Building missional leadership and spiritual formation

Practical theological perspectives on a Master's Programme[1]

Ian A Nell[2]

Abstract

A MTh programme with the focus on building missional leadership capacity has recently been developed at the Faculty of Theology at Stellenbosch University. The programme is a joint effort of the discipline groups of practical theology and missiology and Ekklesia, an ecumenical centre linked to the Faculty of Theology. The focus of the programme is to serve as a learning community for pastors and congregational leaders who want to build their missional and ministerial leadership capacity. Research done in congregations of the Partnership for South African Missional Churches (SAPMC) shapes the focus and content of the different modules in this programme. The purpose of the paper is to do a practical theological analysis[3] into the background and development of the programme. After giving some insight into the rationale and motivation for starting the programme, the hermeneutical-rhetorical framework of the programme is explained. The paper goes on to give a brief exposition of the content covered in each of the modules, probes into three frames of interpretation (pedagogical, theological and strategic) and ends by reflecting on feedback from some of the first students that recently finished the programme.

Key words: Missional leadership, spiritual formation, missio Dei, pedagogy

1. Introduction

At the beginning of 2011 a MTh programme with a focus on building missional leadership capacity has been developed at the Faculty of Theology at Stellenbosch University. The programme is a joint effort[4] of the discipline groups of Practical Theology and

---

[1] Paper delivered at the annual conference of the South African Missiological Society in Stellenbosch, 13–15 March 2013. The theme of the conference: Transforming and Liberating Spiritualities in the 21st Century: Christianity in dialogue with ...

[2] Associate professor in practical theology and missiology at the Faculty of Theology, Stellenbosch University.

[3]   A practical theological probe usually includes the following tasks: the descriptive-empirical, the interpretative, the normative and the pragmatic or strategic (Dingemans 1996 Heitink 1999; Osmer 2008).

[4] Initially the programme was developed under the initiative of Jurgens Hendriks. In later phases many colleagues played a role, with Frederick Marais, Coenie Burger, Danie Mouton, Marius Nel, Ian Nell, Dion Foster, Breda Ludik and Nico Simpson all participating in the continuing development of the pro-

Missiology, and Ekklesia, an ecumenical centre linked to the Faculty of Theology. The focus of the program is to serve as a "learning community" for pastors and congregational leaders who want to build their missional and ministerial leadership capacities.

The point of departure of the entire programme lies in the *missio Dei*[5], the activity through which the triune God causes His kingdom to come in this world. The focus is on the theological grounding of the *missio Dei* in the life of the triune God and in the gospel of Jesus Christ. While the church and congregations are sociological realities subject to social rules, Christian theology has always believed that the church ultimately finds its identity in the Trinity, the gospel of Christ, and the *missio Dei.* The programme operates from this theological basis of the church and the ministry.[6]

Small (2009:57) gives a concise description of why the doctrine of the Trinity is essential for building missional leadership and spiritual formation:

> First, the doctrine of the Trinity begins with God and not with us; second, the doctrine of the Trinity eclipses individualism and recognizes God in the other (the neighbour, the stranger, and even the enemy); finally, the life of the Trinity is evidenced in God's sending nature, which encompasses the world. In the end, as disciples of the triune God, we are all invited, concretely, into the divine life of the Trinity.

In Guder's recent contribution to a volume on *Dogmatics after Barth* (2012:133) he mines Barth's dogmatics for a missional ecclesiology, and shows convincingly

---

gramme. Frederick Marais, director of The South African Partnership for Missional Churches (SAPMC), plays an important role in bringing the programme to the attention of ministers and congregants through a wide network of relationships in Southern Africa among many congregations that participate in the processes of becoming missional.

[5] "Missio Dei reconceived mission by looking at the nature of the triune God with regard to the world. Inspired by Karl Barth and developed by the Willingen Mission Conference in 1952, missio Dei became a central feature of mission rooted in Western Trinitarian theology, now operationalized by the missional church. Missio Dei redefines mission as the very nature of the triune God ... and denies that functional activities and programmes of the church constitute mission. Missio Dei argues that mission is theocentric, not "ecclesiocentric" (Small 2009:52). "The church exists not to bring in the kingdom but rather to faithfully identify with, personify, and respond to what God is doing in the world, the Mission dei. as Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile describe in The Missional Church in Perspective, "God is a missionary God, and God's mission involves a church sent into the world to represent the reign (kingdom) of God. Thus the church is missionary by nature"." (Chap Clark and Michael McEntyre, 2011, viewed 3 March 2015, from http://www.gregjoiner.com/2012/03/02/practical-theology-model-for-youth-ministry/).

[6] John Flett (2010:35–77), in a chapter under the heading "The problem that is Missio Dei", points to the fact that the concept Missio Dei lacks coherence and is full of ambiguities. His main point of critique is that "Missio Dei claims to provide a Trinitarian framework for concepts that do not draw on that doctrine. The apparent logical homogeny of the concept submerges often radically discordant positions. This produces a range of positions consolidated under the designation Missio Dei, which, when placed alongside each other, exist in irreconcilable tension" (2010:36). We need to take note of this critique when we use the Missio Dei concept and make sure that it doesn't become a kind of blanket concept covering whatever we want to promote or to read into it.

that when Barth re-initiated his doctrinal project as a *Church Dogmatics* "his intention was shaped by his conviction about the centrality of mission for understanding and interpreting the nature and task of the church". Guder goes on to show that for Barth "the church's purposes and actions are to be understood in terms of the church's calling to serve God's healing purposes for all creations as a missionary witness. If the church does not understand itself in terms of its God-given mission, then it is not fully the church of Jesus Christ."

At the beginning of the 1990s South African theologian David Bosch understood the *missio Dei* as a fundamental "paradigm shift" in the understanding of both mission and church in a post-colonial context. This is also reflected in the title of his monumental work: *Transforming mission. Paradigm shifts in theology of mission* (1991). The primary point of his argument was that, in mission, the sending agent is God Himself, with the church participating in this divine sending. This initiative emanates from the Trinitarian action of God and not from the church. "Mission is not primarily an activity of the church, but an attribute of God. God is a missionary God" (1991:389–390).

