorter Catechism. The aim of these classes is to re-inforce a theological and doctrinal foundation in the congregation.

We want to equip them with the necessary theological categories to help them in their knowledge of God, to understand the Bible better, and be better equipped to engage their faith in the world, evangelistically. These classes are interactive, and allow people to ask questions and wrestle with the doctrines that are being taught. We follow this pattern of catechetical

¹¹ *Sinclair B. Ferguson, Some Pastors and Teachers: Reflecting a biblical vision of what every minister is called to be (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2017), 653.*

teaching, in addition to teaching from Scripture, from the continental Reformed tradition, which held an evening service for this express purpose.¹²

We also run new membership classes for people who are interested in becoming members of the church. These classes go through the key beliefs and doctrinal distinctives of the church, and give people an idea of what to expect to contribute and receive as a member of the church.

Our midweek Bible study is another way for people in the church to grow in their faith. These take place in a more relaxed, home setting, where there is more opportunity for connection and fellowship. In this context, we have worked through Dr J.V. Fesko's book on the Ten Commandments, entitled, *The Rule of Love*.¹³ We've also done a course on church history, and we are currently teaching through God's attributes.

Pastoral care is another important way in which the congregation is disciplined, cared for and shepherded in Christ. Following the pattern of our Reformed forebears, we take seriously the task of meeting up with members of the congregation during the week, in order to pray with them, give them counsel according to Scripture and encourage and guide them in their faith. One of the advantages of being a small church plant is that pastoral care can happen much more effectively than is often the case in larger churches, where it is easier for people to get lost in the crowd.

Fellowship and outreach

Hosting social events has been an important way in which existing members have been included more in the fellowship of the church, as well as outsiders. Our fellowship events have thus taken on a dual role of fostering community within the church, and providing an opportunity for new people to be included in our fellowship, and invited to the Sunday worship service. We have hosted numerous events such as some braais, a Reformation Day craft beer tasting event, and other fellowship meals.

We always have new people attend these events, and many of them have attended our Sunday worship services as a direct result. The comforting truth is that we can engage in outreach to our community, knowing that God has promised to sovereignly draw a people for himself unto salvation from our community (Acts 13:48, 18:10). Our ultimate goal is to plant more

¹² Clark, *Recovering the Reformed Confession*, 294.

¹³ J.V. Fesko, *The Rule of Love: Broken, Fulfilled, and Applied (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2009)*.

churches in the Durban area, as it is through the church that communities get evangelised.

The journey so far

The journey so far has been incredibly challenging. Church planting is tough at the best of times! Growth is slow and we are a very small congregation. Some people who you pour into the most, don't grow as you hope they would. Many of the key leaders who started off with us have left to live in other parts of the country and the world, and the journey can be tiring and lonely.

At the same time, it has been incredibly rewarding. God has sovereignly brought people to us by the power of his Spirit. Young, old, black, white, Zulu, Afrikaans, English, churched and unchurched. Sinners previously ignorant of the gospel, are now growing in Christ-likeness. Others, burdened with the challenges of life, have found refreshing, grace and hope in Christ and are growing upon the solid foundation of his Word.

Conclusion

Pragmatism is not the answer in planting a church. Just because something appears to work in the sense of attracting people to church, it does not mean that it is right. Our church planting methods should be rooted in the old and trusted paths: rooted in the Word of God. It is only churches that are planted according the Word of God that will grow into biblically faithful, gospel-preaching churches. One of the strengths of the Reformed tradition is that our theology is rigorously rooted in the Word. Therefore, we should plant churches that are informed by our Reformed theological convictions.

The great encouragement for me is that this process of church planting is not reliant on my ability to parse the culture, my marketing savviness, my coffee-making skills, or my ability to produce a slick production like worship experience. I am pretty useless at all those things! Instead, I am grateful that God builds and grows his church, not through the cleverness of man and his techniques, but through his Word.

It is a complete blessing to be able to see the Lord change hearts for his glory, see the gospel at work in people's lives and Jesus Christ be exalted in our church. I am grateful to the Lord that he uses weak and broken instruments like me and my team. And it is also reassuring that God's ordained means of grace – the faithful preaching of the gospel, the correct administration of the sacraments, and prayer – are indeed the primary ways in which he builds his church. He does what only He can do – transforming hearts

of stone to hearts of flesh! Indeed, Christ Jesus himself will build his church, “I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” (Matthew 16:18)

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16. The GKSA, Apologetics and the cults

Expose lies

People believe lies. Sometimes about themselves – lies which Pastoral Theology wants to address. Sometimes about doctrine; about God, man, world, origin, purpose, norm, eternity and various aspects that go with it – lies that Apologetics wants to address. Truth sets people free – Biblical truth.

Christians have the apologetic task to reasonably defend and contend the truth of Scripture. 1 Peter 3:15 urges Christians to practise apologetics – “always being prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect”. The importance of preparation and of the use of reason in apologetics is described in this verse, as well as the personal character thereof (“hope that is in you”) and the way of doing “with gentleness and respect”. Because of who God is, our apologetic reasoning must reflect caring truthfulness.

GKSA and Apologetics

To point out the lies for what they are and to communicate the truth in such a way that it frees, requires that we think about our Apologetic approach and act responsibly in accordance. Much work by members of the Reformed churches and other Christians, done especially in the last thirty years, to describe scientifically and semi-scientifically what such an apologetic approach should look like. Through this work a few hundred people have come by the grace of God to true salvation.

Apologetic work on grass roots level with people trapped in various heresies has, amongst others, grown to several Masters and Doctorate degrees,

as well as Bible studies, TV and radio programmes, podcasts and short articles in church newsletters.

Some Apologetic theses and dissertations by GKSA-members and/or led by GKSA supervisors or advisors are tabled below.

Cults and new religious movements

- A counter-cult apologetic inquiry into “Christ in me international”. God se verlossende wil: 'n Dogmaties-apologetiese studie met verwysing na die Mormoonse verlossingsleer. Translated: *God's redemptive will: A dogmatic-apologetic study with reference to Mormon doctrine of salvation*
- Die Jehovah-getuies: 'n Onchristelike kulte? Translated: *The Jehovah's Witnesses: An Unchristian Cult?*
- The Church of Scientology: godsdiens, kerk of kulte? Translated: *The Church of Scientology: religion, church or cult?*
- Die perfeksonisme : 'n apologetiese en etiese studie. Translated: *The perfectionism: an apologetic and ethical study.*
- The prophetic claims of the founders of Islam (Muhammad) and Mormonism (Joseph Smith, Jr.): a comparison from a Christian apologetic perspective

Worldviews and world religions

- A comparison of Buddhist compassion to Christian love: an apologetic study.
- Creating a contextual approach to evangelizing Theravada Buddhists.
- Does the Christian worldview provide a place for the law of attraction? An Apologetic study.
- A theological evaluation of atheistic ontological disproofs and modern apologetic responses.
- Origin of species or specious origins? A reformed presuppositional apology to Darwin's origin of species and descent of man.
- Die Neo-Marxistiese politieke teologie in Suid-Afrika: 'n Gereformeerde-apologetiese studie. Translated: *Neo-Marxist political theology in South Africa: A Reformed-apologetic study.*
- Weltanschauung and apologia : a study in C. S. Lewis.

Apologetic methods and approaches

- Geloofsvorming en die vermoë om geloof te verdedig by kinders onder sewe jaar as korrekatief op nominale Christendom. Translated: *Faith formation and children under the age of seven's ability to defend faith in as corrective to nominal Christianity.*
- Die missiologiese waarde van die messiaanse tema in die Superman kultus. Translated: *The missiological value of the messianic theme in the Superman cult.*
- A Trinitarian modal-spherical method of Apologetics. An attempt to combine the Van Tilian method of Apologetics with reformati-onal philosophy.
- Die rol van voorveronderstellings in die denke van Van Til en Stoker toegepas op vertrekpunte in die Apologetiek. Translated: *The role of presuppositions in the thinking of Van Til and Stoker applied to points of departure in Apologetics.*
- The "Octavius" of Minucius Felix : a tool for modern day Christians in their defence of the gospel.
- An analysis of the nature, effectiveness, and reliability of the Bahnsenian method of Presuppositional Apologetics when applied to the South African context.
- The role of logical argument, persuasion and evidence in Christian apologetics with reference to Matthew 22, John 5, Acts 26 and Titus 1.
- The problem of common ground in Christian apologetics: towards an integral approach.
- Resurrection and Scripture: the relationship between two key doctrines in reformed apologetic methodology.

Cultural and doctrinal

- An apologetic in support of biblical inerrancy substantiating objective faith in a pluralist society.
- The relevance of Calvin, Pascal and Francis Schaeffer to post-modern apologetics.
- A biblical investigation of the Pauline apologetic framework and its implications for evangelism in a postmodern context.
- Conducting biblical apologetics in a culture: the finite relative non-biblical paradigm and the infinite absolute biblical paradigm.

- Die sondeleer in die apologetiek van Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. Translated: *The doctrine of sin in the apologetics of Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones*.
- Die kinderdoop in gedrang: 'n Gereformeerde apologetiese beoordeling van die siening van F.P. Möller. Translated: *Infant baptism in jeopardy: A Reformed-apologetic assessment of the view of F.P. Möller*.
- Die herontdekking van die charismata as bydrae tot Roomse kerkvernuwing volgens Hans Küng: 'n gereformeerde apologetiese studie. Translated: *The rediscovery of the charismata as a contribution to Roman church renewal according to Hans Küng: a reformed-apologetic study*.

For the love of God and his truth, much has been done by GKSA members and churches to bring people out of the bondage of lies into the light of truth. I regularly get enquiries from ministers and other believers from around South Africa who are helping someone to come free from heresies.

Some of these people have become members of Reformed churches. For instance, at the time of writing, three students that are studying theology to become ministers in the GKSA come from a cultic background. Members of the Reformed churches also play and have played vital roles in apologetic organisations such as KIES/CIEC (Cult Information and Evangelization Centre), Cult Caring as well as Ratio Christi.

Cult Apologetics

Religious cults (in a Christian sense) can be defined as religious groups who reject essential Christian doctrines (as described in the general confessions of orthodox Christianity). These are groups who aim to control both the earthly and eternal lives of their members. Cults can therefore be described from both a doctrinal and a mind-control perspective.

This is because cult leaders pretend that they and only they act on behalf of God; that their doctrine and their interpretation of the Bible is the only correct way; that they have divine authority and may not be questioned even if there are doctrinal changes; that eternal life or a special position before God is only possible through membership and zeal in the service of the group and in accordance with the rules of the group.

Mind-control

Although cult members believe heresies, our experience in working with them brought us to the insight that while the doctrinal aspects must be addressed for these people to believe in the right Jesus Christ, the controlling aspects of cults must simultaneously be addressed. Cultic mind-

control makes it very difficult to reach these people with the gospel, and form an important part of counter-cult apologetics.

Understanding these control-mechanisms of cults is critically important when reaching out to cult members. Cults subject their members to control mechanisms that keep them dependent and obedient which makes it extremely difficult for cult members to leave their groups.

Knowledge of the history of cults is a big help to expose the falsehood of the cultic claim that they are God's specially appointed representatives on earth. The many false prophecies and doctrinal about-turns can be revealed to prove that this so-called God's organisation is an unchristian cult of purely human origin. Approaches that help to break through to cult members so that they can dare to look critically at their organisation and what is being taught, include:

- An explanation of how similar the claims of the cult as well as how it operates are to other cults
- A historical approach (which shows that this organisation was man-made and that doctrines and rules underwent several changes)
- A prophetic approach (where the predictions that failed to occur are pointed out)
- And then finally also a doctrinal approach (where doctrines are judged in both an immanent and transcendent way), based on Scripture and sound hermeneutics.

Part of the apologetic studies done, was to understand the different methods and techniques used by cults in general and specific groups in particular, through which they succeed in changing their members from self-reliant to dependent on their specific group and its leader(s).

It was found that through their manipulation techniques, cults control their members' behaviour, thoughts, emotions, information and environment, language, norms, history, view of God, view of salvation, interpretation of Scripture, doctrines and membership. Explaining these control mechanisms and mind control to members and ex-members of cults with examples, not only gives them the necessary insights to break free, but also helps them afterwards to evaluate and deal with their anger and shame instigated by their involvement in these groups.

Doctrinal

In Matthew 24 our Lord Jesus Christ emphasises that to be deceived is worse than wars, famine and earthquakes. He warns “many will come in My name saying, ‘I am the Christ’”. He also says that “many false prophets will rise up and deceive many,” and that “false Christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive”.

The word “deceive” can be translated as “to lead astray”, as can be seen in cults. Paul also warns about deception (Colossians 2:4): “Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words”. In line with this Paul warns in Romans 16:17-18 “smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple”.

Cults use smooth and persuasive words to deceive and lead away from the truth, while pretending that it is Biblical. Instead of implementing a consistent hermeneutic when consulting Scripture, cult leaders change their way of interpreting to fit their ideas, in accordance to their cultic doctrine. Twisting of Scripture and twisting of doctrine goes hand in hand.

2 Peter 3:15-16 not only motivates Christians to always be ready to give an answer (apologia) to others about our hope and certainty in Christ. It also urges Christians to keep their eyes open for those who pretend to be Christians, but twist Scripture according to their preferences: “. . . as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you . . . which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures”. Since the doctrines of most of the religious cults we face in Southern Africa are claimed to be based on the Bible, we must make an effort to show how the Scripture is twisted.

The distortion of Scripture by cults can be (and often is) so severe that they teach in the name of Scripture directly the opposite of what the Bible teaches. They twist the meaning of Scripture in such a way that the truth of God’s revelation is turned into a lie – and that while the Biblical evidence for the core doctrines of the Christian faith is overwhelming.

The core doctrines include the triune nature of God, the deity of Christ, creation *ex nihilo*, sinfulness of all humanity, salvation by God’s grace through faith, the resurrection of the dead, etcetera. These are unfortunately some of the main doctrines challenged by cults – while claiming that their doctrine is biblical. We must challenge these false doctrines, because the distortions of the Bible will, according to 2 Peter 3:15-16, culminate in the “destruction” of these cult followers, if not rectified.

Honest reading of the Bible brings the reader to understand its different parts as it presents itself to us. Cults violate basic principles of Bible understanding by, for instance, ignoring the immediate context of passages, intermixing the context of two or more passages, over specifying certain passages by allowing them to say more than the passages permit, interpreting passages figuratively instead of literally or vice versa, and introducing speculative readings of predictive prophecies.

When the Bible is quoted by cult leadership, it is done in selective ways. New definitions of words are given to suit their purpose, without the necessary justification or with distorted justification, which leads to their wrong interpretations of passages.

In conclusion

To evangelise members of cults, Reformed Apologetics uses consistent reasoning, based on Scripture as the Word of God, to bring truth to people and to expose lies. Several passages in Scripture describe the apologetic task the Word of God asks of Christians. According to these passages the task of apologetics can be described as defending and contending.

That should be done through “demolish arguments” (2 Corinthians 10:5), “gently instruct” (2 Timothy 2:25), “sound doctrine . . . refute those who oppose it” (Titus 1:9), “contend for the faith” (Jude 3). Romans 12:2 emphasises the importance to support Christians not to “be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect”.

Other practical guidelines



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17. Building capacity through new opportunities

The will of God is to use us, his people, to reach the lost and call them into his kingdom. God sends his gospel to the world through his people. It is a great privilege to be used by God to make disciples. God provides the means to do so at any given point in history. He has enabled the preaching of his Word in the past and in the present and in the future in all circumstances. In this chapter we will be looking at the future of Reformed missions in South Africa.

Evangelism in the Old Testament

When God called Abraham, He did so for the glory of God. God called Abraham to go on a journey. God said to Abraham: “Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” (Genesis 12:1-3, New King James version)

Abraham was sent on a mission not to get a name for himself but for the glory of God to be seen among nations throughout all ages and even today. When God promised to bless the nations through Abraham’s children, he was commissioning him to be a missionary.

