


# A missional hermeneutic for the transformation of theological education in Africa

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The wide acceptance and maturation of the theology of *missio Dei* is the most important development in the theology of mission in recent times. It introduced a radically new understanding of mission and theology, and flowing from that a re-appropriation of ecclesiology. Mission studies are also characterised by a new appreciation of mission from the margins: liberation theology and the associated discourses on decoloniality, deep engagement in contextuality and the explosion of missional ecclesiology (missional church). This apostolic orientation of the church is of the utmost importance in the reflection on the future of theology. This research attends to the postcolonial discourse as an important critique of colonialism and understands the emancipation of Africanised or decolonised theological education as an inevitable and positive development. Contextual sensitivity, attention to diverse power structures and a predisposition to appreciate diversity open imaginative possibilities for theological education. This leads to the argument that decolonial African theology must confront issues of biblical hermeneutics. The proposal of this research is that missional hermeneutic is an excellent starting point. It describes the contours of a missional hermeneutic, attending to mission as central to the Biblical story, the meaning of mission and the conviction that reading Scriptures constitutes an essential part of missional praxis. Missional hermeneutic is a centring vision and purpose for theological education. The argument is for a missional curriculum that defines a centre that unifies the various disciplines, one that places mission and missiology at the heart of theological education.

**Keywords:** Hermeneutics; Missional hermeneutics; Missional church; Theological education; Encyclopedia of theology.

## Introduction

The theological enterprise in general, and theological education as well as mission studies in the South African context in particular, finds itself at the confluence of a number of significant events that challenge conventions and approaches. Researchers use the concept of a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) world (see Kok & Jordaan 2019:5) to describe the state of affairs. Volatility refers to the speed, magnitude and dynamics of change, while uncertainty describes the lack of predictability, the prospect for surprise and the need for a sense of awareness and understanding. Complexity alludes to the confounding of issues, the lack of clear cause-and-effect chains and general confusion surrounding organisations. Ambiguity brings ideas of haziness of reality to mind (Kornelson 2019:32). It is a world of superdiversity, a diversity within diversity or form of 'diastatification'. This is diversity and complexity within diversity (Kok & Jordaan 2019:5). To this, we must add human mobility and migration. This constant movement of people is closely associated with, and reciprocally influenced by globalisation (Niemandt 2013:22–39).

This is the age of acceleration (Friedman 2016:26–27) where the network society became hyper-connected, and where the acceleration in computing power and smart technology leads to seamless complexity.

Friedman initially called it a 'flat world'. Thinking about the prevalent complexity and superdiversity, I would like to call it a 'superfast flat mosaic'. These influences do not leave South Africa and Africa untouched. South Africa is similarly a complex mosaic: it has 11 official languages; a multitude of ethnic groups; widely diverging histories; all major religions are present; it experienced various phases of colonisation and decolonisation; it hosts many formal and informal economic approaches; and many stories compete for attention (Niemandt 2019:152). It also does not leave the theological enterprise untouched.

**Note:** HTS 75th Anniversary Maake Masango Dedication.

Guder (2015:20) reminds us that there is wide-ranging consensus in the missiological discussion that authentic theology must be 'contextual', 'local', at home in and relevant to the particular setting within which a Christian community confesses and witnesses to its faith.

## New theologies of mission

It is no surprise then that mission studies, with its inherent sensitivity towards and alignment with contextualisation, are influenced by these contextual changes. New theologies of mission are emerging. The mission affirmation of the World Council of Churches, *Together towards Life* (Keum 2013), *The Cape Town Commitment* (Lausanne Movement 2011), more recently *The Arusha Call to Discipleship* (World Council of Churches 2018) and a variety of emerging theologies impact on mission studies. To mention but some of the exciting themes that entertain missiologists: a new appreciation of mission from the margins, liberation theology and the associated discourses on decoloniality, the maturity of a theological consensus on the *missio Dei*, contextual awareness and practice and deep engagement in contextuality and the explosion of missional ecclesiology (and especially the concept of missional church). Skreslet (2012:loc. 4426) concludes his comprehensive overview on missiology with the remark that bright prospects lie ahead for those who might want to study Christian mission in all its aspects. Missiologists in Africa and South Africa can likewise expect interesting times.

This research recognises the multitude of influences in a superfast flat mosaic, and the broad range of challenges it represents, but focuses more specifically on a theological and missiological engagement with the *missio Dei*, the resultant missional ecclesiology, and how contextual challenges such as decoloniality and missiological futures such as mission from the margins, might come together to open up new possibilities for the discipline.

This focus inevitably implies a critique of the current structure of theological education that received its main features in a Christendom and colonial paradigm where Christianity practically ceased to be a missional religion (Guder 2016:293).