The rest of my article will be structured in three sections. I start by briefly describing what the programme comprises in terms of its unique learning experience, its hermeneutical-rhetorical framework and the objectives, content and outcomes of each module. Secondly, I use three different interpretative frameworks to further explain the rationale of the programme: a pedagogical, a theological, and a strategic frame. I conclude the paper by giving feedback from some of the MTh students about the impact of the program on their ministry.

2. A valuable learning experience

The programme offers students a rewarding learning experience. It focuses on the development of students' skills as missional leaders by reading academic books and articles, by reflecting in a learning community, by practical exercises, and by articulating and integrating theory through assignments and a research proposal. An important goal of the program is to make students part of a "community of practice" (Wenger 2000:226), in which social leadership competence and personal experience form part of the learning process.

According to Cummins (2000:62), students' fields of competence are enlarged by creating more opportunities for socialisation and participation in a specific community of discourse. In this way, students become part of a new community or discipline group by learning a new set of values and developing a new identity, without sacrificing their old identity. The point of departure for this learning experience is the ecumenical community of students, which is why attendance of modules is compulsory. During the modules missional faith disciplines are practised to establish a culture of faith discernment.

3. Hermeneutical-rhetorical framework

The programme focuses on building missional skills, and therefore makes use of a **hermeneutical-rhetorical** framework. The hermeneutical[7] approach has to do with the interpretation and understanding of various texts and contexts in the wider sense of the word. The rhetorical[8] approach focuses on *pathos* (the character of the audience), *logos* (the character of the message) and *ethos* (the character of the messenger) and communicates that missional leadership works with certain communicative convictions regarding the gospel.

Two focus areas

The first three modules are compulsory for all students. For modules 4 and 5 students can choose between the following focus areas:

➢ Missional leadership and ministry provide a learning community to ministers and church leaders, within which missional leadership and ministry skills can be developed.

➢ Spiritual formation deepens spirituality and build the capacity to practice faith formation; it also offers spiritual guidance from a missional perspective.

Lecturers

The programme is presented by lecturers of the Faculty of Theology and accredited research fellows with proven practical experience of missional leadership and spiritual guidance. International lecturers also participate on occasion.

Structured programme of six modules

As seen above the MTh programme consists of six modules. Each module follows the following rhythm:

---

[7] In the book The Missional Church in Context: Helping Congregations Develop Contextual Ministry (edited by Craig Van Gelder), Mark Lau Branson (2007:95) explains his use of 'hermeneutics' as follows: "I will use the word "hermeneutics" as a way to refer to what we do continually, often subconsciously: we interpret everything and we live inside our interpretations. By that I mean that we take a jumble of thoughts and experiences that exist in our minds and in our encounters with the world and we make meaning out of them. Our thoughts and experiences, any new perception or reasoning, are processed (always and almost always) through language. We have access to this process, internally and in conversation with others, mainly through words. So hermeneutics is the continual process of making the meanings in which we live".

[8] These terms are understood in the Aristotelian sense that effective communication and or persuasion occurs from the interaction of the ethos of the messenger (in this case it will be the perspective of those involved in teaching the course), the logos of the message (this concerns the content of what is being taught, i.e. the program), and the pathos of the audience (which has to do with the student's perspective).

The hermeneutical-rhetorical framework of the six modules in the programme

	Year 1	**Year 2**
Pathos Character of the audience	**Module 1** Congregations – their formation, deformation and reformation. Reading the culture of a congregation and community.	**Module 6** Missional ministry integration. Developing a missional ministry of empowerment through formation.
Logos Character of the message	**Module 2** Trinity and Missio Dei. The plot of the gospel. Developing a missional language.	**Module 5** Kingdom communities and faith formation in the community. Spiritual formation.
Ethos Character of the messenger	**Module 3** The spirituality of the missional leader. The personal practice of missional faith habits.	**Module 4** Missional leadership/ guidance in faith and insights from secular leadership. Spiritual formation.

➢ *Preparatory reading and leadership assignments*
   Each module includes a literature list for students to read before the contact session; they must prepare summaries of the books agreed upon.
➢ *Attendance of contact weeks*
   The contact weeks are the backbone of the programme. This is when students meet for a week and, under the guidance of lecturers, discuss the reading and leadership challenges with which they had to cope. The contact weeks follow a pattern:
   a. Saturday: The students arrive and reflect on their ministry experience during their three months' recess. Orientation for the contact week.
   b. Sunday: Students attend church services and meet with the church leadership of various denominations.
   c. Monday to Thursday: Class discussions led by lecturers.
   d. Friday: Submission of assignments and orientation for the next module.

Assessment

This MTh programme has a weight of 180 credits: six examinations on approximately six books (700–800 pages) per examination, in the form of assignments. Every module = 20 credits x 6 = 120; research assignment = 60. Total credits = 180.

4. Objective, content and outcomes of the modules

In this section I will discuss the six different modules in terms of the objectives of each, giving a short summary of the content, as well as the outcomes. The first three modules, as well as module 6, is compulsory. For modules 4 and 5 they may choose between leadership and spiritual formation.

4.1 Module one Congregations: formation, deformation and transformation

Objectives

The objective of this module is the theological deepening of students' ability to "read" a specific context; this is known as "cultural hermeneutics". Cultural hermeneutics is offered here in the context of congregational transformation, therefore it focuses on theological concepts such as culture, hermeneutics and missional transformation. Another objective of this module is to help students develop basic research skills.

Content

Dwelling in the Word: Listening to one another in open Scripture discussions. Introduction to the programme and visits by alumni. Discussion of the congregation as culture and cultural transformation. Learning about the eight missional patterns (Barrett). Exercises in the reading of culture (Van Hoozer et al. 2007) by attending various church services in Stellenbosch in pairs. Introduction to practical theology and research methodology. Blackboard training. Applied ethnography – ethnographic exercises on campus. Missional transformation as cultural and adaptive transformation (Robinson). Building students' missional formation and transformation theories.

Outcomes

The ability to competently address questions such as: What are context, cultural hermeneutics, and cultural transformation? Development of skills to do a basic analysis of community and congregation. Enhancing the skills to develop a research problem and address it, using practical theological methodology.