Abraham’s mission was passed on to his descendants. It was passed on to Isaac (Genesis 26:4) where God blesses Isaac and also to Jacob (Genesis 28:13-14). God chose Israel to be the nation through which all nations may be blessed.

Here are a few examples:

Rahab the prostitute abandoned her city and her gods to turn to the living God. She hears of God and she believes. She said "The Lord your God, he is the God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath." (Joshua 2:11)

Ruth abandoned her land of birth, her biological family and also her gods. She did this when she promised Naomi to commit to her and also to Naomi's God. She made a strong commitment to The God of Israel. (Ruth 1:16)

Jonah was sent on a missionary journey to Nineveh which was a wicked city. When the message from God was delivered, the people in the city repented and God spared the city from destruction.

Evangelism in the New Testament

God's mission is very clear also in the coming of Jesus. For example, according to Luke He announces some of his mission statements as follows: But he said to them, "I have to proclaim the good news about the kingdom of God in the other cities also, for that is what I was sent to do". (Luke 4:43). Luke 9:2: Then he sent them to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.

Luke 9:60: But he told him, "Let the dead bury their own dead. But you go and proclaim the kingdom of God". Jesus did not proclaim judgement but He personally proclaimed the good news of the Kingdom of God and deployed his disciples to do the same.

Mission has been God's tool for the growth of the church. The last instruction that the disciples were given by Jesus is a mission statement which became known as the Great Commission: He said that "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and I am with you always, even to the end of the age". (Matthew 28:18-20)

The disciples of Jesus took this mission statement seriously and they earnestly began to work, preaching the good news of Jesus Christ. God has always, as evidenced throughout the Bible, focused on ensuring that his Name is known.

Evangelism continued

The mission of God has never changed. God still expects us to execute his mission nowadays. The word of God reached South Africa centuries ago due to the faithful execution of a worldwide mission. The missionary journey in the Reformed churches in South Africa has not been an easy one, but we bless God because there were many dedicated man and women who were willing to give their time and life for the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

Many people received Christ as their saviour as a result of these dedicated people. Churches were established, generations were saved that now belong to the kingdom of God. There were missionaries who worked hard in order for the gospel to reach many people of different languages in South Africa. But there is still a lot of work to be done. The question that we can ask ourselves is: “What is the future of Reformed missions in South Africa?”

The world is constantly changing but the church is rooted and established in the unchanging truths of the Word of God. The word of God is confronted with the continual change taking place in the world. Those of us born 30 or 40 years ago would agree that the world has changed drastically. The way that mission was done back then might not produce the intended results today and also in the future. Maybe you are trying mission outreaches and the strategies are not yielding any fruits. Bosch (1991:7) says “One should not be made powerless and then back off”. That means we should not give up and fold our arms.

Finding modern ways

While our message remains unchanged, we find modern ways to put across the message to reach each new generation. The future of the Reformed mission requires a new vision to counter the ever changing environment without necessarily changing the message.

The church has to find a way to reach out to present and future generations. The good news is that the gospel never changes. Missionaries are able to move with the times and embrace the modern realities and innovations while at the same time remain glued to the principles of the word of God.

The gospel must be made accessible to everyone in their culture. Instead of the people having to first know our language and culture, we who are preaching the good news should be accustomed to the language and culture of that particular people.

Paul said, “I become all things to all men that I may, in some way, save some”. (1 Corinthians 9:22). That means if you are in KwaZulu-Natal you

should learn the language and culture of the Zulus. If you are in Venda you learn the language and culture of the Vhavenda people who live there.

A special connection is established when you speak someone's language. There will be a strong level of empathy with the missionary and a deeper sense of trust by the people being ministered. Nelson Mandela said it well when he said if you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to the head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to the heart.

So to make an impression where God has called you to, consider learning the basics of the local language and also the culture. The many different language apps available nowadays make it much easier to learn new languages than ever before. The locals will certainly appreciate your efforts to speak their language.

Building capacity

Mission should be approached with a view to build capacity rather than create dependency. Previously mission was oriented in giving rather than equipping. When we give to someone in need, we do one of two things. Our gift can build their capacity, making them stronger and healthier, with a greater potential for development and growth and also to help others. On the other hand, our gift, though heartfelt and sincerely given, can invite them to become dependent on others for their growth, health and development. Our gift can actually keep them stationed in a place of helplessness.

This then means that Reformed church mission should focus on building capacity rather than nurturing dependency. If it is preaching the gospel, let it be done in such a way as to enable people to teach others in their community so that the word will have a ripple effect in that environment.

So the future of Reformed missions should empower leaders rather than address needs. We are quick to identify needs; we see the difficult situations and hopeless conditions. The needs are always before us, staring at us. But for mission to be successful, let the needs be addressed by equipping the community so that there is sustainability.

In that way the community gains autonomy. It is able to produce its own leaders going forward. If sustaining livelihoods is a need, then they are taught to produce food or to manufacture or conduct any kind of business. The aim here is that they should not expect handouts. But they should start projects that would sustain them continuously.

We are following the footsteps of Jesus. He came to address all the needs of people which included the spiritual, physical and social needs. The way

He did that was noteworthy. Instead of focusing on the needs, He focused on leaders. He empowered leaders so that the leaders would then empower the people. We're called to do the same.

Confronting challenges

If mission in the Reformed churches is to be successful, it must also be directed to confront the challenges facing our communities. There is so much injustice and violence taking place. Women and children do not feel safe in our communities. Corruption is rife. These issues have made headlines over the recent past. The church of God is to confront all these injustices.

Christian mission has to be at the forefront of creating a just society where each can live with God given dignity, where his/her rights are accepted and respected. We are the agents of social justice. The gospel heard on Sunday should be demonstrated in the market place, in the public square, at our work places at tertiary institutions and in our schools.

So children, adults, all of us are on a mission. Every believer is called to serve. Every believer is to hunger and thirst for justice, to be a peace maker. This is an essential attribute of a believer.

The word of God calls us to educate ourselves in doing what is right: learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow. (Isaiah 1:17). The church should be ready to stand for what is right in their communities. Doing that is an effective way of mission. The church must be charged with mission in the public life.

The congregation is to actively participate and must be involved in the just cause of the community. They must stand for the truth. Prophet Isaiah says it is time to learn to do good. Goheen (2011: 11) says the church must be a "contrast community of justice in a world of economic and ecological injustice". Living as a contrast community will definitely have a positive impact on the future of mission in the Reformed churches.

New tools

When we look at the future of the Reformed mission in South Africa we should also strongly consider the issue of technology. Goheen (2011: 20) says "No doubt the powerful forms of technology at the beginning of the twenty first century are shaping the next generation's view of the world more than anything else."

The church should not ignore this powerful force. New technology must be recognised as a powerful mission tool to be deployed in future Reformed church missions that will alter future mission processes.

Many people are interacting through social networks. We used to know that we could speak with one person at a time on a phone and that it was very expensive. But today one can speak with more than 20 or 30 people simultaneously on a free video call either on a smart phone or a computer.

These platforms are called cyber communities. In cyber communities, people from all over the world are able to interact on the internet without any interruption at any time. Internet defeats the hindrances of physical distance (global village concept).

We should view this technology as God's way of bringing the gospel to every person upon the world. Internet provides an opportunity to reach out to people regardless of separation by physical distance.

Communication technologies such as internet provide new opportunities for church growth by enabling outreach to those outside the church. People are able to share the word of God, have discussions and generally interact as never before.

The use of internet should not replace the existing methods but be used as a tool or an aid to deploy current methods. The purpose of the cyber community is the worldwide proclamation of the gospel or good news. The internet has made it easier to translate the Bible in different languages.

The goal of mission is to win people for Christ and to make disciples of all nations according to Jesus's Great Commission. Utilising cyber space is a way in which the Reformed churches in South Africa can make disciples.

Believers can interact with one another in worship, prayer, Bible study and witnessing. New believers, in turn, can bring others to Christ through their witnessing. Therefore the Reformed churches in South Africa can consider the maximum utilisation of cyber space as a vehicle for mission as it also complements the methods that are already available.

New opportunities

The introduction of lockdowns due to the Covid-19 pandemic has offered opportunities for the church to reach to those who are outside of the church through cyber communities. There are social platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, live streaming, Zoom, amongst many others which are being used for Sunday services. You will discover that the Sunday worship service

or the Bible study or any other church activity will end up in many other homes as the congregants would be passing on the messages on various social platforms.

Cyber space gives us the opportunity to share the gospel to many who hunger and thirst for God. Cyber space is a good tool to execute the instruction of Christ. It provides a beautiful opportunity, given to the church by God for the church to travel the world through the internet to share the gospel with people.

The future of missionary work of Reformed churches is very bright. We are learning much and the Lord is teaching us to find new ways to reach out to people in a continually changing world. It is our duty to make use of the all means available to proclaim the gospel. We look into the future with hope. May we pray to God to help us and that he refines, edifies, empowers and refreshes us as we move forward.



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18. Gospel proclamation through poverty alleviation

Biblical principles on the call of the church to reach out to the poor

In an article “Towards a Gospel Centred theology of poverty” (written by the elders of Coram Deo Church in North America), the ultimate cause of poverty is presented as sin.

Poverty needs to be understood as the result of a broken relationship between God and mankind that originated from the fall (Genesis 3) and is continued by ongoing sin. There are three kinds of poverty: 1) poverty caused and exacerbated by the oppression of the poor, 2) poverty caused by natural disasters, and 3) poverty caused by personal sin. Understanding this, we realise that we are all spiritually poor and lack in our relationship with God.

Original sin inherited from Adam at the fall (Romans 5:12–22, Psalm 51:5, Job 14:4, 1 Corinthians 15:22), as well as actual sin, described by Augustine as “a word, deed, or desire in opposition to the eternal law of God”, impacts on all people. Each person is a sinner and is affected negatively by sin. For example, a person may be slothful, and this sin may impact on that person in a way where they do not have food to eat.

Or a person can be bullied by a sinner resulting in the victim experiencing poverty. Also, a person can suffer from drought, a result of the curse from

the fall, caused by original sin. We can therefore concur with *Coram Deo* that sin is the root cause of poverty¹. The Heidelberg Catechism describes the condition as “misery”. (HC Q1, Romans 3:9-10; John 1:10)

Holistic liberation from the slavery of sin and erecting signs of the kingdom

Remarkably believers can be set free from sin and their misery through Christ’s work on the cross (John 17:3; Acts 4:12; 10:43). This is the gospel or Good News. Sinners are no longer beholden to the enslavement of sin because Christ died on the cross as a substitute for them – the Holy Spirit works transformation in them, and this results in hope. The Holy Spirit equips every believer with gifts and stirs up his fruit of love (Galatians 5:22,23) in us that brings a desire to serve God, one another and others with acts of love and a desire to be responsible stewards of God’s creation out of love and gratitude to God.

As a result of this (achieved by the working of the Spirit), a growing thankfulness to God for this incredible act (that although believers do not play a part in their regeneration and justification, they become active in their sanctification (Philippians 2:12,13)) results in an outpouring of *agape*² love (Matthew 5:16; Romans 6:13; Ephesians 5:8-10; 1 Peter 2:9,10) that witnesses the love of Jesus (*agape* love) in the expansion of the Kingdom.

Thanksgiving takes the form of witnessing and proclaiming God in a way that will bring God glory. Integral mission is an expression of our hope of the final coming of the Kingdom. Integral mission erects signs and milestones of the new creation.

This results in poverty alleviation that demonstrates and proclaims God’s love in a way that moves poor people from being dependent on other humans to realising their dependency on God, their own gifts and talents and their interdependency on each other. When that happens, believers become streams of living water (John 7:38).

¹ *An excellent sermon on this topic by Dr. David Murray called “The cause and cure of poverty” can be downloaded from <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=718048640>.*

² *Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon describes agape as a Greco-Christian term referring to unconditional love, "the highest form of love, charity" and "the love of God for man and of man for God." I use this term to differentiate between other meanings of the word “love”.*

Living *coram Deo* and a kingdom perspective

Coram Deo means living before the face of God and that stirs up a Kingdom perspective in our lives and ministry. Right from Genesis 1:27-28 we see how God calls Adam (us) to be stewards of his creation and thereby participate in his rule over all of creation. The article, “Towards a Gospel centred theology of poverty” points to the Bible as God’s word to us. God’s Word needs to be proclaimed to herald the kingdom of heaven on earth (Matthew 10:7; 24:14). *Agape* love of kingdom believers (who respond to being sent) bear fruit (Matthew 21:43) and this is the mark of the kingdom.

Christian poverty alleviation is separated from secular³ (or any other kind of) poverty alleviation by the Word. The Word points to Jesus (John 5:39) and it is in Jesus that we have eternal life (John 14:6). For the gospel to go forward the word of Christ must be proclaimed (Romans 9:17) with our words as well as our deeds.

As Christians we believe that the only way poverty will ever be totally alleviated is through the gospel (the good news of Jesus) taking control in people's lives. The gospel cannot exist in true form without both word and deed. Faith comes through hearing the word and faith without works (deeds) is dead (Romans 10: 17; James 2: 14-26).

The ultimate purpose of poverty alleviation

At a recent short-term mission with some Dutch youth in Ramotse, I was discussing the purpose of a Christian. Then one young man started speaking about a bangle they wore in the Netherlands that asked the question “what would Jesus do?” Although we all agreed that this was a good guiding principle for how we are to act, we came to the conclusion that perhaps a better question for understanding the purpose of a Christian would be asking the question “will this (whatever is about to be done) bring God glory?”

Rob van der Kooy (cf his Introduction) highlights the perspective: Only if people's zeal is first and foremost believing in and seeking God's glory – seeking His kingdom first, healthy development can flow from that, God willing. Logically, if God is not the compass, then there is room for greed, power, selfishness, etcetera to become the compass.

³ *Lois Lee describes secular as the state of being unrelated or neutral in regard to religion and irreligion. He goes on to suggest that anything that does not have an explicit reference to religion, either negatively or positively, may be considered secular.*

In trying to understand what will bring God glory, we start to see certain patterns in the Bible. Sadly, through this we also begin to see how by means of sin we keep on taking the glory away from God. I say sadly because when we realise the extent of Christ's love for us, that as God, He came into the world, became one of us suffered and died for us, so that we could be set free, it grieves us that we should express our lack of gratitude with disobedience. We should be grateful and express our gratitude with *agape* love through obedience.

Poverty in South Africa

Like poverty elsewhere poverty in South Africa shares one common theme – a lack of that which is necessary for sustenance. A secular perspective focuses on a lack of physical sustenance. However, a recent World Bank survey of poor people around the world clearly showed that the poor experience poverty from a multi-dimensional perspective. Poverty impacted on morals, dignity, spiritual, feelings of hopelessness and many more non-physical dimensions.

Worldview⁴ is increasingly being identified as a prime cause for poverty (and its alleviation). In South Africa, we have dependence on government grants, entitlement, prosperity gospel⁵ and what Mbetwa in his 2018 book *Why Africa is poor* calls communalism. This is veneration of elders that is ultimately linked to ancestral worship; a very big problem in South Africa.

Besides drought, floods and other natural disasters prevalent in South Africa, poverty can be seen stemming from oppression and personal sin. The South African Qualifications Authority recently launched new Christian leadership occupational qualifications to address what President Cyril Ramaphosa calls the “bogus pastor” syndrome in South Africa. They identify the problem that out of the 187 000 churches in South Africa, only 7 000 have access to formal biblical training.

Most of the 180 000 independent churches rely on prosperity gospel television as their source for theological education. This false message of physical wealth exacerbates the politically weighted dependency from social grants

⁴ *The Oxford dictionary describes a worldview as the fundamental cognitive orientation of an individual or society encompassing the whole of the individual's or society's knowledge and point of view.*

⁵ *Wilson Matthew suggests that prosperity gospel refers to a belief that “financial blessing and physical well-being are always the will of God ... and that faith, positive speech, and donations to religious causes will increase one's material wealth”.*

enslaving the poor into feeling entitled and beholden to human promises that prevent freedom of thought, transformation and interdependence.