## Mature missional ecclesiology

One of the most important developments in mission studies and the theology of mission is the wide acceptance of the theology of *missio Dei*. This can certainly be called the most important development in the theology of mission in recent times. It introduced a radically new understanding of mission and theology, and mission studies are still grappling with the implications, which stretch far beyond the traditional cross-cultural missionary task of the church (Goheen 2016:303). There is indeed a growing consensus on the Trinitarian theology of the *missio Dei*, and flowing from that a re-appropriation of and understanding of ecclesiology (see also Skreslet 2012:loc. 784). African theologian Mashau

(2012:7) observes: 'The supremacy of God needs to be rediscovered in the practice of theology. The doctrine of God should therefore be taught with explicit reference to God's missional character'.

The *missio Dei* defines the essence and substance of the church. *Missio Dei* is God's plan to save the world.

Mission is an eternal reality rooted in God's sending of the son and the procession of the Spirit from the Godhead. It is not only a case of God doing the sending, but also God in his very essence being a sending or missional God. Life in the Trinity is a dynamic life of sending and being sent, of interdependence and the outpouring of love. Mission begins in the heart of the triune God and the unifying love which binds together the Holy Trinity which overflows to all humanity and creation. This divine love is found in the reciprocal interdependence and self-dedication of the Trinitarian members to each other, and the active relations of love throughout eternity (Franke 2016:92). 'God's love,' says Conradie (2015:104), 'is epitomised in the well-being of the whole household of God'. It is the activity through which the triune God causes his kingdom to come into this world.

The *missio Dei* is at the core of being church. Skreslet (2012:loc. 799–800) explains that *missio Dei* language interprets the church as a sent community, dispatched by the triune God for witness in the world.

He (2012:loc. 791) explains that the language of *missio Dei* gave theologians a way to connect churches and their missionary programmes to the entire history of divine revelation attested in the Bible. There is no church without mission, and no mission without the church (Kärkkäinen 2002:loc. 1786).

The term *missional church* gained prominence in the work of the Gospel in our Culture Network (GOCN) and with books such as *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* edited by Guder (1998) and *Church Next* by Gibbs (2000). The works of Lesslie Newbigin, and the influential *Transforming Mission* by David Bosch (1991), played an important role in laying the groundwork for this new interest in mission, and the focus on the place of God's church and the vocation of disciples to participate in God's mission.

The church is a communion in the triune God and participates in the mission of God. Bosch (1991) explains:

The classical doctrine on the *missio Dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit was expanded to include yet another 'movement': Father, Son and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world. (p. 390)

In the words of Lausanne III (Lausanne Movement 2011): 'Our mission is wholly derived from God's mission, addresses the whole of God's creation, and is grounded at its centre in the redeeming victory of the cross'.

This apostolic orientation of the church is of the utmost importance in the reflection on the future of the church as well as theology. The church as a witnessing community must always be kept to its apostolic mission, which is to form gathered and sent communities who would continue the witness to God's salvation in Christ – this is nothing less than the original reason for the existence of those very communities (Guder 2016:288). As Bosch (1982:22) proposed an approach that weaves together the church's being, its up-building and its mission, the discourse (and renewed reflection on the work of Barth) matured with the wide acceptance of the missionary nature of the church and the identity of the church within the triune God's mission. Mashau (2012) argues:

Missiology covers the entire scope of theology without relegating all of theology to mission and missiology. Missiology has the function to provide scientific description and analysis of the life of the church in the past and in the present, but at the same time, it provides a normative critical function with regard to the future of the church and the manner in which the church should conduct its activities towards that future. (p. 5)

In conclusion, Goheen summarised the vast implication of this tectonic theological shift and mentions the implications for a missional hermeneutic, missional theology and missional theological education (Goheen 2016:303–304). Mission studies and the nature of theological reflection on and training for mission will be shaped by the near universal consensus on the *missio Dei*, and the wide-ranging implications of this approach for ecclesiology. This is especially relevant in terms of Mashau's (2012:1) conclusion that theological training in both the minority and majority worlds has failed to live up to the expectations created by the conviction that mission is the heart of theology. On the contrary, Missiology as a theological discipline has struggled to find a home in many theological institutions in the world (Mashau 2012:1).

## Decolonialised theological education

Reflecting on the church and its theological enterprise in the last two centuries, one must acknowledge that one of the most visible characteristics is the fact that the church and much of the discourse on mission were dominated by a colonial framework (Goheen 2016:7).

Bosch (1982:16) warned about the colonial approach to mission studies and mission. There is a legacy of close liaison between Christian missions and Western colonialism, and, says Bosch, 'the modifications in our missionary policies and practises are little more than superficial modernizations and adjustments'.

Goheen (2016:7) summarises some of the characteristics of this colonial framework:

1. Mission is a task for parachurch organisations and the church has a pastoral function.
2. The world is divided into a Christian West and a non-Christian rest (mission fields).

3. Mission happens on non-Western mission fields.
4. There is no need for mission in the West, because it is already Christian.