4.2 MODULE TWO Understanding our faith: Trinity, the drama of the gospel and
  the *missio Dei*

Objectives

The main objective of this module is to help missional church leaders to develop
sound theological insight into the heart of the gospel. For this, a good understand-
ing of the Trinity and the history of the *missio Dei* is necessary. Together with the
theological knowledge, discernment to see how and where the triune God is still
at work in our world today should also be developed. Students are asked to (re)
formulate their own understanding of a Trinitarian theology in view of this module.

Content

Discussion of Lesslie Newbigin's work with the purpose of discovering images of God,
and of the ecclesiology operative in worship services. In-depth discussion of Christology,
with specific reference to the work of the New Testament scholar N.T. Wright. Lecturing
on and discussion of faith in the triune God, ministry, church and mission, the underly-
ing question being: How did the church understand the *missio Dei* through the ages?

Outcomes

A sound knowledge of the most important theological debates about the Trinity,
Christology and our understanding of the *missio Dei*. Understanding that these three
themes form the framework of an operative missional theology and the ability to think
and speak within this framework. The ability to distinguish between a Trinitarian un-
derstanding of God and a general faith in God *(inter alia* theism, deism and panthe-
ism). Grasping the way in which theology sees the presence and activity of God in life
today, and the ability to formulate a personal point of view on this. Equipping students
to exercise spiritual discernment as part of the activities of a missional congregation.
Strengthening students' own faith in the Trinity, the gospel and the *missio Dei*.

4.3 MODULE THREE Spiritual discernment and missional spirituality

Objectives

To develop personal and corporate spirituality and skills for missional leadership. To
help students grow in terms of their awareness of God's active presence in the world.

Content

Personal exercises in *Lectio Divina* and the prayer of self-examination during
the time of preparation. In-depth discussions of disciplines, based on feedback
by students about their experience of disciplines during the time of preparation.
Discussion about the prescribed literature. A short silence retraite, with input and

discussions about the role of silence and seclusion. Daily exercising of *Examen* and *Lectio Divina* in various styles.

Outcomes

Increased awareness of God's activity in the world and in every student's life. The ability to facilitate a similar awareness in the participants' congregations. An improved ability to practise spiritual discernment as part of a missional congregation. A clearer understanding of the direction in which God is leading the participants and their congregations.

4.4 MODULE FOUR Missional ministry and leadership or: Missional spirituality and spiritual direction

Objectives – leadership track

The Christian Church believes that the living Christ through the Holy Spirit is still the First Minister of the Gospel and sees church leaders as merely fulfilling a supportive role by following Christ and constantly referring others to Christ. This does not mean that leadership in the Christian community is not important, but that it has its own unique character and content. In this module, attention is given both to the usual leadership functions within organisations, and to the proprietary nature of Christian ministry and leadership.

Outcomes – leadership track

A thorough overview of the most significant viewpoints regarding congregational ministry and leadership. Understanding the key functions of Christian ministry and leadership and their work within these parameters. Introduction to the best theories and practices of leadership from the secular world via the PEAK Leadership Course. Doing exercises in some of these practices. Insight into students' preferred styles of leadership. Insight into the unique nature of Christian leadership in the manner of Christ.

Objectives – spirituality track

In preparation for this module every student must arrange to spend time with a person experiencing suffering. It is important that during these visits students should simply "be there" for this person and not try to provide answers, solve problems or offer counselling. They only have to learn what it means to place oneself in the position of the suffering person and to meet Christ in that person. Students should reflect on their visit(s) and the time they spent with the suffering person. Based on their reflection, students must write a report of approximately 6 pages in which

they try to express their feeling and thoughts during the visit(s). They should reflect about what God is saying to them through his Spirit and how this motivates them to respond. They will be given the opportunity to share this with the rest of the group.

Outcomes – spirituality track

This module deals with the three questions regarding spiritual guidance within the Christian tradition. The outcomes are linked to these three questions: (1) What is spiritual guidance? (2) What is the most important design that emerges from a spiritual guidance relationship? (3) How does spiritual guidance relate to our life in this world?

4.5 MODULE FIVE The development of faith communities and public spirituality

Objectives – leadership track

This module aims to deepen students' theological insight in the church as an image of the kingdom of God. It specifically focuses on what the theological concepts of forgiveness, reconciliation and justice entail in the South African context. The module presupposes that church leaders should not only reflect on how to proclaim and embody the gospel for their contexts, but also what the real content of this gospel is. In other words: What is the ultimate hope contained in the Christian gospel?

Outcomes – leadership track

Missional skills: The module strives to foster the skills needed by church leaders to cross boundaries and to integrate missional theology in their congregations' ministries. *Missional attitudes and convictions:* Students are guided to recognise the various missional opportunities in everyday life for themselves and their communities. Particular attention is paid to the development of a focus on establishing new partnerships with other communities and leaders. A *kenosis* approach to leadership is established. *Missional habits:* Students learn the habit of constantly entering and creating new communities. Dwelling in the Word, Dwelling in the World and Plunging (see par. 7.3) are examples of such habits.

Objectives – spirituality track

Spiritual formation and guidance are the traditional practices by means of which individuals and communities become involved in the process of spiritual transformation, which should lead to transforming actions in the church and community. The progression of spiritual guidance is well articulated in Peter 1:4-7. Spiritual formation and guidance includes reflective and active elements. Our encounter with God transforms our inner lives (as individuals and communities). The result of this inner transformation is social transformation.

Outcomes – spirituality track

Students should gain an understanding of both the theory and discipline of personal and communal spiritual formation, and share examples of how spiritual disciplines shaped, changed and transformed individuals. In this process the focus is on the relation between spiritual formation and mission, as is clear in the gospel of John. Students will be guided to ground their understanding of the relationship between spiritual formation and mission, by paying attention to specific examples of how these disciplines helped to sustain the work of the church in South Africa under the apartheid government.

4.6 MODULE SIX Integrated missional ministry

Objectives

Integrated missional ministry strives to integrate the missional capacities of modules 1-5 in a missional ministry of empowerment. The core question in this module is: How are leaders formed and empowered as missional leaders? The missional reading of culture and the development of a missional culture in the congregation. Concepts like Trinitarian missional language, missional spiritual formation, missional leadership and missional communities will be revisited and integrated into the hermeneutical-rhetorical framework.