To make matters worse, communalism turns a blind eye to corruption and allows political bullies like Jakob Zuma to get away with massive state capture. Because Zuma is seen as an elder or chief, his actions are tolerated, and supporters continued to vote for him even though he has been blatantly corrupt. A facilitator involved in my Bushbuckridge ministry noted that each time that the ANC were victorious during elections, their supporters would toyi-toyi (protest) against political decisions that impacted them negatively.

Based on information emerging from the Zondo commission's proceedings, political analyst Marianne Mertin published an article in which she revealed that State Capture in South Africa during the second term of President Jacob Zuma's administration hovers around R1,5 trillion of the state budget for 2019. "Put differently: State Capture has wiped out a third of South Africa's R4,9 trillion gross domestic product, or effectively annihilated four months of all labour and productivity of all South Africans, from hawkers selling sweets outside schools to boardroom jockeys."

Professor Lumumba, who served for several years as the director of the Kenyan Anti-Corruption Commission, delivered the keynote speech at the Third Anti-Corruption Convention in Kampala, Uganda in 2013. In his speech he raised an alarm that one of the main reasons why Africa remains the poorest continent on earth is that the levels of tolerance for corruption in Africa are very high.

According to him "Africa has been invaded by its own sons and daughters who are forever looting its resources in the name of governance and democracy". About the corruption and bribery among leaders he said: "We elect hyenas and expect them to take care of the goats." In the speech he raised the question: "Are we children of a lesser god?"

In South Africa we see clearly poverty caused by natural disasters, personal sin and oppression, and how if a Christian worldview is not central to poverty alleviation, it cannot be fully remedied.

Worldview and poverty alleviation

Voddie Baucham, author of the book *Fault Lines: The Social Justice Movement and Evangelicalism's Looming Catastrophe* (Salem Books, 2021) suggests that there is a divide between listening to the oppressed to hear the truth, and justifying individual situations to fabricate the truth. In speaking about

critical race theory, he explains that the culture around race influences a perspective of the truth in a similar way to the way in which worldview impacts on an understanding of truth.

He explains that an understanding of truth impacts actions. For example, the social justice movement (which he compares to a religion) doesn't have any room for redemption, so it is opposite to Christianity and should be treated very carefully by Christians. Even though it is against racism (which is biblical), it has no room for forgiveness.

From personal experience

Having worked in the secular social development sector for 30 years, I continue to be reminded about the logic and centrality of God in poverty alleviation. Poverty alleviation is understood universally as the transformation of a person from living in a state of poverty into a state of wellbeing. It could be argued that this can only be fully achieved when the poor person understands and experiences poverty alleviation from a biblical worldview.

A biblical worldview presents the world as a place of sin that leads to poverty but that has a saviour God who offers redemption from sin for those who believe and repent. This is different from a secular worldview where individuals experience being alone and without a creator, eternal hope or *agape* love. Animistic and other religion worldviews base their hope on their deeds and so never experience total freedom.

In their book *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor ... and Yourself* (Moody Publishers, 2009) Brian Fikkert and Steve Corbett build on an idea initially written about by Bryant Myers in his book *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development* (Orbis Books, 1999) that poverty is caused by broken relationships. They show how sin resulted in broken relationships between us and God, us and ourselves, us, and our neighbours and us, and our environment. It is a Christian worldview that believes that the restoration of the broken relationships is the mission of God.

Worldview is not only an academic belief system, but it impacts on every aspect of our lives. This is why holistic integral mission is so important. The use of the word "holistic" refers to the all encompassing, to address our worldview in every aspect of our lives. The term "integral mission" refers to understanding our role in the mission of God – as René Padilla, Father of Integral Mission says, witnessing through "proclamation and demonstration".

Holistic integral mission

When Jesus Christ was busy with His ministry here on Earth, He taught and demonstrated the gospel message. The article “Towards a Gospel Centred theology of poverty” (written by the elders of Coram Deo Church in North America), quotes Tim Keller from his book *Ministries of Mercy* (Spck, 2017) as saying, “When God gave the law to Moses, he was constructing a believing community in which social righteousness was as required as personal righteousness and morality”.

The great commandment taught to us in Matthew 22:36-40, (a summary of the law), is clear on the fact that we should *agape* love God and likewise (not more or less), *agape* love our neighbour. In order to *agape* love God and our neighbour, it is critical that we understand the gospel message and where we fit into God’s plan or mission.

Augustine introduced the concept of the mission of God (*missio Dei*) as God’s plan revealed to us throughout the Bible. Very simplistically: God created; man fell from grace; God is busy with his redemptive plan with Christ central to the plan; and complete redemption occurs at the new creation. Christopher Wright⁶ and Michael Goheen⁷ write about the importance of understanding God’s mission, so that we can understand our role in it as believers.

The Heidelberg Catechism Lord’s Day 12 summarised the biblical message that our mission as Christians must be proclamation with word and Lord’s Day 33 with deed, to win our neighbours for Christ. What does this mean in reality? We proclaim with word by 1) confessing Christ’s name (Matthew 10:32; Romans 10:9, 10; Hebrew 13:15), 2) presenting ourselves as a living sacrifice of thankfulness to Christ (Romans 12:1; 1 Peter 2:5, 9), and 3) fighting with a free and good conscience against sin and the devil in this life. (Galatians 5:16, 17; Ephesians 6:11; 1 Timothy 1:18, 19). We proclaim with deeds by living according to the will of God in all good works. (Romans 6:10, 11; Galatians 2:20).

To understand what good works are, the Heidelberg Catechism explains that good works are only good if they are done out of true faith (John 15:5; Romans 14:23; Hebrews 11:6), in accordance with the law of God (Leviticus 18:4, 5; 1 Samuel 15:22; Ephesians 2:10) and done to God’s glory (1 Corinthians 10:31). It goes on to clarify that this does not include good

⁶ <https://g.co/kgz/NhQNjK>

⁷ <https://g.co/kgz/br2Ke3>

works that are based on our own opinion nor those based on the precepts of men (Deuteronomy 12:32; Isaiah 29:13; Ezekiel 20:18, 19; Matthew 15:7-9)

In his master's dissertation on "The missional identity of Christian Development Organisations" Jorma Kuitunen describes integral mission as to "proclaim and demonstrate the Kingdom of God". He quotes Andrew Kirk in stating that "God's calling to mission is a calling to serve". Again, service is not so much a function as a definition of the Church. Kuitunen suggests that the community Jesus founded is diakonia (Mark 10:43-45). God's people are judged not by their formal piety but their spontaneous compassion they show – or fail to show – to those in need with whom Jesus Christ identifies himself. (Matthew 25:44, Acts 11:29; 12:25)

The concept of Asset Based Community Development

I have found the adage "give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime" to not be true unless you also teach the man to build the fishing rod/net needed to catch fish – out of what resources he has available to him.

This adage is about mental and spiritual transformation that comes from physical transformation. Physical transformation is a new and more positive way in which people experience and respond to life and its difficulties. In my ministry we use an approach known in the secular world as Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) where participants are incentivised to take part since their rewards are immediate, tangible and practical.

I have found that training becomes more of an enabling process (rather than teaching) where participants are empowered practically to make the equipment they need and to use it effectively to change their lives. ABCD methodology for the sustainable development of communities builds on existing strengths and potentials. It uses the individual and community's own assets and resources as basis for development; it empowers the people of the community by encouraging them to utilise what they already have at their disposal. Such assets range from family and community relationships, personal talents and skills, through to the recycling of waste and sustainably utilising natural resources.

De Gruchy (In Msuku A S & De Gruchy S, 2003, in *The church and environmental education: A model for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi*. University of KwaZulu Natal. Pietermaritzburg) points out the following common elements between ABCD and the Christian faith. Both:

- Recognise that all people are created in the image of God. All people are equal and have innate value, whether they are young, aged, disabled, or illiterate.
- Affirm that all people have a vocation. God has a calling for each person's life that requires someone to be an agent, not a client.
- Understand that all people have gifts and talents, which they use to the glory of God both in the church and community.
- Appreciate the humanising value of labour. People do not only work to earn money; it is a fundamental way in which they participate in the activity of God in the world.
- Believe in the fundamental importance of community: Human beings are constituted by belonging and seek to solve their problems through communal action.
- Accept that the church and Christians are 'assets' to the community the light of the world and the salt of the earth.
- Recognise the importance of changing people's attitudes or mindsets.

From a Christian perspective we teach participants that we have all received gifts from God. We are blessed with resources, abilities, and relationships of varying measures. If we come to realise what these gifts are, we can use them to transform our lives and reach out with service to others in need around us. This understanding assists in freeing the poor from earthly dependency on government grants, donors or from destructive worldviews like communalism or greedy capitalism. It enables people to see that their only comfort, dependency and hope is in Christ alone.

The practice of poverty alleviation in transformation

Practically I have found that using Christian based social development as a method of discipleship is effective in that poor people experience biblical-based physical transformation that helps them to recognise and undergo spiritual transformation. Physical transformation builds confidence and an enquiring mind. The people that I have worked with predominantly (86%) call themselves Christian. Although there is a high level of syncretism⁸ (40%) and an even higher level of prosperity gospel (60%), people are extremely keen to understand the gospel as most of them already consider it to be the word of God.

So, if minds are fired through the physical experience of biblical-based transformation in their own lives, they naturally become fertile to receive

⁸ *The Oxford Dictionary defines syncretism as "the amalgamation of different religions" for example in South Africa the amalgamation of traditional African religion and Christianity.*

spiritual food. We read in the Bible that the Holy Spirit uses the Word to transform. I therefore work with a premise that if the Word is being proclaimed and demonstrated, the Holy Spirit works transformation.

An example of our approach is the way we at Khanyisani (African Honey Bee, ChildVision and Pastors for Africa) recruit people into our ministries. On the first day workshop, after a contextualised devotion, our facilitators tell everyone that we will not be giving out food or handouts at training sessions. People need to bring their own food and help neighbours in need where possible. Many of the people leave at that stage, disappointed, from having come with a sense of entitlement that led to an expectation of receiving handouts at projects.

For the rest of the session, our facilitator shows the remnant how to make beekeeping gloves, a smoker, a hive tool and a veil from old T-shirts, jeans, wire, tins, kitchen curtains, an old screw driver, some cotton or string, and a needle i.e. how to use locally available resources, with the help of local relationships (family members) for learning abilities (making tools to generate income).

That evening everyone is sent home to look for the materials (resources) they need, as well as a Bible if they own one. The next day, after the first Bible study using the African Honey Bee catechism⁹ and their Bibles presented by the facilitator, everyone who attempts to make their own veil, gloves, smoker and hive tool are joined up to the project. It is self-selection, and transformation takes place because the people who try, realise that they can. They can because they realise that the gifts given to them by God (resources, relationships, and abilities) are accessible to them if they simply try.

What differentiates us from secular social development projects is that our primary training tool is the Bible. For this purpose, we developed and translated the catechism (mentioned above) into the core languages that we most commonly work with, namely Zulu, North Sotho and English. The answers are multiple choice i.e. Christian, animistic, and secular. Group members who do not own a Bible are given one in their language of choice and discussions are colourful with Bible texts being read in different languages until everyone is convinced about the correct answer.

I have had Shembe priests telling me that they are so excited to read the Bible (that they have owned for 40 years) for the first time. Their Bibles had

⁹ Downloadable from <https://africanhoneybee.co.za/pdf/AHB-Catechism-new.pdf>

been used as talismans¹⁰ prior to their transformation that led to their inquisitive minds that were receptive to learning about the Word of God. Usually, members repeat the Bible study with their families in the evenings. The ultimate concept is to train up facilitators who can teach others with the goal of planting churches and growing pastors and churches from the ground up.

Social cohesion is achieved by starting what Teafund calls Self-Help Savings Groups. These are a blended stokvel/community banks that require money to be invested through the buying of shares that are paid out after a savings cycle (usually after one year). The money saved in the Self-Help Savings Groups is used only for wealth creation, financing running costs of income generation activities, and growing incomes. Money is lent to group members to start income generating and food production activities. Loans are repaid with interest, and fines are charged for misdemeanours, so the value of the savings increases throughout each cycle.

Self-Help Savings Groups are critical to the success of projects because they establish social and economic community based, owned, and managed structures. Once a member starts to save in a group, they (or a family member representative) always attend savings meetings because they want to ensure their investments are safe. The exciting opportunity that exists is that groups of people are meeting on a regular basis to save money, lend money to each other, help each other in transforming lives and learning more about the Word of God. A perfect church planting environment is established to plant churches that are not dependent and have members who are hungry for the Word of God.

We have also started using this method among existing poor church groups, and this helps immensely in uplifting the congregation in a holistic way. The amazing thing is that when participants start to see their lives changing, they want to help others in the transformation of their lives. By using social development as discipleship, physical transformation leads to spiritual transformation which leads to an understanding and outpouring of *agape* love and biblical stewardship.

Conclusion

The article “Towards a Gospel Centred theology of poverty” (written by the elders of Coram Deo Church in North America) states that the mission

¹⁰ *The Oxford dictionary describes a talisman as an object that is thought to have magic powers and to bring good luck.*

of the church must be to see the gospel going forward in word and deed, “to establish beachheads of the kingdom of God”. “As the saving word of Christ is taught and tangible acts of mercy and compassion are given to those in need the gospel takes root, and a new expression of the kingdom is born.”

I was excited recently to learn that the term mission and mission worker were being proposed at synod for incorporation in the Reformed Churches in South Africa (GKSA) Church Order. Although I believe that all Christians are sent as in Matthew 28:18, I also believe that there are office bearers and mission workers who are specifically sent by the church to perform mission ministries in a way that witnesses through proclamation and demonstration, and through their work, bring glory to God.

I am excited because when one looks at the churches that we have ecumenical bonds with who use the terms mission and mission workers, one observes a greater understanding of biblical integral mission that infiltrates the churches, and the church becomes more mission minded.

As churches, I believe that it is critical for us to be mission minded in South Africa. Our poor people have suffered under colonialism, apartheid and now even more than ever, the atrocities of Marxism, state capture and large-scale corruption. We have an opportunity in our country, in that the large majority of our population see themselves as being Christian.

Our task, therefore, is a discipling task much more than an evangelism task. We need to plant churches from the ground up and strengthen and grow existing churches through Bible-based integral mission. It is an exciting and blessed time to be involved in integral mission in our beloved country.



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19. One of the first Protestant mission textbooks – still relevant

How should we do mission work? This is a question that has been asked many times by missionaries, church planters, churches, mission committees and deputies and so on. Throughout the centuries, many books have been written about what mission is and how it should be done. Missiology is the systematic study of this.

Although there are clear trends visible, which can be linked to the various periods of mission history, one sometimes also wonders how often the wheel has been reinvented.

We tend to have a certain perception about what the qualities of a successful missionary or church planter should be. However, those who have practical experience on the mission field know that this can be deceiving. A successful missionary often needs other talents than prescribed by the general perception.

A missionary should not just be an extrovert who can preach, full of the Spirit, on street corners. A church planter should be moneywise or able to do bookkeeping. Neither does it seem to help necessarily if a missionary is abreast of the newest scientific missiological insights.

A church planter should perhaps first and foremost be someone with common sense, perseverance and a sense of entrepreneurship, someone with financial insight, to mention just a few often neglected qualities. These talents are not unlike being Spirit-filled; they are indispensable gifts of the

Holy Spirit on the mission field.

Nearly two and a half centuries ago a mission textbook was published, possibly the first in Protestant missionary history. Yet, when reading through it, this almost forgotten textbook still appears to be surprisingly relevant. It teaches from grass route level how to be a successful missionary and church planter.