Guder (2015:23–24) is also highly critical of the reductionist nature of such a 'Euro-centred theology and practice of mission'. He mentions the following problems:

1. the church's partnership with power, wealth, property and social prestige
2. the reduction of the gospel to individual salvation and thus a failure to attend to the fullness of the message of the in-breaking reign of God in Jesus Christ
3. the tendency to make the church into the institution that administers individual salvation, failing to attend to the comprehensive nature of the reign of God breaking in now in Jesus Christ.

Recent discourses on coloniality added a deeper understanding of the colonial framework:

1. It is an epistemic system or, more precisely, an epistemic hierarchy that privileges Western knowledge and cosmology over non-Western knowledge and cosmologies. It presumes that Western knowledge, world views, social constructions, imaginaries, practices, hierarchies and even violence are superior.
2. 'Coloniality' also refers to the persistent socio-economic and political stratification according to Eurocentric standards.
3. Niemandt (2017:214) argues that the prosperity cult that is sweeping through Africa like a veld fire is also a form of global capitalism (and coloniality) that has succeeded in spiritualising the materiality of that system.
4. It represents a protest against the dominance of Eurocentric thinking (see Niemandt 2017:214), and is as such part and parcel of the new appreciation of mission from the margins. The World Council of Churches (WCC) argues in *Together towards life* that mission has been understood as a movement taking place from the centre to the periphery, and from the privileged to the marginalised of society: 'Now people at the margins are claiming their key role as agents of mission and affirming mission as transformation'. The decolonial turn is a turn towards the marginalised as agents of mission.

Decoloniality is the discovery of agency by theologians from Africa, South America and other emerging Christians. As Maluleke (2000:28) explains, there is 'a new wave of awareness of the agency of ordinary marginalised Africans'. He explains that the agency of African Christians and the African poor is being rediscovered, explored and respectfully interpreted (2000:31). Decoloniality is a response to the relation of direct, political, social and cultural domination established by Europeans and their Euro-North American descendants (Quijano 2007:168). More importantly, theology and missiology is redefining itself, because the dismantling has collapsed colonial system, which began following World War II (Van Gelder 2007:20), has now finally collapsed (Goheen 2016:8).

The postcolonial discourse and decolonial turn represent an important critique of and correction to the colonial framework and approach. The emancipation of Africanised or decolonised theological education and ecumenical mission in Southern Africa is an inevitable and positive development.

Niemandt (2017:210) argues that the decolonial discourse is also a 'glocal' issue, that is, both recognising the broader discourses in theology, but also the construction of a localised theology. It is the construction of a variety of 'local theologies' (Bosch 1991:427). 'The Africanisation of Theology', says Niemandt (2017:210), 'must attend to ways in which the gospel narrative relates to, and plays into, local narratives and theologies'. Maluleke (2000:26) warns that there is no united, homogeneous Africa or African identity – 'there are and should be many and various ways of being an African'.

The decolonial discourse is more about the future than the past, and more about a contextual awareness and practice that engages appreciatively, but also critically, with cultural and contextual realities. Yes, it is certainly important to engage with all the legacies of colonialism, but we have the opportunity to participate in the postcolonial debate with all of its creative potential to open new futures.

One of the important issues flowing from the contextualisation of the gospel is the demand to engage with local context and a sensitivity towards marginalised people. The decolonial discourse is part and parcel of the broader appreciation of mission from the margins. Marginalised people are experts in contextualisation because they have a 'double-consciousness' that exposes local realities that the centre is bound to miss.

The decolonial discourse is also developing into a more intercultural approach to education and theology.

Coloniality represented a kind of mono-cultural Western mould that spilled over into the shaping of theological education and congregational imagination. The contextual sensitivity, attention to diverse power structures and predisposition to appreciate diversity open new imaginative possibilities for theological education and challenge the reflection on this theme.

## A missional hermeneutic and theological education

This exploration of missional ecclesiology, and the attempt to imagine new futures for Transformative Theological education in Africa, must incorporate these recent developments in mission studies and the theology of mission, and engage with local realities and the decolonial turn in the African and more particularly the South African context. Maluleke (2000:31) argued that a decolonial post-apartheid African theology must confront issues of biblical hermeneutics. This research proposes that a *missional hermeneutic* is an important component of the reflection and an excellent starting point. A missional ecclesiology has a correlational-

hermeneutical approach to theology, meaning that it correlates or compares various perspectives and initiates a dialogue between them. This is a fertile vantage point from which to develop a transformative theological education. The implications of the missional nature of the church, and the eventual impact on congregational life, must be worked out in terms of theological education and curriculum.

The starting point for the transformation of theological education in Africa is the development of an appropriate missional hermeneutic. 'African theological approaches have bidden farewell to hermeneutical innocence', says Maluleke (2000:32), and there is a need to take conscious responsibility for the complex task of hermeneutics, both in terms of the Bible and contextual realities.