Outcomes

Students should acquire the ability to form and empower missional leadership, missional training and mentorship, vocational guidance, and missional and public mobilisation.

In the next part of the article, attention will be given to *three frames* that will be used to probe into different aspects of the programme. The purpose is to come to a better understanding of the underlying *pedagogical, theological* and *strategic* assumptions of the programme.

5. A pedagogical frame

The *pedagogical* frame derives its name from the Greek words *paideia* (child) and *agogos* (leader) and is seen as an ancient practice that relies on texts for the formation of a person. According to Small (2009:52): "It is a form of education that is centered in virtue and cultural engagement through the continual practices of learning *(mathesis),* teaching *(didaskalia),* and practice *(askesis)* – with the goal of creating a *habitus,* or second nature". This "second nature" refers to a redeemed or baptismal identity not related to your inheritance or bloodline. Kelsey (1992:6-9) discusses the way in which Christian education adapted *paideia* to

achieve the Christian transformation of the person as part of an on-going educational process, with the purpose of discovering the divine and the good. "The goal of Christian *paideia* is formation, including virtue, knowledge of the divine, wisdom and conversion" (Small 2009:53).[9]

For the development of the pedagogical frame I make use of the comprehensive study of Foster et al. (2006:67–186), entitled: Educating clergy: Teaching practices and pastoral imagination. In this volume they discuss four different pedagogical strategies of which I will be using three in an attempt to illuminate the operative pedagogical strategies of the program.

5.1 Contextual pedagogies

Pedagogies of contextualisation refer to pedagogies that all, in some way, emphasise the social situatedness of knowledge and practice (Foster *et al.* 2006:127-155). In the case of the MTh programme, the aim is *firstly* to foster an awareness of the students' own context. The goal is to help them to reflect contextually about the task of missional leadership. During the past thirty years our country has been through "discontinuous change", affecting faith communities in deep and lasting ways. We cannot practise missional theology without serious attention to these societal changes.

A *second pedagogy* focuses on developing in students the ability to participate constructively in the meeting between their different contexts. The ecumenical mix of the students attending this course – coming from different denominational backgrounds, different social locations and different sizes of congregations – contribute to their ability to interpret various contexts.

A *third pedagogy* is to make students aware of the processes of social and systemic transformation of contexts. Processes like modernisation, globalisation and secularisation are continuously transforming the social scene. Students become aware of their own and other cultural prejudices and the importance of approaching social analyses from different perspectives.

From these pedagogies it is clear that the social situation of students has a big influence on practising missional leadership skills.

---

[9]   David Kelsey (1992:6–9) helped us to understand the difference between paideia (Athens) as character formation and Wissenschaft, (Berlin) as theological research and practised in modern research universities. These two traditions are not mutually exclusive, but need each other. Therefore, the combination of the two in a so-called "critical paideia" is what this MTh-programme is also striving for. In the words of Small (2009:53), "Accepting paideia as primary and Wissenschaft as secondary results in a critical paideia that offers promise as a way forward." He goes on to show three ways in which such an approach can be helpful and concludes by stating: "Finally, the theologian, whether pastor, scholar, or lay disciple, understands that by embracing paideia she can understand her Christian life as a process of on-going conversion" (Small 2009:54).

5.2 Interpretative pedagogies

There is consensus in the theories of interpretation that four different realities can be discerned in the process of interpretation. This includes: (a) a phenomenon that must be interpreted, (b) the interpreter, (c) the interaction of the interpreter with that which must be interpreted, and (d) the interest of a community of interpretation. All of these interpretation practices have one communal goal: to help students to think critically (Foster et al. 2006:70–99). In the light of this, different pedagogies of interpretation can be distinguished. They include:

➢ *Interpretation as a continuous dialogue* in which various levels of dialogue can be discerned. Regarding the teaching aspect of the program, this means encouraging students to participate in various dialogues with Scripture and tradition. This includes dialogue in the classroom with the help of the Socratic method (question and answer), conversations with fellow students in different exercises of deep listening ("dwelling in the Word") as well as group discussions in class on topics related to the *missio Dei* and missional theology.

➢ *Interpretation as the application of tradition.* The students are from different denominational traditions. Each tradition acts as a lens, colouring the interpretation process. Appreciation of these traditions helps students to understand how different interpretations of the same leadership activities can lead to different applications of the traditions. This is specifically prominent when we look at, for instance, the different offices (leadership roles) at work in the different traditions.

➢ *Interpretation through choice of the "right method".* It is important to note that the outcome of a module determines the method. If there is consensus that the outcome should be the development of students' critical thinking abilities, then it is important that the methodology should serve that outcome. If the goal of critical thinking is "understanding", the method should help students to develop the ability to make sense of texts, situations or contexts, and events. They should be able to analyse texts, situations and relations, and to integrate them into a frame of understanding. Students must be guided to understand that they are part of an on-going dialogue with source documents, traditions and the contemporary practices of faith communities.

5.3 Formative pedagogies

The distinguishing characteristic of formative pedagogies is that they strive to contribute to the formation of knowledge, attitudes, skills and customs that are related to the development of a professional identity and its accompanying practices, commitment and integrity. The goal which a formative pedagogy strives for in the case of missional leadership, is involvement in the mystery of human existence (Foster

2006:99-126) which is interpreted as the *missio Dei* and *missio ecclesiones* within the context of the programme. Three approaches to a pedagogy of formation can be distinguished:

➢ *The practice of the presence of God* (see especially module 3). This pedagogy is about making students aware – through texts and reality itself – of that which is holy and mysterious, which transcends the human consciousness. Thus, it deals with the transformation of the consciousness that has the ability to make sense of things from the perspective of the "Completely Other, which is symbolic of God, the holy and the mysterious" (Foster 2006:103).

➢ *Sanctification as practice.* This pedagogy concurs with the previous one, but also goes further "to live on every word and gesture, taste, touch, smell, sound, and sight of the liturgies they celebrate with people" (Foster 2006:104). Through the habits and attitudes related to the latter, students learn about a manner of being ("being functions"), which is unique to each one's individual tradition. The pedagogical intention is the embodiment of a certain religious tradition by the manner in which they think, talk, act and develop relationships.