In this article I want to go back to the beginnings of Protestant mission history. Although there were isolated examples of organised mission after the Reformation (for example, the so-called Indian Seminary in the Netherlands at the beginning of the seventeenth century), large-scale and organised Protestant missions did not take off until the beginning of the eighteenth century.

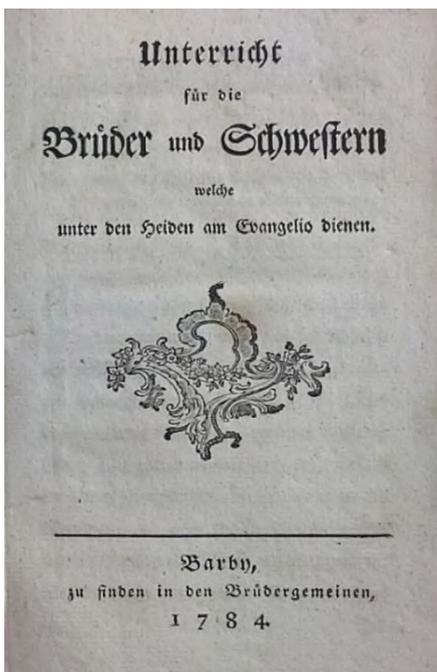
By this time, 150 years after the Reformation, many Protestant churches in Europe had fallen into a kind of dead orthodoxy with no zeal for mission. We therefore see the missionary movement especially emerging among the ranks of Pietism (Germany), Second Reformation (Netherlands), and among the Puritans (England).

An example of this is the worldwide mission the Moravians embarked on as from the 1720s. The Moravians (also called the Herrnhutters) stood in the Protestant tradition of John Hus. They originated from Moravia and Bohemia (modern-day Czechia), but fled to East Germany due to Roman Catholic persecution. There they found refuge on the estate of Count Ludwig von Zinzendorf, a Pietist Protestant.

The Moravians were the first to start with organised mission in several countries, such as Greenland, Canada, North America, the Caribbean Islands, Suriname and South Africa. Doctrinally, the Moravian Church positioned themselves between the Reformed and Lutherans. As for their view on the Lord's Supper they were more Reformed, as for their liturgy more Lutheran.

The purpose of this article is to share some excerpts from this old Protestant mission textbook, in order to illustrate its relevance for today.

The book was first published in Barby (Germany) in 1784 and was written by the Moravian August Spangenberg (1704-1792). He was the leading Moravian theologian after the death of Ludwig von Zinzendorf. His mission textbook is the fruit of half a century of Moravian mission in



The textbook is called:
Unterricht für die Brüder und
Schwestern welche unter den Heiden
am Evangelio dienen (*Training for
those Brothers and Sisters who are Serving
the
Gospel among the Heathen*).¹

general, and in particular his involvement in, amongst others, the mission work in Pennsylvania (North America) where he lived for years. Subsequently, a revised second edition was published in 1837,² after being augmented by Hans Peter Hallbeck (1784-1840), a missionary in Genadendal (South Africa) from 1817-1840. His missionary experiences also enriched this textbook. Often the Moravians used so-called tentmaker missionaries. It was precisely for such people that this mission textbook was of great use.

Excerpts from this mission textbook

Without claiming to be comprehensive,³ here are some excerpts from this mission textbook. Each time I will first give a paraphrase from the textbook, after which I will – if necessary – provide some explanatory notes,

¹ *August Spangenberg*, *Unterricht für die Brüder und Schwestern welche unter den Heiden am Evangelio dienen (Barby, 1784)*. Copy in *Unitätarchiv, Herrnhut, Germany*

² *Hans Peter Hallbeck*, *Unterricht für die Brüder und Schwestern welche unter den Heiden am Evangelio dienen (Gnadau, 1837)*. Copy in *Unitätarchiv, Herrnhut, Germany*

³ For more information, see *PG Boon*, *Hans Peter Hallbeck and the Cradle of Missions in South Africa (2015)*, 186f.

endeavouring to apply it for today.

1. It is God's will that as long as there are Gentiles, the gospel should be preached, for how will they believe in Him, if they have not heard of Him?

This point of departure (based on Matthew 28:19-20 and Romans 10:14) is just as relevant today. Although the Gospel has reached the ends of the earth geographically in the 21st century, it is yet far from having reached all people on earth.

2. The textbook begins by advising people who are considering serving in the mission. It refers to different Bible texts. Essential for a missionary is the love for those to whom he is going to bring the gospel. He has a lot of love, because a lot of love has also been shown to him. To understand the heart of a heathen, a missionary – who is just as sinful by nature – should also know his own heart.

3. In the early years, the Moravians only sent out unmarried men among the Gentiles, amongst others in view of the health risks on the mission field. In the course of time, however, it became apparent that men could not win enough confidence among pagan women. Pagan women had certain experiences with and perceptions about (pagan) men, making it difficult for the missionaries to gain their trust. Hence, the Moravians began sending out married couples, so that the missionaries' wives could work alongside them. This had good results in reaching pagan women.

Even today, the 'MmaMoruti' on the mission field plays an important role. Often women approach the missionary for advice via his wife.

4. It is important for a missionary to learn the language of the Gentiles as soon as possible. If he meets someone who can speak (fully or partially) a European language, he can initially use him as an interpreter and assistant. However, when preaching the Gospel, he should not make use of unconverted interpreters.

Also, today, interpreters on the mission field play an indispensable role.

5. As soon as a missionary can communicate with the Gentiles, he begins his mission work by introducing Jesus Christ to them, as the God who created everything, the One who rules over the whole world, the One who has all power. He also testifies of his love, that He became human to pay for all our sins and miseries and to open for us a new future without death and with eternal happiness.

6. The missionary textbook pays attention to the so-called second

generation, children of the first converts, who grow up in the church. They too must make a conscious choice for the Lord. They require a different approach than the first generation of converts. For them, biblical teaching from an early age is essential. On the mission field there is a close connection between mission and the education of the youth.

Even today the second generation in a mission church will not automatically become believers, and it is not a foregone conclusion that they will always stay in the church. Serving the youth with a solid education, from the perspective of the biblical worldview, remains essential.

7. The textbook emphasizes the training of local people so that they too can begin to serve in the mission. However, converts should not be placed in positions of great responsibility too quickly, as they can become conceited and too authoritarian over their compatriots (1 Timothy 3:6).

As an example, it can be mentioned that the very first theological training of South Africa opened its doors in 1838 in Genadendal. Also, in mission work today, we experience the need for training and employing people who come from the mission field itself. This creates a whole new dimension to mission work, which was initially started by missionaries from elsewhere

8. In the mission there is a fine balance between essential diaconal assistance to the poor on the one hand, and philanthropy that becomes sentimental on the other. Especially with missionaries who come from elsewhere or who still have little experience on the mission field, there is a tendency to – for fear of being too hard – become too indulgent and philanthropic. In this way the misery of the needy is only aggravated instead of relieved. The external help causes the “poor” to surrender to laziness and in the long run only become poorer.

This warning from a mission textbook of centuries ago is so relevant! Still, well-intentioned philanthropy from the West may cause many problems in the so-called Third World, also contributing to the persistent spiral of poverty in this part of the world.⁴

9. The mission textbook emphasises the importance of financial independence of older mission stations so that missionary work in other areas can continue. If older mission stations do not become financially self-

⁴ See in this regard: PG Boon, *The Funeral of Mandela. Mission in a Changing Country* (Pretoria, 2015).

supportive, they block the much-needed progress of spreading the Gospel to other areas.



Johannes Nakin, a black minister trained at the Seminary in Genadendal, the first theological training in South Africa. He began studying in Genadendal in 1846.

Even today, it is a struggle for mission churches to become self-supportive. New Christians must also learn to make grateful sacrifices for the preaching of the gospel and for church planting in other places. A mission project that just does not want to become financially independent, continues to swallow funds that could have been used to start new mission projects.

10. If a missionary is successful on the mission field, it should never make him conceited. He only reaps what others have sown. An old widow far away in Europe, who dedicates the mission work to the Lord in her prayers, contributes just as much to the conversion of the gentiles as those who are active on the mission field themselves!

Even today, mission work cannot take place in isolation, but it must live in people's hearts and prayers on the home front.

11. The textbook pays attention to the relationships between missionaries, especially if they live as a community on one mission station. If more than one brother is appointed to work among the gentiles, they must especially preserve the brotherly love among themselves. For nothing is more detrimental to the mission among the gentiles, and nothing is a greater

disgrace, than when there is discord among people who preach peace and love. The textbook further warns against the sin of envy: Whoever has a loving and humble heart, will experience it as a joy when he sees that his colleague is successful, thriving and bearing fruit. He will thank God for the grace his colleague experiences, just as much and just as heartily as when it would happen to himself.

How relevant are these words! Also, today we experience how harmful it can be when there is disagreement between colleagues, or when there is jealousy because of the success of others. The devil is still active, and we should not underestimate his influence.

12. In this regard, the mission textbook gives concrete guidelines on how to proceed if a dispute arises between colleagues. First, missionaries must be guided by the biblical principle found in Ephesians 4:26: "do not let the sun go down on your anger". However, if a dispute continues, according to Christ's rule in Matthew 18 - the person must first talk it through with the brother or sister concerned. If the dispute cannot be resolved, it should be discussed with the leader of the mission station. If it still cannot be reconciled, it must be submitted to the mission committee.⁵ The mission committee must listen to both sides, to form an impartial judgment. Only hereafter the matter, if it still has not been resolved, must be referred to the elders. They served as the last body of appeal.

In today's mission, clear and written agreements and policies are still essential, because it would be wishful thinking to believe that conflicts will not occur. Furthermore, it is equally important that missionaries adhere and submit to the agreed policies on how to appeal, and not try to follow a self-chosen route.

13. A matter that required special attention was how to deal with European colonists who lived in the vicinity of a mission station. Often it was a reality that their way of life was not in accordance with God's Word or Christian morality. Missionaries needed to prepare their converts for this, as they could not always protect and hide their converts from the world. It is a reality that pagan converts sooner or later had to face that not all Europeans maintain a Christian lifestyle.

Also, today, members in mission congregations sometimes wonder why they see so many church buildings in the traditionally white neighbourhoods, but at the same time many of these people do not really live a

⁵ *In the Moravian mission this was called the Helpers Conference.*

dedicated Christian life.

14. Also regarding European colonists, the textbook gives the missionaries the following advice: The worship services held at the mission station should also be open to people coming from elsewhere, for example visitors of European descent. However, it remains important that missionaries in their sermons continue to focus on the congregation gathered from the gentiles, and that the sermons do not become incomprehensible to the gentiles with their limited understanding, as the missionaries try to impress the more educated Europeans.

Conclusion

What is striking regarding this textbook is how relevant it still is today, even after ages. Furthermore, it is striking how practical it is. Rooted in sound theology, it did not get stuck on a theoretical level, but gave workable advice for missionaries on grass root level.

This textbook was clearly written by people (Spangenberg and Hallbeck) who both had a decent theological underpinning, whilst at the same time had experience on the mission field. Often the most useful knowledge is that which is born out of and tested in everyday life.

Even though we now live centuries later, this Protestant mission textbook is by no means outdated. It can still be used fruitfully by missionaries, church planters, churches, mission committees, mission deputies and the like.

Because the textbook was written in German and published in the old Gothic font, it is for all practical reasons inaccessible for most people in the present. It may be of great benefit to republish it, for example in an English translation.



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20. A guide for Christians to engage people of other world faiths, with a focus on Islam

Religion and religiosity have been intrinsic in the nature of humankind. About 20% of the world's population claim to have an adherence to secular, non-religious, atheistic and agnostic traditions. Many of the people in these categories are in the Western world whose ideologies are shaped by post-modern thinking. In the majority of our world there is the constant seeking of some manner of deism, some kind of worship, acknowledgement of a type of spirituality or an endeavour to relate to a divine being. This search goes on in a multiplicity of cultures and traditions among the vast nations of the world. The indigenisation and inculturation of belief systems have come to serve all of the numerous people groups spread all over and up to the remotest parts of this universe. These can be verified from the table below.

The figures in the above table are startling when we make a few comparisons. While the non-religious or a-religious people will grow by 61.49 million over a 40 year period, the Christian world community will decrease by 66.05 million over this same time. According to the Pew Research Centre published in 2010, religious conversion may have little impact on religious demographics between 2010 and 2050. Christianity is expected to lose a net of 66 million adherents mostly to the religiously unaffiliated, while the religiously unaffiliated are expected to gain 61 million adherents. Islam is expected to gain 3.2 million followers, while Buddhists

and Jews are expected to lose 2.9 million and 0.3 million adherents, respectively.¹

Table1: Prevailing religious population by country, 2020

Religion	Adherents	Percentage
Christianity	2.382 billion	31.11% ^[1]
Islam	1.907 billion	24.9% ^[1]
Secular ^[a] /Nonreligious ^[b] /Agnostic/Atheist	1.193 billion	15.58%
Hinduism	1.161 billion	15.16%
Buddhism	506 million	5.06%
Chinese traditional religion ^[c]	394 million	5%
Ethnic religions excluding some in separate categories	300 million	3%
African traditional religions	100 million ^[4]	1.2%
Sikhism	26 million	0.30%
Spiritism	15 million	0.19%
Judaism	14.7 million ^[5]	0.18%
Bahá'í	5.0 million ^[6]	0.07%
Jainism	4.2 million	0.05%
Shinto	4.0 million	0.05%
Cao Dai	4.0 million	0.05%
Zoroastrianism	2.6 million	0.03%
Tenrikyo	2.0 million	0.02%
Animism	1.9 million	0.02%
Neo-Paganism	1.0 million	0.01%
Unitarian Universalism	0.8 million	0.01%
Rastafari	0.6 million	0.007%
total	7.79 billion	100%

Table 2: The expected net change of religions due to religious conversion by Pew Research Center between 2010-2050.

Religion	Switching in	Switching out	Net change
Religiously unaffiliated	97,080,000	35,590,000	+61,490,000
Islam	12,620,000	9,400,000	+3,220,000
Folk religions	5,460,000	2,850,000	+2,610,000
Other religions	3,040,000	1,160,000	+1,880,000
Hinduism	260,000	250,000	+10,000
Judaism	320,000	630,000	-310,000
Buddhism	3,370,000	6,210,000	-2,850,000
Christianity	40,060,000	106,110,000	-66,050,000

Source: PEW Research Centre

million adherents. Islam is expected to gain 3.2 million followers, while Buddhists and Jews are expected to lose 2.9 million and 0.3 million adherents, respectively.¹

The Christian world statistics do not seem very encouraging. The challenges of post-modern thinking and more recently the post-Christian phenomenon are permeating the West. These notional thoughts in academia, philosophical thinking and keeping to new world trends of belief systems or “unbelief” systems foster and promote the life patterns being experienced in the Western parts of our world. Islam is said to grow by 3.22 million over this period. Statistical data on conversion to and from Islam are scarce. According to a study published on 2011 by PEW Research, what little information is available suggests that religious conversion has no net impact on the Muslim population, as the number of people who convert to Islam is roughly similar to those who leave Islam.

The faith communities

The religious world has much to contend with in the ever-changing contexts of countries, people and communities. Much of our situations are affected and impacted by political changes, socio-economic problems, people’s identity, birth-rights, financially imposing factors and the manipulation by inte-

rest and power-seeking groups. In the light of these challenges, religion has to become the catalyst for social and human cohesion.

The major religions in the world have different worldviews regarding the growth and spread of their faith. Christianity, Islam and Buddhism are basically mission minded. They are organised and orchestrated to achieve these goals. The other religions either grow or decrease by natural birth and attrition. The faith-based communities are also entrenched in the cultures and traditions of their birth, heritage and homelands.

These factors bring different dimensions to the practice and life experiences of these religions. Our focus is the engaging of Christianity and Islam with each other as world religions. It is interesting that they also occupy the positions of being the two largest religions in the world. Presently Christianity is larger than Islam. In order for Christians to engage with Islam as a focus area, there must be some basic understanding about Islam.