## The contours of a missional hermeneutic

This research explains the contours of a missional hermeneutic, following the description of Bauckham and Goheen (Goheen 2016:15). This is followed by an exploration of the implications of a missional hermeneutic for theological education. This includes an appreciation of congregations, witnessing communities and the church as a hermeneutic of the gospel (Newbigin), and the importance of a missional hermeneutic that shapes doctrine (Guder).

The contours of a missional hermeneutic:

1. **Contours of a missional hermeneutic – Mission as central to the Biblical story:** The *missio Dei* is disclosed in a historical narrative relating the story of God's covenant with a particular people to participate in God's mission and fulfilling of his universal purpose of restoration. Wright (2010:loc. 462) reminds us to take the story as a whole and calls this the biblical storyline consisting of 'Creation, Fall, Redemption in History, and New Creation'. The Bible relates the story of God acting and his love overflowing to his chosen people Israel, to all the nations and all of creation. 'The church is caught up in this movement of God's redemptive work from the particular to the universal' (Goheen 2016:16). Bauckham (2016:29–30) calls this a canonical interpretation and a narrative interpretation. A canonical interpretation approaches scripture as a canonical whole. A narrative approach recognises the importance of narrative and how narratives shape identity and the future. Bauckham (2016:30) explains that narrative '... creates its own world in front of the text and so interprets our world for us ...'. A missional hermeneutic is a way of reading the Bible with mission as its central interest and goal. Mashau (2012:5) states: 'Service to the *missio Dei* should serve as one of the hermeneutical keys to help us understand the biblical text'. The *missio Dei* is the unitive narrative theme of the Bible (Hunsberger 2016:45). Flemming (2015:loc. 155–156) explains that it seeks to engage 'in an intentional, self-involved, missional reading of scripture as a whole'. It is a metanarrative about all reality, within which many

other stories are told. Although there might be considerable postmodern critique of grand narratives, Conradie argues that we need metanarratives, and especially cosmological metanarratives, and pretending not to have metanarratives might be even worse (Conradie 2015:124).

## 2. Contours of a missional hermeneutic – The meaning of mission:

The conviction that mission is the dominant motif and framing metanarrative in the biblical story impacts on theology and the theology of mission. The insight in the theology of mission can be briefly summarised as follows.

God is the agent of mission. Mission is the redemptive work of the triune God – mission begins with God. 'The Bible', explains Goheen (2016:21), 'narrates the work of the triune God to restore the whole of creation and the whole of mankind from the corrupting effects of sin'.

One cannot understand mission without beginning with reflection about the Trinity – the Trinity is the determining reality of the church (Volf 1998:195). Mashau (2012:4) refers to the Trinitarian foundation of missiology. This includes reflection on the economic Trinity – the sending work and missional life of the triune God, and the relational Trinity – the communion in the Trinity is a communion that flows outwards.

This provides the frame for Christian mission as the proclamation of the Kingdom of the Father, to share the love of Jesus Christ with all and to be witnesses of the powerful work of the Spirit (see also Van Gelder 2007:29). Van Gelder (2007:30) argues that both the economic and relational approaches to the Trinity enhance and deepen the understanding of ecclesiology and missiology: 'This relationship provides the framework for understanding the nature, ministry, and organisation of missional congregations' (Van Gelder 2007:30). The two perspectives remind us that the sending, communal God works in and through community. God is the primary agent of mission, and the church secondary (Elton 2007:147).

Mashau (2012:4) also mentions the eschatological foundation of missiology and relates this with the mission of the church: 'The mission of the church is, therefore, to be directed towards the nations with an eye to the coming of Christ and his kingdom'.

## 3. Contours of a missional hermeneutic – Reading Scripture equips the church for missional praxis:

One can say that Bosch was one of the early pioneers in his appreciation of the missional direction and missional purpose of the New Testament. His paradigmatic approach opened up new perspectives and possibilities. It also focused on the relation between God's mission and the mission of the church. Scriptures inspire and inform the church for its missionary praxis. The interplay between the community of faith and the scriptures does not only contain the gospel, but is the gospel – it is part of the coming of God's kingdom into the world (Goheen 2016:25). Scripture shapes a faithful people and brings healing to the world through this shaping and living of the gospel. The Faith and

Order Commission of the WCC (World Council of Churches 2013:8) formulates it as follows:

The Church, as the body of Christ, acts by the power of the Holy Spirit to continue his life-giving mission in prophetic and compassionate ministry and so participates in God's work of healing a broken world.

This represents a theological interpretation of the Bible that brings scripture and theology into conversation. It recognises the importance of the Bible in the life and origin of Christian communities and the intention of the Bible to shape these communities in their love for God and others (Flemming 2015:loc. 160–164). Gorman reminds us that the only point of entry into the gospel story is the story narrated in the life, worship and proclamation of the Church – 'Through its service and being as witness, the Church is a rendering of the gospel to the world' (Gorman 2015:loc. 83–85).