➢ *The practice of religious (missional) leadership.* This pedagogy is closely related to the attitudes and customs of the previous pedagogy, but here it specifically applies to the practice of the roles and responsibilities of a religious vocation. Students are guided to master certain skills that lead to the formation of patterns of leadership. This is related to the manner in which the interaction of institutional processes and the people participating in them is facilitated.

In each of these pedagogies, it is clear that an integration of hand, head and heart – what the students do *(pathos),* what they know *(logos)* and who they are *(ethos)* – is essential. Therefore, these pedagogies are interdependent on one another to assist and rehearse the cognitive abilities, emotional development, practical skills and identity formation of students, contributing to an integrated spirituality.

6. A theological frame

In the introduction, we have seen the importance of the *missio Dei* and the major influence of Karl Barth, Lesslie Newbigin and David Bosch in the development of "missional language". In this theological frame, I want to make use of the insights of Smit[10] (2012:3–14) in his contribution to a volume on *Dogmatics after Barth: Facing challenges in church, society and the academy.* The title of Smit's article is: "Dogmatics after 'Barth'? South African challenges". The quotation marks in the title points to the

---

[10] Dirkie Smit is also one of the lecturers in the programme and, together with Burger, is responsible for module two on "Understanding our faith: Trinity, the drama of the gospel and the Missio Dei".

fact that, in South Africa, "Barth" is not the same Barth of theologies in other continents and contexts, because of our own specific history and circumstances.

Smit (2012:8-15) goes on to discuss "Three challenges for Christian theology after 'Barth' – in South Africa". These three challenges are very helpful in developing normative criteria for our MTh programme, by trying to answer the question: "What ought to be going on?".[11] I make use of Smit's challenges, but change the order to fit into the hermeneutical-rhetorical framework of *pathos, logos* and *ethos.*

6.1 Contextual and ethical

Under the heading "contextual and ethical", Smit (2012:10-12) deals with what he calls "the *realistic,* the concrete, the historical and the contextual nature of 'Barth's' work". He points to the fact that in many recent studies of Barth's preaching activities and his understanding of Reformed faith and Reformed confessions, as well as his own social and political activities, Barth has been read in South Africa as the role model of a deeply contextual theologian "not in the sense that changing contexts determined his theological viewpoints, but precisely in the sense that he continuously enquired into the implications of the joyous gospel for concrete human beings living real lives in continuously changing circumstances" (Smit 2012:11).

Smit goes on to emphasize the fact that for Barth dogmatics and ethics are intimately related and therefore any systematic-theological reflection has to consider the political, ethical and moral nature of these implications of the gospel for continuously changing circumstances.

> Faith calls for Christian life, it is engaging, involving, calling. Faith has to do with belonging, with being a witness, with embodiment, with a life of vocation. The one Word of God should be heard, trusted and obeyed. Believers and church are drawn into the *missio Dei*. This ethical, moral or political nature of his (Barth's) work carried implications for society and the world – for human freedom, justice, and peace – but also for human agency, identity and involvement (Smit 2012:11).

From this quotation it is clear – especially the reference that we "are drawn into the *missio Dei"* – that there is no way in which Christians, and in our case, missional leadership, can withdraw from the political consequences of what we have learned by faith. In modules one and six it is specifically these opportunities that we use to grapple with "the character of the audience". In the process we are forced to ask

---

[11] According to Osmer (2005:ix) the normative task of practical theology is interested in the question: What ought to be going on?, where the focus is on "the construction of theological and ethical norms with which to assess, guide and reform some dimensions of contemporary Christian praxis".

self-critical questions on whether we indeed understand this link between systematic theological reflection and ethics in such a way.

In times of radical pluralism of social life-worlds, as well as radical pluralism of ethical convictions and moral practices, it is of the utmost importance to make sure that "we do not fall into another enclave mentality" (Cilliers and Nell 2012), by neglecting the social and political consequences that we have learnt from history. True to the "missional nature" of our calling, we are always confronted by the question: Who is "the other" that God is sending us to?

6.2 Christian and joyful

According to Barth Christian theology properly understood is second-order reflection, *fides quaerens intellectum* (Smit 2012:8). Smit, interpreting Barth, writes:

> Knowledge of God is given in Jesus Christ, and is therefore knowledge of the triune God, not knowledge based on anthropology in any form, whether built on human reason, human history, human experience or human spirituality. Faith responds to revelation. The Word of God in the Scriptures is the source for theological reflection, which calls for theological reading of the Scriptures. The church is created by the Word, and not a voluntary association of like-minded people. Theological knowledge is open-ended, never final; theological truth cannot be captured in timeless propositions, the church's mind could change, its confession is authoritative but only "until further notice".

According to Smit (2012:8), a "Christian and joyful" approach in practicing theology in the South African context do have important implications. The "Christian" part of the heading boils down to "renouncing any form of religious idolatry that replaces Jesus Christ as the one Word of God by a humanly chosen revelation in history". Our history reveals many examples of this kind of religious idolatry and it is still a challenge for ministers and congregations to be aware of the many different ways in which natural religiosity can replace the living Christ with members in a free-market of religion choosing the spirituality of their liking.

Concerning the "joyful" part of the heading, Smit (2012:9) refers to Barth's so-called evangelical theology as a "positive, joyous restatement of the gospel as God's 'yes', as good news, as the humanity of God, as the wonderful election in Christ … as the calling of the church as witness to this good news". From many of Barth's students, including theologians from South Africa who had contact with him, we hear that Barth's theology "was a cause of joy". It was a theology full of vitality with a rich content of love and grace as well as the power and majesty of the living God, but at the same time it had a critical element especially concerning forms of natural theol-

ogy and religious familiarity leading to Barth's critical "no". It is no wonder that his theology earned the label of "Christocentrism" with Christ at the centre. Barth was convinced "that the reality of the knowledge of God precedes all questions about the possibility of our knowing Him" (Smit 2012:9).

This is also the conclusion that Flett (2010:295–298) came to at the end of his thorough revisit of the *missio Dei* concept. He writes: "Joy is the wellspring of the missionary act. It is an involuntary cry that results from finding that pearl of great price … witness, fellowship, and joy are of a piece (1 John 1:1–5). Mission is the abundant fellowship of active participation in the very glory that is the life of God from and to all eternity" (Flett 2010:297).