Size and Projected Growth of Major Religious Groups

	2010 POPULATION	% OF WORLD POPULATION IN 2010	PROJECTED 2050 POPULATION	% OF WORLD POPULATION IN 2050	POPULATION GROWTH 2010-2050
Christians	2,168,330,000	31.4%	2,918,070,000	31.4%	749,740,000
Muslims	1,599,700,000	23.2	2,761,480,000	29.7	1,161,780,000
Unaffiliated	1,131,150,000	16.4	1,230,340,000	13.2	99,190,000
Hindus	1,032,210,000	15.0	1,384,360,000	14.9	352,140,000
Buddhists	487,760,000	7.1	486,270,000	5.2	-1,490,000
Folk Religions	404,690,000	5.9	449,140,000	4.8	44,450,000
Other Religions	58,150,000	0.8	61,450,000	0.7	3,300,000
Jews	13,860,000	0.2	16,090,000	0.2	2,230,000
World total	6,895,850,000	100.0	9,307,190,000	100.0	2,411,340,000

Source: The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

These tables give us some idea of the projected growth of the major religions over a 40 year period.

Understanding Islam

The history of Islam concerns the political, social, economic and cultural developments of Islamic civilisation. Most historians believe that Islam originated in Mecca and Medina at the start of the 7th century CA. Muslims regard Islam as a return to the original faith of the prophets, such as

Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon and Jesus and with the submission (*Islam*) to the will of God. ²⁻⁴

According to tradition, in 610 CE, the Islamic Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him – *pubh*)⁵ began receiving what Muslims consider to be divine revelations, calling for submission to the one God, the expectation of the imminent Last Judgement, and caring for the poor and needy. Muhammad's message won over a handful of followers and was met with increasing opposition from Meccan notables. In 622, a few years after losing protection with the death of his influential uncle Abu Talib, Muhammad migrated to the city of Yathrib (now known as Medina). With Muhammad's death in 632, disagreement broke out over who would succeed him as leader of the Muslim community during the Rashidun Caliphate ⁶⁻⁷.

The Quran which is the book that forms the basis of the Islamic faith and belief system is understood to be the revelation received by the Prophet Muhammad. Muslims believe that the Quran was orally revealed by God to the final prophet, Muhammad, through the archangel Gabriel (*Jibril*), (incrementally over a period of some 23 years, beginning in the month of Ramadan, when Muhammad was 40; and concluding in 632, the year of his death.

Muslims regard the Quran as Muhammad's most important miracle; a proof of his prophethood; and the culmination of a series of divine messages starting with those revealed to Adam, including the *Tawrah* ("Torah"), the *Zabur* ("Psalms") and the *Injil* ("Gospel"). The word *Quran* occurs some 70 times in the text itself, and other names and words are also said to refer to the Quran. ⁸⁻¹²

Important words

Allah – God

Assalaamo alaikum wa rahmutallah – The peace and mercy of Allah be upon you

Adhan – The Muslim call to prayer (can be heard for a distance from the Mosque)

Dawah – The practice of inviting people to Islam

Eid al-Fitr – One of the two Muslim major holidays; it marks the end of Ramadhan.

Fatwa – A decision or ruling by a Muslim authority

Five Pillars of Islam - The fundamental practices required of all Muslims

Hadith – Muhammad's words or actions recorded in tradition

Hafiz – A man who has memorised the entire Quran
 Imam – A leader of Muslims, usually referring to one who leads prayer at a mosque
 Injil – The book that Muslims believe Allah sent to Jesus, often considered to be the Gospels of the New Testament
 Inshallah – A very common Muslim formula, meaning “If Allah wills it”
 Isa – The Arabic name for Jesus
 Jamaat – The Arabic word for assembly, usually used to mean “group” or “denomination”
 Jinn – Spiritual beings often considered analogous to demons
 Jumaa – The Muslim Sabbath
 Kafir – Infidel, non-Muslim
 Khalifa – The position of supreme leader over Muslims; usually the title is used to refer one of Muhammad’s four successors
 Khutba – A sermon, usually the Muslim Sabbath sermons on Friday
 Masjid – A Muslim place of worship, often called a mosque.
 Madrassa – Muslim religious place of teaching
 Mufti – A Muslim legal expert
 Ramadhan – The Muslim Holy month
 Salaat – The Muslim ritual prayers
 Shahada – The central proclamation of Islam: “There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is His messenger”
 Sharia – Islamic law
 Sheik – A Muslim leader, usually with graduate-level education in Islamic theology
 Shia – Followers of Shi’ism, one of the two major branches of Islam
 Six Articles of Faith -The fundamental Muslim beliefs
 Sunni – the second major branch of Islam
 Surah – A chapter of the Quran
 Wudhu – Ceremonial washing before salaat
 Zakat – Obligatory alms, charity

Fundamental Islamic beliefs

Five Pillars of Islam

The proclamation or Declaring the Faith – I testify that there is no God but Allah and that Muhammad is the apostle / prophet of God.

Prayer – Muslims have to pray five times a day, at dawn, soon after midday, mid-afternoon, soon after sunset and after nightfall. Friday is the holy day. Men should go to the Mosque for the midday prayers. The imam will preach before the prayers.

Fasting – Muslims fast during the month of Ramadan, the 9th month of the Islamic calendar. It is to remember when Muhammad was supposed to have his first vision of the angel Gabriel. They completely dry fast from sunrise to sunset for the month.

Charity – Muslims believe that if they give money to support Islam and help poor Muslims, this paves the way to paradise. Sunni Muslims must give 2.5 % of all they earn.

Pilgrimage to Mecca – All Muslims must travel to Mecca at least once in their lifetime if they can afford it. This is called Haj that happens during the 12th month of the Muslim Calendar. There are many rituals to be followed in Mecca and Medina. The important ritual is for the pilgrims to walk seven times around a large cubic structure, the Kaaba in which is embedded in one corner a Black Stone. The Black Stone is probably a meteorite.

Jihad (holy war) – It is to engage in war to protect the faith, one's family and one's self. Jihad has become an important facet of Islam to such an extent that it is regarded as the sixth pillar.

The Six Articles of Faith

Muslims must believe in:

- God who is one. This belief is called tawhid.
- Angels
- Holy Books, but only Quran valid today.
- Prophets, but only Muhammad to be followed today.
- The Day of Judgement.
- God's will, decides everything.

Engaging with people of other faiths – focus on Islam

This area of ministry is very interesting but also challenging. It is unlike trying to introduce someone to Jesus Christ as Saviour, who has no faith or religious background. In these cases it is bringing the gospel message to a person supposedly on a clean slate. When a person has no faith or background then the approach is like the many cases in the Bible such as Nicodemus in John 3, the Samaritan women at the well in John 4 or the encounters where the engagement is from a completely new perspective or understanding.

Where people do not have a religious background, there is no need to unteach them what they know or believe. Where there is a religious background, then the situation is one of unteaching and re-teaching. This is no

easy process or engagement. Therefore, the preparation of praying and trusting the work of the Holy Spirit are vital elements for dialogue and discussion in this evangelical exercise. The Lord Jesus in sending out His disciples in Luke 10:1-16, instructs them to find a *person of peace*.

In such a home the disciple will be invited in and could share the message of the gospel in Jesus Christ. This situation will prevail and develop when the evangelist has spent sufficient time in praying and interceding for this specific person, people, home or family of peace. In Luke 10:16 Jesus states “he who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects Him who sent me”.

It is evident from Luke 10 our engagement must be the person or people of peace. The Lord Jesus strangely instructs His evangelist to move on if and when he or she does not encounter a person of peace. The guidance of the Lord Jesus and His word are necessary instructions for the engagement in the evangelistic dialogue processes.

In the case of Muslims, they have a very organised and programmed approach of indoctrinating children from the time of the school going age of a child. Every child is required to attend the Madrassa, where they are taught to read the Quran in Arabic and the basic principles of the faith. This is compulsory and mandatory. The child grows up knowing much about the faith and practice of Islam. When the Adhan (call to prayer) is sounded five times a day, every Muslim is reminded to attend the mosque to pray or to pray at home.

The Christian approach should not be naive to believe that people of other faiths are waiting to receive the gospel message of the Bible. There needs to be a healthy respect for the people of other faiths and especially Islam. The commitment and dedication in Islam can be measured and gauged by the large numbers of men who attend the Friday midday prayer at the mosque.

In the preface of John Calvin’s Institutes “he used two key phrases to describe the Christian life: that faith is the principle work of the Holy Spirit; that prayer is the principle exercise of faith” (Calvin: 2008: xvi)

The approach for any kind of evangelism among the Muslims must begin with a deep sense of prayer and intercession. This is vital for the approach, to develop courage and strength from the Lord to even begin in such a ministry. One cannot emphasise enough how vital and crucial the role of praying and seeking God’s guidance is in this engaging and evangelising process.

The effectiveness of such efforts can and must be from a solid spiritual platform and basis. Therefore, times of personal, group and corporate prayer must bring those who wish to be involved in this ministry to a point of deep spiritual understanding which must be shaped by praying and interceding.

The second important aspect of the approach must be to entirely depend on the Holy Spirit. What does this mean? One cannot become loaded with information and teaching and then let loose to engage people from Islam. This will spell nothing but disaster. There has to be the leading, guiding, empowering and equipping by the Holy Spirit for any individual of the Christian faith to embark on such a ministry. We are reminded of what Jesus said in Acts 1:8 where He forbade his disciples to go out or be involved in any kind of evangelism or ministry until they have received the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

The Lord Jesus viewed the anointing by the Holy Spirit as being absolutely necessary and vital for any type of evangelism. In the text the Lord described evangelism in four spheres but all at the same time. This is explained by the Greek word “καί” which means “and”, used four times in the one verse. The church should not adopt an “ostrich” approach where it focuses solely on its congregation and all the affairs of one congregation or one denomination. There has to be a wider approach of the gospel to people of other faiths, the world and the kingdom of God. We need to transform from a congregational or denominational mentality and focus to a kingdom mentality. The church cannot accomplish anything without the work of the person of the Holy Spirit in that endeavour.

The third vital need for Muslim evangelism is the study of the Bible. It not just about reading but dealing with the authority and interpretation of Scripture as it answers questions and issues that would be raised from the Quran. The need for in-depth studies of the Bible is prompted by the fact that there are many similarities and common events recorded by both these holy books. There are more than 50 incidents or people’s references that are common to both the Quran and the Bible. There are also significant differences in both these documents. A good knowledge and understanding of the Bible will certainly assist the course of this dialogue. Some knowledge of the Quran will also be advantageous in this evangelical outreach effort.

The question is often raised about debates and challenges in public forums or symposiums. The writer’s view is that these approaches are counter productive. When the situation of polemics and confrontation takes centre

stage in a dialogue, it is bound to lead to aggressive and less sensitive reactions which polarise people of two faiths rather than bringing them to points of understanding and acceptance. In the situation of mutual respect the outcomes will work towards a peaceful and amicable understanding of each other's faith and belief systems.

There can be convincing points and reasoning to foster the end result to be cordial and not conflictive with animosity. Our world has too much of religious, political and economic differences which brew and end up in large scale wars and destruction. We do not need even one more such situation. We can come to conclusions of convincing the other party of our belief, faith, the meaning, understanding and acceptance of such a religious persuasion. There can also be an end result of agreeing to disagree.

The style and manner of communicating is paramount especially in religious discussions of different faiths.

How does one communicate the message of the gospel to people of the Muslim faith or any other faith, must be understood and practiced with respect, sensitivity, care, religious tolerance and without aggression? Here dialoguing with the Muslim can be a great manner of approach. This can be explained in three ways.

First approach: Friendship

We need to build bridges with real and genuine friendships. These friendships start to help crossing boundaries which were obstacles in the past. The starting point would be the areas of commonality. There are definite areas where the Christian can dialogue with the Muslim on common grounds.

There are some well-known differences between Muslims and Christians. Muslims who study the holy Quran, do not believe Jesus was divine or that He died on the cross and do not subscribe to the trinitarian concept from the Council of Nicea. Christians do not recognise Muhammad (pbuh) as a prophet, do not celebrate Islamic holidays, and have different days of worship than Muslims.

That said, there are surprising similarities between the Islamic and Christian faiths:

God the Father – Muslims and Christians worship only one God and believe all are children of Him.

Prophets – Both religions revere the early prophets including Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Joseph, John the Baptist and even Jesus (peace be upon them.)

The Bible – Christians are familiar with the Bible, but Muslims also believe the Bible to be holy scriptures insofar as it is translated correctly and does not contradict the Quran.

Religion – Both Muslims and Christians believe that practicing their faith is good for them personally now, creates peace and harmony among people, and brings blessings in the life after mortality.

Commandments – People of both faiths believe in similar rules given by God for all people and obeying them keeps humankind in a right relationship with God.

Mary – Both Muslims and most Christians believe Mary was a virgin and that Jesus was born miraculously.

Messiah's miracles – Islam and Christianity both ascribe that Jesus Christ was the promised Messiah and did perform miracles.

Satan – Both Muslims and Christians believe Satan is real and evil and that he tries to make people follow him instead of God.

The return – The two faiths believe Jesus will return from Heaven. Antichrist The belief that there will be an antichrist who appears before the end of the world and that Jesus will return and conquer him is common to both theologies.

Judgment – Both religions believe a day of judgment will really happen and people will be judged for the lives they lead on earth. Hell and paradise – Muslims and Christians believe hell and paradise to be literal places.

Covenants – Muslims and some Christians believe God connects with His people through covenants.

Family – Family is a foundational part of both Christian and Muslim life. Both peoples believe the family has a critical impact on society.

Codes of health – Muslims and some Christians have codes of health such as not drinking alcohol or not eating certain foods. These codes of health are part of their covenants made with God.

Modesty – Muslims and most Christians believe the body should be treated with respect” (Christensen: 2015).¹⁴

Second approach: Relationships

This will mean taking friendship to the next level. When the people of the Christian faith can build trust and integrity with people of the Muslim faith, it takes the communication and evangelism process to levels of deeper understanding with each other. These areas of common ground can certainly post much for discussion in the realms of friendships and relationships. Initiatives need to be taken by the Christian evangelist to utilise these aspects as entry points for the friendship and relationship.

Third approach: Lifestyle

The above two aspects must unfold in the third, which is one's lifestyle. The manner in which the Christian evangelist or witness lives his or her life must help to create the Biblical lifestyle which would create impressions upon the Muslim communities. A life of caring, supporting, assisting in times of need and difficulties would bring out the lifestyle which is expected from the Christians by the people of the Muslim and other faiths.

We need to understand that people of other faiths are not just people to be preached at. There needs to be the bridges of friendship, relationship and lifestyle that we can cross in our dialoguing. These are by no means easy approaches which are similar to handouts we offer and expect responses or results. This is done painstakingly with deep senses of commitment, genuineness, sacrifice, extending oneself and making transitions in our minds and hearts. It has to be of a serious nature with no compromises.

The biblical basis for engagement

The writer's approach would be ensuring that in the dialogue process there is agreement on the frame of references to be utilised. The Christian evangelist and witness would need at the outset to state the frame of reference being the Bible.

Confirmation and support for the Christian frame of reference is found in 2 Timothy 3:16, the word used for inspired in the original Greek text is "θεόπνευστος", which means God breathed, "where the Lord breathed life into His Word". This provides proof and support of the Bible being the living and inspired Word of God. The text further enhances the fact that God is the author of this Word and it must be used for teaching and ministry.

Did Jesus have the right to make a very cutting-edge statement in John 14: 6-7 (ESV): "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known the Father also." A clear statement of Jesus saying he is the only way to the

Father. Is this arrogance or messianic promise and confirmation? Having gone through the crucifixion to compensate for the fall of Adam and all of humankind and hence creating a way for humankind's forgiveness gives Jesus this authority. Based upon this authority Jesus makes the statement in response to the Apostle Thomas asking Him "How can we know the way?"