A missional hermeneutic recognises the important and formational role of the Bible in early Christian communities and constantly asks, 'How did this written testimony form and equip God's people for their missional vocation then, and how does it do so today?' (Guder 2015:14).

This brief discussion of the contours of a missional hermeneutic has important implications in the conceptualisation of mission studies, the decolonial discourse as well as theology as such. Goheen (2016:27) warns that a non-missional reading of the Bible is crippling the church in the West, 'fostering self-centredness and thwarting a missional encounter with culture'. It is clear that the growing consensus of the ideas concerning missional church, and the growth in missional hermeneutics, are deeply related to the decolonial discourse. Maluleke's (2000:32) remark that we have bidden farewell to hermeneutical innocence comes to mind. The decolonial discourse can contribute much to the future of mission studies and theology, and even more so if it embraces a missional hermeneutic, which should be the default approach given the sensitivity towards contextualisation and a 'glocal' approach.

Bauckham (2016:37) raises the issue of 'dubious totalisation', and whether the appreciation of a metanarrative might not be oppressive. Can one reconcile a missional hermeneutic with a predisposition for a metanarrative with a decolonial approach with its focus on contextualisation, the local and the marginalised? He warns against the danger of focusing only on local narratives and ignoring wider relevance and the desire for meaning. The impetus of the biblical witness is that God's people are the witnesses to his truth and sole deity. Mission is 'the making known of God's name' and 'God's name names the narrative identity he gives himself in the biblical story' (Bauckham 2016:38). Missional hermeneutics appreciates the complexity and diversity of scripture and the relative openness of the biblical narrative, inviting God's people to participate in God's mission. It also values the issue of contextualisation. The biblical narrative, in its openness to the future, is open to the inclusion of other

narratives in their own 'particularity and diversity, narratives of other times and places, other groups and individuals ...' (Bauckham 2016:41). This is perhaps what Sanneh (1989) intended with his description of the translatability of the gospel in *Translating the message. The missionary impact on culture*.

Contextualisation (and inculturation) is always a critical engagement with context. 'This means that the Gospel', argue Van Gelder and Zschweile (2018:42), 'can become good news to everyone, everywhere, in language and within cultural expressions that are understandable, knowable, and accessible'. Inasmuch as the gospel is inherently translatable, the church – which we profess to be universal (catholic) – is also inherently translatable with the inherent ability to live in every place and become contextual within every cultural setting (Van Gelder & Zschweile 2018:43).

Maluleke (2000:31) asks: 'Which biblical hermeneutics are the most appropriate and liberating for African Christians?' The core of the argument in this research is that the transformation of theological education in Africa through a missional ecclesiology starts with reflection on and the theological practice of a missional hermeneutic. 'Reading the bible missionally can aid the church in various ways', says Goheen (2016:27), '... and foster theological education that forms future leaders'.

## Congregations as witnessing communities and the church as a hermeneutic of the gospel

Lesslie Newbigin understood the church as a missional community and as a hermeneutic of the gospel (Newbigin 1989:222–233). The focus is on the formation of communities of faith – on the congregation – and a congregational approach to theology. The church as a hermeneutic of the gospel implies that it proclaims the gospel story but that it is also, in its life and witness, the gospel. Guder (2015:104, 109) summarises the influence of Newbigin and explains that God is carrying out his saving and healing purposes for the world through gathered communities, referring to congregations. Guder argues that this influences the way the community of disciples approaches the Bible. The implication is that it will also shape theology.

Reading the Bible as a 'called and sent community' means constantly asking some version of the question, 'How did this text equip the missional church then for its vocation, and how does it do that today?' (Guder 2015:129). Theology is not merely an academic enterprise, or a contestation of ideas, isolated from the life or vocation of the church. Although it is technically possible to conduct theology in isolation from congregational life, Guder (2015:14) reminds us that 'the formation of the church for mission should be the motivating force that shapes and energizes our theological labors in all their diversity and distinctiveness'.

## Missional hermeneutic as centring vision and purpose for theological education

The core of the issue is to propose a missional hermeneutic as centring vision and purpose for theological education (a unifying and directing core) and to engage in a case study to illustrate possibilities in this regard.

The 1952 meeting of the International Missionary Council in Willingen, Germany, can be described as the birthing moment of a new missional theology. This meeting already understood the important implications of the tectonic theological shift brought about by the *missio Dei* and stated:

This study has of necessity led us to consider theological education and we cannot but express our concern that theological education throughout the world should be much more radically orientated to the total missionary task of the Church. (Goheen 2016:304)

Hunsberger (2011:309–32; 2016:49–62; see also Flemming 2015:loc. 190–200) formulated four different 'streams' or understandings of a missional hermeneutic, which reflect much of the current ideas in terms of a missional hermeneutic:

- a focus on the missional direction of the biblical narrative, which tells the story of God's mission and the people who are sent to participate in God's mission. This works with the message and function of the biblical text
- a focus on the missional purpose of scripture – how the biblical writings equip and energise God's people to engage in the mission of God. This is also embedded in reflection on the biblical text
- a focus on the missional location of the Christian communities that are reading scripture and the questions they bring to the text. Here, the emphasis is on the reader and the context
- a focus the missional engagement with different cultures and social contexts. This is familiar missional engagement to critically engage various human contexts in the light of the gospel.