6.3 Confessional and ecumenical

Developing a MTh-program for building missional leadership capacity within the post-apartheid context is part of "dreaming a different world". It is to participate in witnessing to Jesus Christ in public, but doing so deeply aware of the context and the ethical implications of that witness. In this regard, Smit (2012:12) points to the fact that "faith is always discerning, self-critical … faith remains self-critical reflection on the praxis of church and believers. The criterion for such self-discernment may never be success, relevance or popularity, but rather obedience, faithfulness and truthfulness – in short freedom for the gospel."

Confession in the form of "self-criticism" is not always a popular way of practicing theology, but if we are serious about developing missional leadership, the courage to be prophetic in our context often demands swimming against the current of popular theology. In a world where success is measured by numbers, popularity and influence, it requires a certain audacity to confess that the Church is one, holy, catholic and Christian.

It is in this context that Smit (2012:13) points to the importance of the unity of the church for Barth. His emphasis on the unity of the church grew out of his involvement in ecumenism (the same is true of Newbigin and Bosch). In this regard, he was also a source of inspiration for many during the "struggle years" against the backdrop of apartheid theology, when the church was divided along racial and ethnic lines. Therefore, the Confession of Belhar, with its emphasis on unity, reconciliation and justice is an important building block for our Master's programme, both in terms of being confessional and ecumenical.

7. A strategic-pragmatic frame

The *pragmatic task of practical theology* is to find an answer to the question: "How might this area of praxis be shaped to more fully embody the normative commitments of the Christian tradition in a particular context of experience?" (Osmer

2005:ix). Therefore, this task focuses on the development of action-guiding models and rules of art. In listening to a number of scholars who reflected at the 2010 meeting of SAMS on what they have learned from South African congregations on their missional journeys, three spiritual practices can be distinguished, namely: Dwelling in the world, Dwelling in the Word and Dwelling with the (O)other.[12]

7.1 Dwelling in the world

For the church to be "the light and salt of the world" (Matt 5:13–14), it is necessary to dwell in the world. We have seen that the *missio Dei* focuses on the world and therefore a good understanding of what is going on in society (cultural hermeneutics) is extremely important. In congregational studies we find different ways of doing a thorough "contextual analysis" by concentrating on the social, cultural and religious contexts of congregations, their geography, demographics, historical time-line, etc. (cf. Brouwer 2009:150–22; Hendriks 2004:109–119). This kind of research can and have been done in different quantitative and qualitative ways to open different windows on what is going on in the context in which congregations are operating.

In the MTh-programme we use the basic principles of applied ethnography[13], where the purpose is to train the participants in the "skill to listen". It is about building the capacity to listen to their contexts. During the first module of the program the students are sent onto the campus of the University in pairs with the purpose of finding two students that they have to interview. The two questions they ask are: What is your experience of student life? And: Do you feel at home on the campus? The answers to these questions are then analysed and discussed in class. Before the exercise, the students are asked to write down their assumptions about student life on campus. These suppositions are then compared with the actual data from the interviews, and time and again it is interesting to see the difference between the two – proving the difference between our assumptions of what is going on and what is in reality happening around us.

The participants then have to do a similar exercise in their congregations, using eight questions that they ask to their congregants. The different answers of the

---

[12] Here I found the three spiritual practices that Hendriks (2012:5–7) describes under a heading "discovering a missional hermeneutic" very helpful. The third practice Hendriks calls "plunging", but I prefer to keep to the concept of "dwelling" – in this case "dwelling with the (O)other" – for reasons that I will explain in paragraph 7.3.

[13] See in this regard Frederick Marais & Taylor Ellison's (2008) contribution: Push through the pain: The Spirit transforming churches across the world, a draft of early reflections on a narrative/ethnographic contextual model for the research of congregations, in Conversation with a missional vision for the church.   http://communitas.co.za/dienste/navorsing1/120-ekklesiologiemissionere-gemeentewees/273-push-through-the-pain?q=push+through+p.

church members, working and living in different places, produce interesting data as to what is happening in the world. A reading team is then formed to interpret the data, looking for patterns[14] in the data. The *spiritual practice* that the programme wants to emphasise is that the participants should become aware of the fact that everyday encounters can become missional events if seen from this perspective.

7.2 Dwelling in the Word

The spiritual practice (habit) of "dwelling in the Word" plays a key roll in all the modules of this programme. Luke 10:1–12 is normally read and reflected upon as listening each other into free speech. Nel (2010) summarizes it in the following way:

> The methodology of Dwelling in the Word consists of reading a chosen text aloud in a group. After the initial reading of the text, time is given for silent reflection on the meaning thereof. Every group member is then instructed to find a "reasonably friendly-looking stranger" with whom to share what has been "heard" during the personal reflection on the text. After sharing in pairs, members report to the group what they have heard from their respective partners. The group is then invited to discover the meaning of the text for their specific context by asking: "What is God up to here?" and "What is the Word of God for us in this place and time?" (cf. Keifert 2009:21). These two question reflect the specific theological aim of Dwelling in the Word as inviting participants into the world of the text, and in so doing to join in the mission of God (the *missio Dei)* to the world (Keifert 2006:36–37).

This exercise is part of the programme's journey to discern to whom God is specifically sending the participants as individuals, but also their faith communities. The expressed aim of the process of corporate spiritual discernment, through Dwelling in the Word, is "to discover the preferred and promised future of God for a specific faith community" (cf. Keifert 2006:64).

According to Keifert (2006:69) this spiritual practice or discipline is one of the most significant innovations for building the missional capacities of a local congregation, because it stimulates the ability of the people participating (be it leaders or congregants) to imagine their everyday life stories within the bigger narrative of the Biblical world. In this way a capacity for communal spiritual discernment is shaped, empowering the participants through missional imagination to develop a

---

[14] The patterns that the listening team are looking for are: missional vocation; Biblical formation and discipleship; taking risks as a contrasting community; practices that demonstrate God's intent for the world; worship as public witness of God's reign; dependence on the Holy Spirit; journeying towards the reign of God: and missional authority. These patterns were developed by making use of the work of Barrett, L (et al.) 2004.

missional understanding of the Word, and thus helping to reshape the culture of that congregation.