A challenge at the very beginning of any dialogue with a Muslim will be the understanding of original sin. The Muslim view is that origin sin was dealt with by God with Adam and Eve. Therefore, the sins of humankind are dependent on human choice, behaviour, rebelliousness, rejection of God and His commands, as well as the work of Satan. It is confirmed in Ephesians 6:12 that our battles are against the powers of darkness.

This brings us into a sinful state which is by our birth. One has to go back to the frame of reference, the Bible and highlight Romans 3:23 "all have sinned and have come short of the glory of God". There has to be this acknowledgement and acceptance of inborn and original sin and not incidental sin. This may take quite some convincing.

There is further support for this understanding from Romans 5:12: "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned." Romans 5:14 speaks of death reigning from the time of Adam. If the initial agreement on the frame of reference has been established, then the Christian can follow through with these Biblical arguments.

The verses of Romans 5:18-19 lends intrinsic support to clear any misunderstanding, doubts and unbeliefs. These verses say (v. 18 "consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men". V. 19: "For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of one man the many will be made righteous").

Understanding the concept of original sin will take up the central role in this dialogue. The Christian and Islamic worldviews of this concept of humankind are vastly different. We need to focus on Romans 6:23 "the wages of sin is death and the gift of God is eternal life". This creates a dilemma in the dialogue. The fallback on the frame of reference, the Bible is crucial in this dialogue.

The Muslim belief of heaven and being rewarded by God is central to their understanding of life on earth and the afterlife in heaven. This will need to

take some real convincing and convicting by the work of the Holy Spirit. It is important for us to know that scriptural instruction and guidance is vital for these evangelistic engaging processes.

These are often the accusation or inference that Christians want to convert Muslims or people of other faiths. In the defence of the Christian, the textual support comes from Romans 8:16 “the Spirit witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God”. Here it is clear that the conversion and conviction processes are undertaken by the Holy Spirit. We need to note that the “Spirit” with a capital letter “S” in reference to the Holy Spirit witnesses with our spirit with a small letter “s” referring to our spirits. So, this is carried out by God’s Holy Spirit and the evangelist is merely utilised as the mediator, communicator, vehicle and messenger of God. This is the work of God and it is not dependent on human individuals or groups. It answers the question the accusations and inferences made against people or Christians.

Upon having these understandings, acknowledging the dialogue and engagement process are being led by the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit leads to the point of personal conviction, response, understanding, belief, acceptance and trusting God’s providence. The texts of John 3 lays down the principles and textual interpretation for the understanding of personal faith. Here the “born again” experience is explained in Jesus’ encounter with Nicodemus.

The way to the Father and the new life in Jesus is soundly portrayed in these exchanges of being born of the water and the Spirit. John 3 explains why salvation is personal and not a group, family, community or congregation happening. Jesus further reminds us of this personal commitment in Revelation 3:20 where He says “behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me”. The Lord Jesus states “if anyone hears my voice” as the point for an individual to engage with Him.

Here the Lord Jesus invites an individual to a personal dialogue. The person has to ask the serious questions of personal faith and belief. The Christian is to encourage the individual to engage with the God of the Bible in the person of Jesus Christ. This is the basis and the place of engagement one aims to bring a person to.

Conclusion

Interfaith dialogue has many goals as its outcome. The issues of dealing with religious tolerance, conflict, peace, reconciliation and a situation of mutual-

ity are some of the goals which sets the agenda for religious dialogue. These situations are facilitated by joint efforts to achieve these outcomes.

What does the Bible say about dialogues? The Barnabas Fund publication *Engage* describes “the Bible dialogue as not about finding similarities and common ground between different religions; but about persuading people to change their minds, this being paving the way for people to become confessing Christians and this is seen as interfaith discussion.” (*Engage*: 2012: 61) The Bible cautions not to deny any aspects of its faith and not to add any parts of another religion.

The clarity of the Biblical perspective of the Christian faith being unique and so is the Lord Jesus Christ. This is indeed not the claim of the Christian but Jesus Himself as alluded to earlier. The pursuance of this noble intention will mean sometimes arriving at a position of agreeing to disagree. There need not be dialogues or discussions which lead to emotional and euphoric responses or reactions. The discussion must remain on levels of theological points, interpretations and content based on the frames of reference.

The people involved in these discussions need to be guided by maturity, integrity, mutual respect, honouring one another and based on the better good of religious understanding. The writer wishes these forums for religious dialogue and discussion could be ongoing exercises to cater for the inquiring minds for their search of the ultimate truth.

*May the true and earnest seeker find their heart's desire.
Soli Deo Gloria*

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21. The mission way forward according to the latest research

This contribution discusses three important aspects regarding mission work in mainstream Reformed churches in South Africa:

- Scriptural based principles to which churches are bound
- Research about mainstream declining churches
- And in conclusion some whistle blowing aspects to be faced.

Scriptural mission

Jesus as the Initiator of salvation instructed his disciples in the last commission to proclaim his kingdom on earth (Matthews 28:18–20; Acts 1:8). This, the Great Commission, is the key to all mission work. It involves God and man within a covenantal relationship. God as the missional God (*missio Dei*) sent his Son, Jesus Christ, and Jesus sent his disciples to all nations.

The Great Commission, as key, is still applicable to the church members as followers of Jesus Christ, today. It will remain so until He returns. Until then, followers must wholeheartedly obey the Great Commission.

The scriptural mission consists of two parts: the indicative and the imperative. The indicative or factual statement indicates the announcement of Jesus's power, authority and his promise of being ever present. The imperative points to his followers proclaiming the message of salvation. Man and God are in a covenantal relationship. This mutual integrated involvement is known as theonomic reciprocity, meaning God works according to his plan by which man is actively involved to do God's will. This intertwined phenomenon works in mysterious ways – all to glorify God!

It seems incomprehensible why God would involve broken humans. Man's involvement predicts the opposite of what is commanded, namely holding back from proclaiming the good news. It might lead to grieving the Holy Spirit, even extinguish or totally shut out the Spirit.

The imperative of the Great Commission implies obedience to the system of unity which the Great Commission reveals. The system of unity comprises human activities focussed on the internal edification of the congregation, and by so doing, simultaneously empowering members to proclaim the Word externally (missional). Churches reflecting both aspects of the system of unity, portray being healthy as well as being part of the missional church.

Research

Almost three decades ago, worldwide research emerged focussing on reasons for both church growth and decline. At the turn of the century, South African researchers focussed strongly on the decline of mainstream churches. Research within the Reformed mainstream churches focussed on God's as well as man's activities as it manifests within the 21st century South African society. This implies research concerning God the Spirit's unstoppable movements, as well as man's broken involvement in God's mission, inevitably limited as result of his brokenness, therefore researching a skewed covenantal relationship.

Research concerning man's involvement focused without difficulty on existential factors influencing humans. But more difficult to research are factors regarding paradigms and ways of thinking.

Regardless of man's brokenness, God stays faithful to the covenantal relationship as He promised in the Great Commission. The missional God works unstoppably toward his return. Research reveal that this unstoppable drive of the Holy Spirit works by means of wave movements. Such wave movements change set ways, creating new circumstances to ensure the spreading of the gospel to all nations.

The Spirit's unstoppable drive can also be seen in the movement taking place from the northern to the southern hemisphere, as well as in the *cyclic ecclesiastic* movements typical to the Christian religion. A condensed version of the results of this research follows.

God's activity

Levelling wave approximately every 500 years

The first wave was noticed about 500 AD during the decline of the Roman Empire and the start of the Dark Ages. The second wave reached its peak by 1054 when the Great Schism between Rome (Roman Catholics) and Constantinople (Greek Orthodox) occurred. The third wave developed and peaked in 1517 when Luther nailed the Wittenberg statement, starting the Protestant Reformation. The fourth wave is now emerging to set forth the next radical shift during the 21st century.

It is important to realise that these powerful waves do not destroy religion. On the contrary, it is the Holy Spirit's levelling way of creating new circumstances for the gospel to be proclaimed. Churches and society living during the third decade of this century, exist amidst an inevitable phase of transition driven by God.

God's activity: the wave from north to south

The shift from the northern to the southern hemisphere reveals the tremendous syncretic built up in underdeveloped countries. It is a charismatic way of interpretation (spiritualistic paradigm) and increases at a tremendous pace. It provides a spiritual home for the "have-nots", while mainstream churches, built on an institutional paradigm, experience serious decline. It is noticed that during this period of transition and restructuring of mind-sets, both – charismatic and mainstream groups – experience an identity crisis.

Another wave emerging within the charismatic stream, points to the 'revolving-door syndrome'. The syndrome is the result of the charismatic stream's inability to empower the enormous number of new members. Consequently an 'advance and recession'-tendency follows, which might lead to disillusionment, churchlessness and can ultimately develop into nihilism.

God's activity - waves within traditional mainstream church practices

Research points out that every congregation experience a life cycle which consists of a growth and a decline phase. The period of each phase is determined by the intensity of members' activities. Lasting revival can be maintained if each generation realises that repentance and reformation are essential in God's kingdom.

Some of the main principles emphasising lasting revival, are found in Romans 12:2, the Great Command and Great Commission and in Matthew 9:17. The period of a church's life cycle is determined by the unique combination of many internal and external factors, including openness toward change and reformation.

In the third decade of the 21st century research highlights that the traditional mainstream as well as the charismatic stream, are not only in a survival struggle, but also dragged along by the unstoppable wave. Wherever change and revival occur, a growth or *societas* wave emerges within the cycle. Whenever the *societas* wave subsides, the *communitas* wave enters and decline and lack of growth occurs. The life cycle of churches inevitably moves forward. To stay in pace with the ever changing cycles, research indicates that the ability to change as the only way of survival, ought to be pursued with vigour.

Man's activity

Research pointed out that man's involvement in church growth and decline can be categorised as factors that can be measured and factors that are difficult to measure.

Factors that can be measured concerning decline in mainstream churches

A summary of measurable factors include depopulation, urbanisation, attachment to religious buildings, influences regarding attending church services and decline in the birth rate.

Depopulation of rural areas and ***urbanisation*** are clear phenomena when decline in church numbers is discussed. As a result of urbanisation, many rural churches are almost empty. The emotional reaction is that the few members left, are desperate not to let go of the church building. It is proven that the congregation disperses when the church building is sold.

Churches in cities, on the other hand, are not prepared or open to accommodate the variety of people entering. Many people therefore disappear from the religious terrain. Data of mainstream church members attending a Sunday service indicate serious decline. Growing numbers by means of evangelisation is rare. In fact, data confirms that it is of no consideration at all.

Statistics confirm the constant and drastic ***decline in births*** in the mainstream churches. The young generation whose calling it is to reproduce, is noticeably absent. The absence of children is the result of the fears of what

the future may hold. The emigration tendency, mainly because of political circumstances, is fear based. The fear to have children is further burdened by the expanding of career opportunities for women and materialism. Natural church growth is seriously affected by decline in births.

Research emphasises a few other *interwoven economic, political and social factors* affecting church growth and decline. Immigrants to South Africa almost never consider mainstream churches when church membership is considered. Mainstream churches are also not adapted to accommodate different nationalities. Emigrating families cause immediate decline in a church. In rare cases of returning to this country, membership of mainstream churches is seldom considered.

Statistics indicate that a full generation of Western orientated church members left this country, since the shock wave caused by political change in 1994. Socially this shock wave shifted mainstream members to the periphery of social life. Distrust in the church increased, caused by unsatisfactory answers to serious questions. Believers' sense of survival hereby received a serious blow, while they had seen themselves traditionally as the called people spreading the gospel in South Africa.

Another factor research brought to light, is the *increasing power of technology*. Data focused on the declining Western orientated Reformed mainstream churches, as well as the struggling African orientated Reformed churches. The almost unbridgeable distance among these different orientated groupings within the Reformed mainstream, is clearly due to poverty/wealth, lack/presence of technology and technological skills.

The influence of technology is even greater when seen in the light of globalism and the intertwined factors mentioned above.

Recent research indicates the radical influence in family life caused by social change. The absence of parents gives rise to the erosion of values and a decline in values and religious practises. Uncertainty and lack of religious zeal are also noticed in the fact that parents allow whatever their children demand – including religious practises. Even change in the weather is held to be a reasonable excuse for parents not to attend church.

This degenerative process of primary transmission is known as *cooling theology*. Many sociologists agree that the poor process of transmission is embedded in laxity among parents experiencing the younger generation. Parents, as the primary source in the process of social transmission – including religious lifestyle – are regarded as the main reason why children

do not have content to believe in. The secondary source in the process is found in technological entertainment – replacing the Bible in the household.

Those still attending church services often experience a sense of dualism. Research formulates this dualism as the church being seen as left behind, caused by unwillingness to adapt to social change. Alienation and a lack of Scriptural obedience within a covenantal relationship, are regarded as serious reasons for decline in churches.

Factors difficult to measure concerning decline in mainstream churches

Secularism¹

Academic sources formulate that paradigms determine human activity. The effect of secularism is serious, specifically when continuous restructuring of man's intertwined mind sets are researched. The resulting research aspects include a decreasing biblical concept of God, the increase of disbelief, the tendency of churches in decline, as well as the absence of missional focus.

Groupings

Bound by the ongoing restructuring process, two main groupings manifest themselves:

- an insular, closed group due to a conservative/ fundamentalist mind set
- and a progressive/liberal mind set.

(Ultra) conservatism, noticed among mainstream churches, consequently leads to portraying introvert behaviour, lack of adaptability, lack of leadership, vision and missional focus.

The social effect observed caused by these groupings is distrust, disagreement, increase of marginalisation and decline in numbers.

Spirituality

Research explicitly points out that members leaving the traditional church still portray a strong sense of spirituality. They focus on the authority of Christ, working within man through the Holy Spirit. The base of power is experienced within man himself, although the focus is on the Holy Spirit. The traditional church is no longer seen as authoritative or relevant.

¹ *Secularism is the umbrella term for different ways of thinking; such as globalism, pluralism, materialism, individualism, subjectivism and postmodernism*

Diachronical research indicates that although an exceedingly small percentage of mainstream churches might, in time, accept the reality of change, the pace of adaptation is inadequate to the rapid reduction of numbers in mainstream churches.

The last factor regarding declining mainstream church membership numbers and lack of missional focus concerns the ecclesiastic practice. The dominant mind set among mainstream churches portrays an institutional paradigm. Data still reflects churches declining, regardless of their focus on repentance, introduction of the system of unity and the creation of healthy church practices. This shows that the traditional mind set seems to remain oblivious to the intensity of the crisis and still regards the church practice to be beyond question.

The degree of awareness among leaders regarding the decline was also researched. It included the possibility of repentance toward a Scriptural mind set, as well as whether the South African population, regardless of language and culture, would be regarded as the missional target group.

However, the challenges posed by the changing context accelerate faster than mainstream churches are able to accommodate. Research concludes that although Scriptural strategy was clearly formulated to pursue healthy churches, contradictory factors are overwhelming. It was indicated that although change toward Scriptural thinking might be possible, the interwoven factors move on unstopably, changing the face of 21st century life.

In conclusion: the way forward!

Research of the past fifteen years emphasises a few important aspects regarding the way forward for the mission. Nonetheless, no one can envision the way forward with certainty. Despite all the factors contributing toward the decline in mainstream churches and regardless of the unstop-pable movement of the religious waves, the Great Commission will probably remain just that, until the Lord returns.

The way forward remains the proclamation of the good news. This entails a spiritual understanding of the Great Commission, including the promise of the Lord's presence, combined with steadfast prayer and zeal in the covenantal system of unity. This will encourage believers to pursue deep and faster change toward a Christocentric paradigm.

The Great Commission therefore ought to be clearly understood. Leaders ought to earnestly look for new possibilities and ways to work toward change/repentance among members, as well as among those who are not

yet members. Different tools can be explored to comply with the aims of the system of unity.