Looking at South Africa, the influence of a missional theology and the impetus to develop a missional hermeneutic are already evident in the grassroots development of a missional ecclesiology in many of the denominational partners in theological education in South Africa. Most of the universities that host faculties, departments or centres of theology do so in partnership with local denominations. At least the following come to mind: Anglican Church of Southern Africa (ACSA), Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM), Dutch Reformed Church (NGK), the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (NGKA), Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika (GKSA), Methodist Church of Southern Africa, Netherdutch Reformed Church in Africa (NHKA), Reformed Church in Africa (RCA), Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa (UPCSA) and Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA).

Niemandt (2019:154) has shown that at least the following denominations made important policy decisions to facilitate the transformation towards missional church: ACSA, AFM, GKSA, NGK, NHKA, RCA and UPCSA. These, and many other congregations, are already part of the missional movement. To mention a few examples: Fresh Expressions South Africa (a joint venture in close co-operation with Fresh Expressions in the United Kingdom, and an expression of missional church<sup>1</sup>) is constituted by the following denominations: ACSA, Baptist Union, Methodist Church of Southern Africa, NGK, NHKA, United Congregational Church, UPCSA, URCSA and Vineyard Church. The South African Partnership for Missional Churches (SAPMC) is closely associated with Church Innovations,<sup>2</sup> another organisation dedicated to the development and support of missional churches, and involved more than 250 congregations from the following denominations: Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (ELCSA), NGK, NHKA and URCSA.

This certainly represents a groundswell of change in the approach to church and congregations among a significant number of mainstream denominations – but this development is not as yet reflected in theological education in South Africa. This leads to growing pressure ‘from below’ to attend to a more missional approach to theological education.

A recent development in the NGK serves to illustrate the point. The leadership of the NGK accepted a policy document regarding theological education, and *inter alia* mention the following issues:

- The missional shift calls for renewal in thinking about ministerial development (theological education). It requires a different pedagogy than the cognitive, theoretical education we have become accustomed to. Theological education must develop knowledge, but must also attend to attitudes, skills and habits. It requires a formative pedagogy (Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk 2018:3).
- Theological education must equip participants for the praxis of a missional vocation (Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk 2018:9).
- One of the core capacities that must be developed is described as: ‘Discerning where God is at work’ and ‘the ability to discern opportunities for missional ministry in the community’ (Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk 2018:35).

This is enhanced by the broader convergence of a new understanding of mission. It must, however, be underscored that the ‘new understanding’ of mission entails a comprehensive and holistic approach to mission. It refers to the whole church being called to discern God’s mission and

1. Fresh Expressions South Africa (2018) states on its website: ‘Missional theology is the backbone of FE’, and ‘Our PURPOSE: To join God’s mission in the world to transform communities, through enabling the development of fresh expressions of church, alongside existing churches, in every place in Southern Africa’.

2. Church Innovations is dedicated to building partnerships for missional churches – see [www.churchinnovations.org](http://www.churchinnovations.org).

to embody it in all aspects of church life and witness, public and private, and to be faithfully present in the communities where the Holy Spirit called and sent the community of disciples. Goheen (2016:309) argues that the core of a missional identity is that of a people formed by the gospel for the sake of the world.

In summary – a missional hermeneutic changes everything and serves as a centring vision and purpose for theological education. We cannot continue theological education where the implicit task is to continue and maintain the *corpus Christianum* or powerful institutional churches. Goheen (2016:310) argues for a missional curriculum that defines a centre that unifies the various disciplines. Theological education centred round a missional hermeneutic will strive to form and equip the gathered community for its vocation to be witnesses to Christ in all places and circumstances (Guder 2016:285). Mashau (2012:8) argues that the reaffirmation of missional ecclesiology will lead to the affirmation of the missional theology, one ‘that places mission and missiology at the heart of theological education’.