The focus on reading Luke 10:1-12 started with Newbigin (1989:234), who wrote, "The only effective hermeneutic of the gospel is the life of the congregation which believes it." He therefore argued that a text like Luke 10:1-12 acts like a hermeneutical lens that shapes the way one looks at and experience the world, awakening the imagination, through the work of the Spirit, to open up new plausibility structures of how to act and what to do (Newbigin 1989:97-99).

According to Hendriks (2012:6), "If this is performed in a group, it activates communal spiritual discernment. God's *missio* gets underway in ways that was usually completely unpredictable. The interesting thing is that it usually began at the fringes, from where it is not expected." In this regard, he also refers to the work of Andrew Walls (2002:67) who wrote that history illustrates that this is a typical characteristic in missionary boundary crossing events.

At the mention of "boundary crossings" we come to the last spiritual practice that I want to discuss, namely dwelling with the (O)other.

7.3 Dwelling with the (O)other

Dwelling in the Word opens one up to the "Other", to the presence and activity of the living God, but it also turns one's face to the "other", in the person of the stranger, the widow and the orphan, coming from a different and sometimes unfamiliar world. According to Walls (2002), cross-cultural movements always do that: expandthe teachability of people and congregations.

Listening to the "other" is part of what the SAPMC calls the "listening plunge".[15] Being missional is about building relationships. We want to get to know the people to whom we reach out and want to learn to speak their language. In this way God also uses the people with whom we build relationships to change us. When we plunge, we break through the technical change and, in the process of adaptive change, we learn the new paradigm of being missional. By "plunging" our existing knowledge and skills are broadened by new knowledge and skills that the missional challenges need. Furthermore we discover what stands in our way – the invisible walls – of building relationships with those people to whom God is sending us.[16]

The purpose of this exercise is therefore to help students to attain the capacity to cross their own and their congregation's cultural boundaries, which may include geographical, but also conceptual, boundaries. In terms of the processes of the

---

[15] For the concept of "plunge", see the unpublished contribution of Danie Mouton at the SAMS conference in January 2010 under the title: "To plunge … when congregations cross their boundaries"

[16] The thoughts about the "listening plunge" I took from Manual of the South African Partnership of Missional Churches,10.

SAPMC, the purpose of this "dwelling with the other" in the form of the "listening plunge" is to develop the concrete skills that enable us to reach out to the world to discover where the *missio Dei* wants to take us. In this way it reconnects the students and their congregations with their contexts and with God's actions, and as such it generates new energy. At the same time the teachability of students and their congregations expands and the invisible walls of our own culture become clear. Hospitality acquires a new meaning, because the world of "the other", the stranger, the widow and the orphan, is usually a different and unknown world. The possibility of new community formation emerges and "forms something like a bridge community that guides the ministry forward and acts as a guide for all concerned in the process of discernment" (Hendriks 2012:7).

8. Feedback from students

Our research methodology employed qualitative techniques in the form of discussion classes, feedback sessions and observations. The different techniques provided data that permit us not only to track the learning experience of each student, but also to assess learning outcomes and monitor whether goals have been achieved.

The data gathering techniques have provided a rich description of the MTH programme as it now moves into its 4th year.

Students enrolled in the course were encouraged to share the narratives of their spiritual journeys during discussions and through their assignments. Each student was required to respond and provide feedback on the course. These responses were essential in getting a pulse on the programme and its success.

In the feedback gained from students one finds personal reflections on the journey of two years. Here are some of the opinions we received from the first students that finished the two-year journey.

"I am very thankful that I had the opportunity to do the course. My faith in God and my hope for the church is growing. The structure of the reading and assignments were stimulating yet not overly demanding, and the input from the lecturers and classmates inspiring – as well as fun! It has given me river banks down which my theology, spirituality and Christian practice can flow!"

"My engagement with the content, lecturers and fellow students through this course has been nothing short of life changing. I have experienced a profound reshaping of my life practices, habits and theology, which has resulted in significant changes in my own journey with the triune God. I highly recommend this program to all who are wrestling with their vocations, yet know that God is leading them beyond the traditional answers."

"Doing the MTh the past two years has been a tremendously affirming experience. After nearly 35 years in pastoral ministry it was good to discover that I got some things right. It has also challenged me to read more widely and think more deeply about who I am."

As this article was being written, these insights from the qualitative data provided important feedback. We regard the students' stories as a type of skeletal frame that supports the narrative of the programme, permitting us to go back and forth, and make inferences that will be used to refine the course and energize the building of missional and ministerial leadership capacities.

9. Conclusion

I started this paper by pointing to the development of a new MTh programme with the focus on building missional leadership capacity as a joint effort of the Faculty of Theology at Stellenbosch University and Ekklesia. Recently we had our fourth intake (2011, 2012, 2013, 2014) bringing the total of students involved in the program to 60 people. We are convinced that, while we are "busy building the bridge while crossing", the program can make a humble contribution to the building of the body of Christ both in terms of leadership and spirituality.

I want to finish with a quote from Klippies Kritzinger in the book of Marilyn Naidoo (2012) on ministerial formation:

What we need as an underlying ethos for everything we do in ministerial formation, is a spirituality of inclusion, reaching out to people who are different, thinking them into our lives as part of our world; a way of life that does not say (or even think), "the coloureds have a gangsterism problem", "the Afrikaners have a racism problem", or "the poor black communities have a xenophobic problem", etc. Instead, it will say, "we have a gangsterism problem in some of our townships", "we have a racism problem in some of our communities", etc. (Kritzinger 2012:41).

By building missional leadership and spiritual formation we want to contribute to this "spirituality of inclusion" in times where we are in desperate need of signs of hope emanating from faith communities around the country.

References

Banks, R.J. 1999. *Reenvisioning theological education: Exploring a missional alternative to current models.* Grand Rapids:Eerdmans.

Barrett, L *(et al.)* 2004. *Treasure in clay jars: Patterns in missional faithfulness.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Bosch, DJ. 1991, *Transforming mission: Paradigm shifts in theology of mission.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

Brouwer, R. 2009, *Geloven in gemeenschap: het verhaal van een protestantse geloofsgemeenschap.* Kok: Kampen.