Research revealed in no uncertain terms that among the intertwining factors, the only terrain that man can make an impact on, is on the level of changing one's way of thinking.

Although man feels defenceless and weak within the changing society, Scripture ensures believers that change indeed is possible (Romans 12:2). Repentance and a new diligent obedience to God's Great Command and Great Commission will enlighten the way forward.

How can change in thinking take place? Within the church, knowledge and understanding of church growth as described in the Great Commission are to be obtained within a Christocentric mind set. The covenantal principles, added to the knowledge about the intertwined factors, will be valuable in the new social and ecclesiastic context. Being contextualised empowered churches ought to plan effectively and work toward healthy churches. Scriptural principles ought to be earnestly considered and actioned – regardless of what it takes.

Mainstream believers experience the recent *communitas* wave of declining churches. Everything humanly possible must be done to counter the declining wave of church deterioration. Applying God's principles might develop into a local *societas* phase of growth, which will encourage believers in this crisis period. They should experience motivation, enthusiasm, an increase in faithful courage and more steadfast trust in the Lord.

Although uncertainties will remain, the mere observation of believers' honest Scriptural intentions, their obedience and truthful actions in order to think and act according to the Great Commission, can motivate the congregation to persist and endure, even in a totally new way of church practice. The scriptural secret of church growth must become common knowledge – from those at theological institutions, to every church member – regardless how young or old. It has to establish a renewed calling among believers on the mission way forward.

Mainstream believers will realise that the traditional ways focusing mainly on one part of the Command, namely the internal build-up of a congregation, is difficult to change. Repentance can be experienced as drastic. The road of repentance asks for patience, seeing that change does not happen overnight.

Simultaneously, believers ought to be honest in declaring that no one else but man must handle this crisis. Believers must confess that the skewed ecclesiastic ways were caused by man's traditional imbalances - caused by their own traditional mindset. Believers as Christ-followers must focus on Scripture and prayer as the only way to follow, or to face the church in its declining phase.

While the shift is taking place, leadership ought to be ultra-sensitive to signs indicating a relapse. Leaders must conscientiously be ahead of the shifting process, empowering the congregation on the unknown road.

Specific phases on this road will be noticed in each person, restructuring change at his/her own pace. Leaders must consider the followers by reminding them about the permanency of religious change, prayer, diligence and sustainability.

Any form of ecclesiastic stagnation must be cautiously prevented according to scriptural strategy. Scriptural strategic guidelines regarding leadership, revisioning and communication should be prayerfully prioritised.

When a process of change is noticed in a congregation, a sense of reassurance will be experienced – knowing God is actively involved in the process – as He alone provides willingness to change. Trust in God will be strengthened for God alone can straighten skewed ways. The comforting and encouraging signs of God's presence and activity by means of man's actions toward change, will activate mainstream believers in such a way, that *missio Dei* will indeed realise. Doors will be opened for mainstream believers to proclaim the Word of salvation to everyone in South Africa, and even further.

Once churches witness the transformation working within their congregation, life outside a church is also observed in a new way. Within the last few years restructuring of mindsets revealed a scattered and bewildered society. The pace of change in society might awaken a new form of anxiety and fear. However, a scriptural mindset will rejoice in the work of the Holy Spirit, realising the mission field is brought right in front of each church member's front door!

The reality of secular life as well as nihilism and the influence of other religions will have to be part of the churches' consciousness, realising that this unknown world is exactly the terrain in which to proclaim the Word of God. The expanding mission field surrounding mainstream congregations

at the start of the third decade of the 21st century, is in serious need of Christ's Great Commission.

Churches where stagnation prevails, will experience decline and could possibly see final collapse. It is disturbing to note that the majority of mainstream churches have not yet reached the phase where missional thinking takes its rightful place. It is incomprehensible that some mainstream churches are struggling on, still oblivious of the unstoppable levelling wave changing society and sweeping through the world, South Africa included.

Evangelising and mission work are still something vague for many mainstream churches. Many believers have never given thought to the millions of lost people in today's crumbling society. Those who are experiencing the missional mind shift are to take note of the next challenge. This challenge focuses on how people outside mainstream churches ought to be approached. Many of them are ex-mainstreamers, now rejecting the Bible and the church.

A scattered lost world – this is the church's calling on the way forward. The unknown mission field, the gradual death of mainstream congregations, the lack of identity, and the pace of social change, are factors worthy of serious attention.

The unstoppable levelling wave destined for this century will continue to create new contexts, replacing existing structures – all for the sake of saving the Lord's chosen living in this age. All church members, leaders, ministers and theological institutions must realise that faster, deeper and more daring scriptural changes are to be fully considered and prayerfully implemented.

Lasting revival can be a persistent phenomenon, if each generation realises and acts according to the principles Scripture teaches. Principles that work ongoing change, repentance and reformation (Romans 12:2, the Great Commission and the Great Command, Matthews 9:17) play a major role in the church practice. Healthy congregations do have the potential to grow, allowing God's kingdom to come – God willing!

The mission of the church, enlightened by the latest research and supported by faith, is crystal clear. There is only one way: Forward! - in line with the Commissioner's marching wave! Praising and declaring Him!

No U-turn attempts or status quo tendencies ought to be detected close to the marching army - not even when darkness, difficulties and prosecution come the church's way. The Lord entrusted his will to his covenantal partners. In faith his commission must be honoured and obeyed, regardless

of bad or unwanted circumstances. The church ought to feel extremely privileged to be part of the mission during this challenging and Spirit-driven levelling era.

The omnipresent Lord provided the Great Commission as key; every day he provides the possibility of repentance and to follow Him in *Coram Deo*. He will make a way to declare His love and salvation for the lost world of the 21st century – with or without mainstream churches.

The path forward is dark but certain, for at the end of the road, He will return to gather all his children who heard his voice during these last days!

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22. Remaining a reforming influence in Africa

The need

It is true that the numbers of nominal Christians are still growing in Africa. It is unfortunately also a fact that the description “nominal” is all too true. Someone has described the church in the USA as “a continent wide and one inch deep”. The same is probably even more true of Africa.

In the recent censuses in South Africa some 80% of the population declare their religion to be Christian. In actual fact, the majority of those have no active affiliation with any denomination. It is still fashionable to be able to “have a church”, for the purpose, among others, of a good burial, so people may call themselves Christian because a parent or grandparent once belonged to a certain denomination. Many of the leader-orientated black churches are syncretistic. Reports of sexual abuse of female members by the leaders regularly fill news bulletins.

In Rwanda, by the end of the twentieth century, 90% of the population was reputed to be Christian, mainly Roman Catholic. Yet in the genocide of 1994 those “Christians” killed almost one million “fellow Christians”. Even nuns and clergy seem to have been involved.

The established denominations

Another insidious factor is that many of the established denominations which originally brought the gospel to Africa have since then rejected that same gospel – some already long ago. When one reads the histories of missions in Africa and learns about the devoted heroes and heroines of faith, their sacrifices and the sterling quality of their work, and the wonderful fruits it yielded, it is a heart-rending tragedy to experience how

everything that they believed in, preached and suffered for is now rejected by church leaders and whole denominations with them.

The moderator of a “Reformed” denomination which was regarded as conservative until less than a generation ago now seems to be intent on destroying all opposition to ancestor veneration. In the same denomination, the resurrection of Christ and the uniqueness of Christ as the only way to God can be questioned; a prominent missionary can declare his belief that in the end all humanity will inherit eternal life regardless of belief or conduct.

Theologians reject the biblical revelation and create for themselves a user-friendly God, who in the end grants eternal life to all mankind. Paganism, drunkenness and random sex are condoned. In many churches the only gospel ever communicated is to be found in the hymns, composed more than a century ago, but still well-known and popular.

There are still Bible believing Christians in those denominations, but they are mostly found among the simple Christian believers rather than in the clergy or seminaries.

African Independent Churches

It is also a tragic fact that a large part of the church in Africa is constituted by the so-called African Independent (or Indigenous) Churches, of which the majority are totally syncretistic: a new paganism with a little Christian veneer on it. I said “the majority”, because there are a few of them which hold to biblical beliefs, and who actually confront paganism in a more meaningful way than most of the traditional churches.

A Korean missionary friend of mine established a conference centre in Malawi. In August 2016 he invited me and a Reformed Baptist friend whom I suggested, to lead a pastor’s conference for a church which he founded. There were about thirty pastors present. The first question we asked them was whether they had any certainty of salvation, and on what basis they thought to have that certainty. Of the thirty pastors not more than four referred to Christ Jesus and/or faith in Him as the ground of their certainty.

We were not surprised, since we both had had similar experiences with many pastors in Africa. In the theological seminary where I taught, I made a point of it to ask every new student the same questions. Among them were more than one son of Reformed pastors. None of them had any idea of assurance of salvation or the basis for it. This is an indication of the great need for biblical training for church leaders.

Pentecostal churches

The largest part of more Biblically orientated churches in Africa, as in Latin America, is probably formed by what could be broadly termed the Pentecostals. As we all know, there are many different forms and degrees of Pentecostalism, some in which the Bible plays a very important role, and some, on the other edge of the scale, where personal experience and personal revelations from God are more dominant. Many of them are strictly opposed to pagan beliefs.

In answer to an enquiry by me, one Reformed pastor in Venda told me that it was well known that most of the churches in the country were syncretistic by nature, except for the (Dopper) Reformed Churches themselves and the Pentecostal denomination, The Apostolic Faith Mission. He mentioned the very interesting fact that the Apostolic and the Doppers watch each other with eagle eyes in order to discover any form of syncretism, so as to be able to accuse the other of not really being Christians but still heathens.

Our task

Summarising what has been said so far, it should be obvious that the most important task, the most obvious way in which to remain a reforming influence in Africa, the approach which must surely have the strongest impact for the advance of God's kingdom in Africa, is providing biblical teaching from a Reformed perspective.

What I mean by a "Reformed perspective", can be summarised as follows: the divine inspiration and infallibility of the Bible as revelation about God's relation to humankind; the three Soli's: to God's glory alone; by Scripture alone; by grace alone; which implies, among more, the adequacy and finality of God's revelation in Christ, eternal King and only Saviour, as reported in the Bible, and obviously also the doctrines of his sovereign grace.

Fatalism?

The criticism has been levelled at Reformed Christians that the belief in eternal election paralyses incentive for mission because it inevitably implies fatalism. I very much doubt that any feels paralysed by their beliefs. I have been a missionary for or sixty years now, and I have always experienced the very opposite. Knowing that for the elect of God grace is irresistible has always been an incentive rather than a stumbling block for me. Most genuine revivals have happened in Calvinist communities. The country with the largest pro rata number of missionaries is Korea, where Reformed doctrine is dominant.

The challenge

It is a well-known fact that hardly one in a hundred local churches in Africa is led by a trained person, and that the vast majority of churches only have the services available of men who know very little about the background of the Bible, and not always much of the Bible itself.

Priorities

The target should obviously be the majority of local pastors in Africa, who have little or no training in understanding and expounding the Bible, and in the majority of cases also not a high level of secular education. But there is also a growing number of well-educated persons who serve local churches, and this section of the leadership can be expected to grow rapidly in future. It is therefore obvious that material should be made available for persons at different levels of education.

The curriculum

Since the majority of local pastors is still from the lowest levels of education, the greatest need at present seems to be to develop programmes for training as many local leaders as possible from that level. Actually many educated church leaders should benefit from this material too.

According to my experience, biblically sound sermons which are appreciated by children of twelve are also appreciated by academics. Who is there who preached simpler sermons than our Lord Jesus or sermons of a higher spiritual level? The reason why preachers deliver “difficult” sermons is usually that they themselves are not in command of their material, and therefore tend to obscure their “message” by producing difficult sermons.

There is much valuable material available on this level. There are the correspondence lectures and tests sent out in Xhosa (and I presume also in English) by the Free Church of Scotland. There is also much valuable material by the Timothy Bible Training Institute.

While working on the new isiZulu translation, I first translated the Hebrew and Greek text into a form of English in which I stayed as close as possible to Bantu idiom and sentence structures, in order to make it easier for the mother tongue translators to produce a meaningful, idiomatic translation.

This method was very useful, resulting in an understandable translation in standard spoken isiZulu in the relatively short time of ten years – only half the time we spent on the Venda translation which we completed before that. I hope to devote the remaining time of my life on earth to the task of producing literature and teaching material for church leaders in the same

form of English. Most of what I published before this had been written in the Venda language. So I have now started compiling a series of short lectures for this purpose.

I am convinced that the lessons should be in the form of a sermon which the student can use as a message in the Sunday services, in that way applying directly what he has learnt. Producing material for an intermediate standard of training would probably fall outside the scope of my work.

As for more advanced training, there is much material available. I personally used the extension training lectures of Mukhanyo Theological College, and those I used were all of them excellent in themselves. Still, according to my experience, there were two challenges.

The first was the level of English used. All the Venda speaking persons who attended them were professional people, most of them teachers, yet they found the English too difficult for them, and most of them did not continue after a few lessons. It should be noted that the challenge is not presented by the spiritual level of the lectures, but by the vocabulary used. The seminary might consider rewriting the lectures using an African person, and my experience in Bible translation warns me that the seminary should check that the translator understands the original English well.

A second and less important challenge was that the participants were not able to follow the sound of the lectures recorded in the classroom. The American English as well as the quality of the recordings were difficult for them to follow. Recordings should preferably be made in a studio and read by an African person.

The motive for these two suggestions is that this excellent material deserves to be understood by the students in order to have its full impact.

Confrontational training

Not very long ago the fashionable term among theologians was “contextual theology”. Theology should not be practiced in a vacuum, but in the context of those practicing it or to whom it is directed. In practice it very often leads to a theology in which the context – that is, the circumstances, frustrations, ideals or pet aversions – were not only addressed in theology, but also decided the outcome of the studies. Not the Word of God dictated the conclusions, but the context dictated it.

I am sure the reader would agree that such a theology does not need any revelation from God. The Bible is not studied in it, it is abused. It becomes a form of theological ventriloquism. I would prefer the term “confronta-

tional theology". This means that theology addresses those involved in it in their context and measures them and their culture, beliefs and circumstances against the Word of God, and since natural, unregenerate humankind is in rebellion against God, all pre-Christian cultures and traditions express that rebellious nature.

The apostle Paul makes it clear in the first chapter of his letter to the Romans that frequently non-Christians also do right things, because their consciences tell them what is right and wrong. Yes indeed, but in all cultures there are also elements which expresses rebellion against God.

Unfortunately, the Gospel is only too often brought to Africans without any reference to those matters. This is also the case among reformed churches. In some parts of the country, such as Venda and KwaZulu-Natal, it is well-known that members of the Reformed Churches do not practice ancestor veneration.

In KwaZulu-Natal, in the Richmond district, there was a bloody battle between the ANC and Inkatha during the late eighties and the early nineties of the twentieth century. The Reformed Christians refused to take sides, because they could not condone the violence committed by either side. Six of the leaders of the Reformed Churches were shot dead by the ANC followers of Harry Gwala, a great admirer of Joseph Stalin, and his successor Sifiso Nkabinde.

Afterwards the murderers threatened that this was the fate that awaited any Christians who disapprove of ancestor veneration. In other parts of the country, such as Soweto, research indicated that a substantial percentage of members of the same denomination not only approves of but actually practices ancestor veneration with good consciences. Their pastors seemed never to have addressed the issue.

One theological student at Hammanskraal once had to do the practical part of his theological training under the guidance of Dr Sarel van der Merwe in the Kuruman District. When he returned, the student came to me with a personal confession. His words were, as far as I can remember them, the following: "Professor, when I came to study here, I was warned by some of the black pastors to beware of the influence of Van Rooy. They said you are the worst enemy of black pastors; you begrudge them whatever they hold dear.

"I was very worried, and when I attended your classes, their misgivings were confirmed, because I often heard you witnessing against ancestor veneration.

tion, and I hated it. But when I visited the Tswana Christians at Kuruman, I got to know genuinely Christian black people, and I saw that you are right and your enemies are wrong. And now I want to confess to you that I also was wrong. Do not be discouraged, but keep on witnessing.”