Goheen (2016:311–313) proposes three important components of the core:

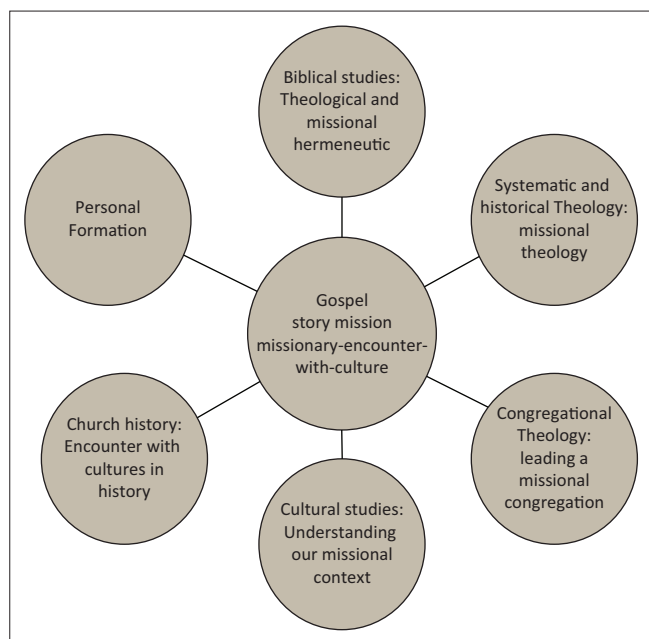
- the gospel – The core is Jesus Christ as revealed in the gospel. A conversation about the gospel should be the first conversation that takes place in theological education, says Goheen (2016:311), ‘as the basis for further theological work’
- the mission of God’s people as they participate in God’s mission
- the missional encounter between gospel and culture and thus the whole concept of contextualisation.

The establishment of the centrality of the proclamation of Jesus Christ is an important point of departure as this ensures the primacy of Jesus Christ rather than the survival or expansion of the church. From these, Goheen develops his proposal for a theological framework that can serve as a case study to inform local initiatives.

## A case study of a transformed model for theological education

Goheen (2016:311–13) proposes a model for theological education that ‘reveals the missional essence of congregational life’, ‘enables students to see the cultural situatedness of various theological disciplines, including the way that cultural spirits have shaped them’. This is, of course, a proposal that challenges a long tradition of the marginalisation of mission studies in especially Western theological institutions (Bosch 1982:17),<sup>3</sup> an approach that seems to be in vogue ... again. Mashau (2012:5–8) follows more or less the same line of argument. The model is summarised in Figure 1.

3. Bosch (1982:18) observed that other theologians often regarded their missiological colleagues with aloofness, if not condescension.



Source: Adapted from Goheen, M.W., 2016, 'A history and introduction to a missional reading of the Bible', in M.W. Goheen (ed.) *Reading the Bible missionally*, pp. 3–27, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY

FIGURE 1: A model for theological education.

1. **A missional core:** The idea is that mission will reframe all the other disciplines and that the place, role and content of the various disciplines will drive from this centre. Mashau (2012) explains:

The entire curriculum of theological training should therefore be missional, permeated by our theological understanding of God's mission and the missionary nature of the church as an instrument participating in the mission of God to advance his kingdom. (p. 8)

2. **Biblical studies:** The Reformation tradition played a major role in the curricular emphasis on biblical studies as one of the important components of academic theology. A missional hermeneutic understands scripture as a record and tool of God's mission to bring new life to all of creation in and through the people God calls and sends. This movement of God finds its 'climactic moment in Jesus Christ'. Flemming (2015:loc. 188–189) follows the same line of argument: 'Missional interpretation, then, tries to read scripture in light of God's comprehensive mission'. It is certainly not an attempt to reduce biblical studies to a missional hermeneutic, but rather a hermeneutic that is concerned about the theological or kerygmatic message of the text. Goheen (2016) explains that this comes from:

... careful attention to the final form of the text in its canonical location in the context of the whole redemptive-historical story, in its location in the literary context of the theological message of the whole book, in keeping with its literary genre, its particular address in its original cultural and historical setting, and its fusion with our contemporary horizon. (pp. 316–317)

The traditional emphasis on biblical studies, biblical languages, exegesis, biblical history and biblical theology must be enhanced by creative engagement with the

biblical understanding and practice of the witnessing community. We must remember that the purpose of apostolic mission was not to generate professional apostles or ordained ministers, but gathered and sent communities who continue to witness to the life God brings (Guder 2016:288). Mashau (2012:5) warns: 'The reading of both the Old and the New Testament should serve the gospel to the fullest, lest it becomes a void academic exercise that only enhances human knowledge'.

3. **Systematic theology:** The decolonial critique of big and powerful systems of Western knowledge organised around a Western historical agenda that is presumed to be universal illustrates the challenge systematic theology is facing. This is complicated by the narrative approach to scripture where *story* has been set up over and against *system*. Goheen (2016:319), however, argues for the place of systematic theology in theological education, calling it a thematic and synthesising discipline. Guder (2016:295) argues that the witnessing community needs the guidance of doctrinal theology formed by a missional hermeneutic and thus faithful to the scriptures. The importance of world views and the fact that many Christians face cultural idolatries also underscore the importance of the articulation of faith and the theological perspective on world views and belief systems. This refers to a broader understanding of world view, as explained by Smith (2009:loc. 143–145) as an intellectual summary formula of how people think, but also a Christian 'social imaginary' as it is embedded in the practices of Christian worship.