Burger, C. 2004. Die predikantsamp. Deel 4: Predikantwees in die Gereformeerde tradisie in die 21ste eeu – nuwe uitdagings en nuwe tendense. *Dutch Reformed Theological Journal (Nederduitse Gereformeerde Teologiese Tydskrif)* 45(3–4), 529-537.

Cahalan, K., Hess, C.L. and Miller-McLemore, B. 2008. Teaching Practical Theology: Introducing six perspectives. *IJPT* 12, 35–87.

Cilliers, J.H. & Nell, I.A., 2011. "Within the enclave" - Profiling South African social and religious developments since 1994. *Verbum et Ecclessia.* 32, 1–7.

Cummins, J. 2000, *Language, power, and pedagogy: Bilingual children in the crossfire,* Channel View Books.

De Gruchy, S. and Ellis, W. 2008. Christian Leadership in "Another Country": Contributing to an ethical development agenda in South Africa today, in S. de Gruchy, *From our side: Emerging perspectives on development and ethics,* 9–20). Amsterdam: Rozenburg Publishers.

De Gruchy, S. 2003. Of agency, assets and appreciation: Seeking some commonalities between theology and development. *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 117, 20-39.

Dingemans, G.D.J. 1996. Practical theology in the academy: A contemporary overview. *The journal of religion,* 82–96.

Flett, J.G. 2010. *The witness of God: The Trinity, missio Dei, Karl Barth, and the nature of Christian community.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Foster, C.R., Dahill, L.E., Goleman, L.A., Tolentino, B.W. 2006. *Educating clergy: Teaching practices and pastoral imagination.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Frank, T.E. 2002. The discourse of leadership and the practice of administration. *Journal of Religious Leadership* 1(1), 7-30.

Frank, T.E. 2006. Leadership and administration: An emerging field in practical theology. Research report. *International Journal of Practical Theology* 10, 113-152.

Guder, D.L. 2012. Mining Barth's Dogmatics for a Missional Ecclesiology, in G Thomas, R.H.R. Brouwer and B. McCormack (eds.), *Dogmatics after Barth: Facing challenges in church, society and the academy:* Leipzig: Self-published.

Guder, D.L. & Barrett, L. 1998. *Missional church: A vision for the sending of the church in North America.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Heitink, G. 1999. *Practical theology: History, theory, action domains: Manual for practical theology.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Hendriks, H.J. 2004, *Studying congregations in Africa.* Lux Verbi. BM: Wellington.

Hendriks, H.J., 2012, *'Contextualising theological education in Africa by doing theology in a missional hermeneutic',* Koers – Bulletin for Christian Scholarship 77(2), Art. #56, 8 pages. http://dx.doi.org/ 10.4102/koers.v77i2.56

Jinkins, M. 2012. *Religious leadership, in The Wiley Blackwell companion to practical theology.* Ashgate: Aldershot, 307–317.

Keifert, P., 2006, *We are here now – A new missional era.* Eagle: Allelon Publishing, Eagle.

Keifert, P., 2009, 'The return of the congregation to theological conversation', in P. Keifert

(ed.), *Congregations: A nested vision for learning new habits, in testing the spirits – How theology informs the study of congregations,* pp. 13–26, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids.

Kelsey, D.H., 1992. *To Understand God Truly: What's Theological about a Theological School.* Westminster John Knox Press.

Kritzinger, J.N.J. 2012. Ministerial formation in the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa: In search of inclusion and authenticity, in M. Naidoo (ed.), *Between the real and the ideal,* 33–47.

Mouton, D. 2010. To plunge... when congregations cross their boundaries. (Unpublished contribution at SAMS conference, January 2010.)

Naidoo, M. 2010. Ministerial training: The need for pedagogies of formation and of contextualisation in theological education. *Missionalia 38*(3), 347–368.

Naidoo, M. (ed.) 2012. *Between the real and the ideal: Ministerial formation in the South African churches.* Pretoria: Unisa Press.

Nel, M.J., 2013. The influence of dwelling in the Word within the Southern African Partnership of Missional Churches. *Verbum et Ecclesia.* 34. oi:10.4102/ve.v34i1.778

Newbigin, L., 1989. *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society.* Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing.

Osmer, R.R. 2005, *The Teaching Ministry of Congregations.* Westminster John Knox Press.

Osmer, R. 2008. *Practical Theology: An Introduction.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Robinson, A.B., 2003. *Transforming Congregational Culture.* Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing.

Small, K.J.A. 2009. Missional Theology for Schools of Theology: Re-engaging the Question "What is Theological about a Theological School?", in C. Van Gelder (ed.), The Missional Church & Leadership Formation. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Smit, D.J. 2008. Mainline Protestantism in South Africa – and modernity? Tentative reflections for discussion. *Dutch Reformed Theological Journal* 49(1-2), 92-105.

Smit, D.J. 2012. Dogmatics after "Barth"?, in G Thomas, R.H.R. Brouwer and B. Mc Cormack (eds.), *Dogmatics after Barth: Facing challenges in church, society and the academy:* Leipzig: Self-published

Van Gelder, C (ed.) 2007. *The Missional Church in Context: Helping Congregations Develop Contextual Ministry.* Eerdmans: Grand Rapids.

Van Gelder, C. (ed). 2009. *The missional church & leadership formation: Helping congregations develop leadership capacity.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Vanhoozer, K.J., Anderson, C.A., Sleasman, M.J., 2007. *Everyday Theology (Cultural Exegesis): How to Read Cultural Texts and Interpret Trends.* Baker Academic.

Walls, A.F. 2002, *The cross-cultural process in Christian history: Studies in the transmission and appropriation of faith.* T&T Clark: London.

Wenger, E. 2000. *Communities of practice and social learning systems.* Organization 7(2), 225.

Werner, D. 2009. *Magna Carta on ecumenical formation in theological education in the 21st century: Ten key convictions.* International Review of Mission 98(1), 161–170.

Werner, D., Esterline, D. and Kang, N. (eds.) 2010. *The handbook of theological education in world Christianity.* Oxford, UK: Regnum Books International.

Zscheile, D.J. 2007. *The Trinity, leadership, and power. Journal of Religious Leadership.* 6(2), 43–63.