It is obvious from this story that the Christian gospel should address the traditional beliefs of Africans, and where this is neglected, the result is Reformed pagans or semi-pagans. The Old Testament, which was the Bible of the early Christian church, condemns any communication with the dead in no uncertain terms (eg. Deuteronomy 18:9-13; 26:14; Isaiah 8:19-22, NIV).

I have spent the largest part of my life studying the Bible and listening attentively to its specific message for Africa in its spiritual context. The Bible has a lot to say about it. One needs to go no further than the first three chapters of Genesis for sufficient material to fill a book.

Important subjects to be addressed

Finally, let me indicate some subjects which I believe should not be missing from any theological curriculum on whatever academic level:

- Assurance of salvation (faith in Christ as Saviour, which also implies Christ as Lord and Prophet). Personal knowledge of God.
- The Heidelberg Catechism in the form of messages which can be delivered to a congregation. This should include the so-called TULIP principles of sovereign grace
- Comparison of what the Bible teaches with traditional African beliefs, in the form of Sunday sermons and/or Bible study outlines
- Practical Evangelism (the surest way to understanding the gospel is to immediately start spreading it oneself)
- Summary of the history of Salvation, both Old and New Testaments
- Principles of Biblical Exegesis, with practical exercises (Hermeneutics, with a study of the exegesis of different literature types in the Bible)
- How to prepare a sermon, with constant practical applications, students delivering sermons during classes. (It should be noted here that the primary level pastors and other church readers may be very bright intellectually, but not accustomed to express their thoughts in writing. A student may hand in a very poor sermon which is required from him in writing, but when he is allowed to deliver the message orally he may turn out to be a better preacher than the teacher himself,

simply because that is his primary medium of expression.)

- Combination of (a) the introduction to every book of the Bible
- (background, author) with the highlights of (b) the
- revelation in each book, also in the form of sermons
- Overview of the history of the church
- History of missions, with case studies of specific missions in Africa
- Systematic Theology, also in the form of sermons
- Principles of Reformed Church Order
- Church planting and leadership (activating the variety of gifts of the Spirit in a church)
- How to communicate with members at house visitation
- Christian education, specifically for youth of different ages
- Apologetics, with special attention to Islam
- Simple bookkeeping and auditing



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23. How to promote a missional focus in a church

In order to be and remain a missional church, the following ideas may help.

Worship

First and foremost, if a church wants to be missional, it needs to focus on God, in Jesus, through the Holy Spirit. As John Piper indicates, “worship is the goal and fuel for mission”. We want to lead people to knowing and worshipping God (the goal), and if we are aware of the exuberant glory of God, we cannot but worship Him, and we will want to bring people to the worship of the glory of this God (the fuel). So the first and last encouragement for us in creating and maintaining a missional church is:

- Let God be central in your lives.

Information sharing

Provide information about the missionary needs in the world. If we want to see the needs, our eyes need to be opened. And we need to open each other’s eyes. The following may help:

- Have a world map in the church, preferably in the front, next to or above the pulpit. We must be constantly reminded of the world in which we live.
- Present three or four countries every Sunday in the church service. Give general information about the country, and then specific information about the church, evangelism, mission work, languages, missionary needs and possibilities. Pray for those countries in the service.

- Make sure that there are people in the church with a special task in outreach and/or mission. As the calling is God's work we cannot make this, but if a church is a worshipping church, sooner rather than later there will be people who will be reaching out nearby or further away. If there are no missionaries in the church, make sure that the church supports missionaries in other churches.
- Share information about missionaries who are supported by the church; share the latest news in the church service, and have pictures and supporting information in folders available in the church's foyer/hall.
- When a missionary is on furlough, have an interview with him/her during the service.
- Arrange a meeting with missionaries on furlough so that the church can interact with them and have the latest information.
- Study mission history, and developments in missionary work. Study biographies of missionaries, personally or in a group.
- Share info on your church WhatsApp group.
- Share news from the mission field on Instagram on a weekly basis.

Motivate

- Have a banner in the church with some missionary encouragement.
- Paint the following or similar words over the door where people leave the church: "Here you enter the mission field."

Pray

- Have a weekly or at least a monthly prayer meeting.
- Pray for unsaved people.
- Pray for missionaries.
- Give out a prayer calendar that can be used at home.
- Tell children about missionary work.

Give

- Collect money for mission work.
- Organise events to raise funds for mission work.
- Give practical help to missionaries, especially if they don't live too far away.
- Organise practical necessities for missionaries on furlough: a house, a car, etcetera.

Communicate

- Write cards, messages, letters, encouragements etcetera to missionaries.

Be creative

- Collect all kinds of ideas about missionary work. This is only the beginning!
- Bible distribution
- Bible translation
- Preaching, planting churches
- Evangelism
- Discipling people
- Tracts
- Medical work
- Social work
- Internet ministries

Sing

- Collect psalms and songs about missions and sing them, in the church and at home.
- Organise a special Missions Day (or Afternoon) and show choirs from the mission field.

Witness

- Be interested in people.
- Bring each person that you meet to God in prayer.
- Listen.
- Bring each person closer to God.
- Talk about (the Word of) God with your own people and with other people.
- Follow Jesus on His way to sinners.

Open

- Have an open heart and mouth, open eyes, ears, hand, house.
- See the world with God's eyes.
- Take the eternity perspective.

Love

- Love God above all and love your neighbour as yourself.



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24. The greatness of the Great Commission

"All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the Lord and all the families of the nations shall worship before You. For the Kingdom is the Lord's and He rules over the nations."

Psalm 22:27-28

The Great Commission is great! It contains:

- A great Truth - Jesus is Lord over all areas of life.
- A great Commission - we are to make disciples of all nations.
- A great Command - we are to teach obedience to all things that the Lord has commanded.
- A great Promise - the Lord Himself promises to be with us for all time.

A careful reading of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) should make it clear that we are called to do far more than merely *"share the gospel"*.

Jesus Christ declared: *"All authority has been given to Me in Heaven and on Earth . . ."* The Lordship of Jesus Christ in every area of life must be proclaimed and practiced.

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations..." We are not called to make converts, or *"decisions"*, but disciples. We are to make disciples, not only of individuals, we must start there and of families, which is vital, we are not only to disciple congregations and communities. The Great Commission commands us to make disciples of nations - all nations!

"...Baptising them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit..." Complete submission to Almighty God is essential.

"...Teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you..." Education is an essential part of the Great Commission. We are not just to teach faith, or a selection of a few of our favourite things. We have been instructed by the Lord Jesus Christ to teach obedience to everything that He has commanded.

Our greatest priority

This Great Commission must be our supreme ambition. The last command of our Lord Jesus Christ ought to be our first concern. *"For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes."* Romans 1:16.

Do not be distracted

We must never allow distractions, danger, disappointments or determined opposition to deter us from obeying Christ's Great Commission. Our purpose on earth is to *"Make disciples... teaching obedience..."* The life-blood of the Church is its evangelistic zeal. No matter what the situation, or how adverse the circumstances may seem to be, our Lord's Command is to: *"Preach the Word! Be ready in season and out of season, convince, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and teaching."* 2 Timothy 4:2.

What are we commanded to do?

We are commanded to: *"Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature."* Mark 16:15; *"Repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His Name to all nations..."* Luke 24:47; Jesus declared: *"As the Father has sent Me, I also send you."* John 20:21; Christ made it clear that we are to be *"witnesses to Me in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth."* Acts 1:8.

When we consider the greatness of the Great Commission, that Christ is commanding us to follow his example, to be sent, even as He was sent, to preach repentance and the forgiveness of sins to all nations, to be His witnesses to the very ends of the earth, to preach the gospel to every person, to make disciples of the nations, teaching obedience to all things that He has commanded, we are overwhelmed! The task seems impossible. Which of us can possibly feel adequate to the incredible responsibility of discipling the nations?

The promised power

Every command of Christ comes with a promise. When the Lord commands us to go and make disciples of all nations, He reminds us that He has all authority in Heaven and on Earth and He promises us: *"Lo, I am with you, even to the end of the age."* Matthew 28:18-20.

When the Lord commanded us to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, He promised miraculous power: *"And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the Word through the accompanying signs."* Mark 16:20.

When the Lord commanded *"That repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His Name to all nations..."* He promised *"power from on high."* Luke 24:47-49.

When the Lord commissioned His followers: *"As the Father has sent Me, I also send you"* He breathed on them and said: *"Receive the Holy Spirit."* John 20:21-22.

At the Ascension, when the Lord commanded his disciples to be His witnesses *"To the ends of the earth"* He promised: *"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you."* Acts 1:8.

Nothing that God has commanded us to do is impossible. As we read in the Book of Acts: The Lord went up! The Holy Spirit came down! The disciples went out! (Acts 1:8-8:1). A handful of disciples in an upper room went out and changed the world!

The greatest

The greatest experience is to come to Jesus. The greatest task is to disciple the nations for Jesus. The greatest priority is to go for Jesus.

Change

Change lives – changing the lives of others. Forgiven sinners – sharing the way of Salvation to other sinners. Blessed Christians, seeking to bless others.

Discipleship and evangelism

The first recorded words of Christ in His early ministry were: *"Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand...Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men."* Matthew 4:17-19.

Our Lord's call to repentance, to discipleship (*"Follow Me"*) and to evangelism (*"And I will make you fishers of men"*) are all inter-related. We are

called to come to Him for salvation and to go for Him to bring the message of salvation to others.

Do you have a world vision?

Jesus is *"The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"* John 1:29.

Jesus is *"The Light of the world"* John 8:12.

Jesus is *"The Way, the Truth and the Life. No-one comes to the Father except through Me."* John 14:6. There is no other way, no other religion, no other hope for mankind. *"Go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in that My House may be filled."* Luke 14:23. *"Freely you have received, freely give."* Matthew 10:8.

Jesus said *"He who is not with Me is against Me and He who does not gather with Me scatters abroad."* Matthew 12:30. You are either a missionary or a mission field. You cannot be neutral in missions. Walking by on the other side of the road is not an option for Christians.

Look at the fields

"Lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already ripe for harvest!" John 4:35. Jesus commanded us to look at the fields. We need to investigate and understand the missionary challenge.

How well do you know your world?

Did you know that there are over 12 000 ethno-linguistic people groups in the world? There are 66 countries which restrict religious freedom and persecute Christians. Over 400 million Christians live under governments which persecute believers. 21% of the world's population are Muslims, 13% of the world's population is Hindu.

Africa occupies 22% of the world's land surface. 41% of Africans are Muslims. 14 countries in Africa have less than 1% Evangelical Christians: Mauritania, Morocco, Libya, Tunisia, Comoros, Djibouti, Niger, Senegal, Somalia, Algeria, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau and Mali. Over 100 million Christians in Africa do not yet possess a Bible. *"The harvest truly is plentiful, but the labourers are few. Therefore, pray the Lord of the Harvest to send out labourers into His harvest."* Matthew 9:37-38.

The field

The Lord commanded us to go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. This is a command, not only to go into all the geographical world, but into every level of society. We must go into the world of business and education, the judiciary, government, entertainment,

economics, medicine, sports and the arts.

The message

We are to proclaim the gospel of repentance and forgiveness of sins. We must deal with the primary issue of sin. People are not innocent victims needing deliverance, but guilty sinners needing forgiveness and mercy from Almighty God.

The call

"As the Father has sent Me, so I am sending you." As with Christ's incarnation we need to become one with and identify with the people we are sent to. We need to live and speak the gospel in their language and in their culture. *"The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the Kingdom..."* Matthew 13:38.

The mission

"You are the salt of the earth...you are the light of the world..." Matthew 5:13-14. *"Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in Heaven."* Matthew 5:16.

What is the best sermon illustration?

The best sermon illustration is the life of integrity of a Christian neighbour, colleague or family member.

What is most effective in bringing people to Christ?

At evangelism workshops, Great Commission Conferences and Biblical worldview seminars that I have conducted throughout Africa, Europe and the USA, I found that the vast majority of delegates surveyed came to Christ through personal evangelism, from friends, family and strangers in one-one-one witnessing and counselling.

So far, I have not come across anyone who reported being converted through gospel music. Once, in a conference of 400 pastors and evangelists in Nigeria, I came across one individual who reported being converted through gospel TV. Even in large groups of several hundred, I have seldom found more than 3% who could, along with myself, report being converted through an evangelistic crusade.

There are normally a few dozen who report gospel literature having been used of the Lord to bring them to repentance. However, at every evangelistic workshop and conference that I have surveyed, the vast majority report that it was through family, friends, neighbours and even strangers, in one-on-one personal Evangelism that they were converted.

Our duty

Jesus said *Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in Heaven. That whoever denies Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father who is in Heaven.*" Matthew 10:32-33. We dare not let opportunities to witness for Christ pass us by.

Do not be intimidated

"For whoever is ashamed of Me and My Words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory and in His Father's and of the holy angels." Luke 9:26. Do not be intimidated into silence, fear God and not man.

Sacrifice is essential

Jesus assured us: *"There is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands for My sake and the Gospel's, who shall not receive a hundred-fold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions and in the age to come, eternal life."* Mark 10:29-30. Sacrifice is required.

Overcome obstacles

"I must preach the Kingdom of God to the other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent." Luke 4:43. Don't bottleneck the gospel. Reach out across boundaries.

"Let us cross over to the other side." Mark 4:35. Overcome all obstacles for the gospel.

Take initiative

"On this rock I will build My Church and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it." Matthew 16:18. Victory is assured. The best form of defence is attack!

"The Kingdom of Heaven has been forcefully advancing and forceful men lay hold of it." Matthew 11:12. Be bold, innovative and persistent in seeking first the Kingdom of God. Nothing is impossible, nothing is beyond the reach of prayer, except that which is beyond the will of God. No one is unreachable. The will of God will never lead you - where the grace of God cannot keep you.

A vision of victory

"And this Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations and then the end will come." Matthew 24:14.

"That at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in Heaven and those on earth and of those under the earth and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Philippians 2:10-11.

"For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." Habakkuk 2:14.

Is your church consistently praying for the fulfilment of the Great Commission throughout Africa? It is written: *"My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations."* Mark 11:17.

"In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be Your Name. Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven..." Matthew 6:9-10. We need to pray for God's Will to be obeyed, not just in the church - but in the world! You are not to be the salt of the church, but the salt of the earth, the Light of the World.

Put feet to your faith

This is the Word of God: *"Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it!"* Luke 11:28.

Give up your small ambitions and follow Jesus!

About the authors

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Mission's way forward!

Be warned ! Neglecting Christ's Great Commission is plain and simple disobedience. In this book 24 experienced writers tell how it is done in Southern Africa and, more importantly, how it can be improved. Here are a few extracts:

Prayer, biblically sound proclamation and mobilisation of converts remains essential. Use biblical methods.

Reject elaborate and expensive campaigns, stirring music, impressive shows, testimonies by celebrities and other gimmicks.

Identify the many old and new opportunities given by Christ.

Be a sound church. Biblical mission is the way while many churches are in decline.

Training of many missionaries, mission workers and pastors are a priority.

Learn from mission work of the past – the rights and wrongs.

Focus on evangelism and multicultural church planting in our cities.

Detach culture from cults. Counter the new explosion of witchcraft and the exorcising of evil spirits. The Bible provides the necessary apologetic knowledge.

How to approach interfaith discussions, e.g. with Muslims.

Replace Western and traditional African ways of thinking as well as false religions, cults and worldviews with the biblical way of thinking.

Should mission work including medical, educational, socio-economic and poverty alleviation programmes be mediums of evangelism? There are pro's and con's.

Promote Bible translations. Much still needs to be done.

How to promote a missional focus in your congregation. The Great Commission is great!

- This book is also available on the webpage of the Christian Study Library, www.christianstudylibrary.org