The church, and thus theological training, must declare to each generation 'what faith is' in a contextual relevant way (Goheen 2016:320). Goheen (2016) proposes that systematic theology can assist the church in equipping disciples to be faithful to their missional vocation, but challenges systematic theology to be more missional in its content:

... mission interrupts the conversation in systematic theology with the words 'among the nations', asking if our theological work is equipping leaders to nurture a missional congregation and if the central missional theme of Scripture is shaping our theological formulations. (p. 321)

4. **Church history:** Bosch's *Transforming Mission* (1991) is appreciated as one of the important missiological tracts of our time, but it is also a history of the church and of various paradigms shaping and influencing church doctrine and life. But, warns Goheen, church history can easily become a history of the church as an institution and a report on theological controversies and doctrinal disagreements (Goheen 2016:322). 'If the church is missional by its nature', argues Goheen (2016:322), 'then church history will be concerned with how the gospel as it is articulated and embodied by the church encounters the various cultures of the world'. Church history that takes the missional nature of the church seriously will attend to the ways in which the story of the gospel has been told and received among the nations. The way in



which the gospel is translated in each new cultural *milieu* forms a very important part of the history of missional encounters. This means that church history will need to engage issues of context and inculturation.

5. **Congregational theology:** Congregational theology refers to pastoral or practical theology. Osmer (2008:4) framed practical theology within the fourfold tasks: (1) the descriptive-empirical task, (2) the interpretive task, (3) the normative task, and (4) the descriptive-empirical task. Osmer (2008:195, 201) acknowledges the important task of the congregation to give witness to God's self-giving love, and to do so in contextually relevant ways. Goheen's (2016:324) approach emphasises the importance of vocation and the church as a community where various spiritual gifts build up the body for their calling in the world. Nel (2018) formulates the following critical departure point for Practical Theology:

Practical Theology is caught up in this deep conviction and confession: God is at work, actively involved in his world and so are we, the faith community and as human beings (even outside the faith community). (p. 7)

The goal is clearly to be orientated to the world and leaders nurture new life in Christ for the sake of the world. For Nel, the question is: 'How does a missional orientation of the church to the world shape the various dimensions of pastoral ministry in contrast to a maintenance of institutional-church vision?'

6. **Ethics:** Goheen does not discuss the place of ethics. Mashau (2012:6) mentions the importance of ethics and refers to 'missionary ethics'. Wright (2010:loc. 4020) understood the gospel as 'intrinsically verbal is just as intrinsically ethical'. He explains the mission of God's people as to be the community who live by the ethical standards of the ways of God. Ethics can be clustered with systematic theology, but the fact that mission ethics is the purpose of the election of God's people and the basis of mission, must be reflected in theological training.
7. **Missional spirituality and formation:** Theological education is about formation and equipping God's people to participate in God's mission. Spirituality serves the apostolicity and mission of the church. Doornenbal (2012:212) argues that missional spirituality is a spirituality that forms and feeds mission. One must, however, remember that a missional spirituality, and the missional life of a congregation, is not the result of technique, strategic planning or programmes. The formation of God's people is all about habits and practises (sometimes called disciplines). Practises are routinised (ritualised) actions shaping our lives in a certain direction (Roxburgh 2015:49), and helping Christian communities to enter more deeply into the biblical narratives. This implies a spirituality that aligns missional leaders to and nourishes a missional hermeneutic. A missional spirituality also brings balance where missional hermeneutic is reduced to the

methodological analysis of texts. It is about hearing God's voice and calling to participate in his mission.

8. **Mission and theology of religions:** The Edinburgh 2010 meeting described the relation with and witness to people of other faiths as one of the most crucial missiological questions facing Christians (Balía & Kim 2010:34). The global context, expanding religious pluralism and the universal appeal of the Christian message necessitate a response by academic theology to these new parameters. This in itself invites broad theological discussion, but perhaps the point of view of the Administrative Board of the German Association for Mission Studies (2008) serves as an adequate summary:

Religious Studies is understood as belonging to Cultural Studies and Intercultural Theology/Mission Studies relies on this expertise in many working areas. In this respect there is an interest in Religious Studies being a strong, independent discipline of Cultural Studies. However, Mission Study Research itself always needs a high degree of competence in religious studies. (p. 106)

This underscores the importance of a theology of religions as part and parcel of theological education.

All of this, and much more, should shape theological education and preparation for ministry.

9. **Conclusion:** A missional hermeneutic, applied to and practised in theological education, can transform theological education to serve the contextual realities and demands of a VUCA world and the decolonial turn in Africa. It entails a clear focus on the central role of a missional hermeneutic, how it impacts on the understanding and theology of congregational praxis and the formation and equipping of gathered communities to be witnesses to Christ in all places and circumstances. This entails a missional curriculum that defines a centre that unifies the various disciplines – one that places mission and missiology at the heart of theological education.

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