

“Together towards Life”: Reconceptualising *Missio-* Formation in Changing Landscape of World Christianity

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Abstract

This article argues that mission-formation in contemporary Africa can no longer be thought of in a homogeneous manner but as a new constellation of missio-pedagogical languages. The modern missionary enterprise's use of the concept of 'missionary' was linked to the old world order that was Eurocentric and hegemonic in nature. In our contemporary period, such language is outdated and a new language has emerged in the concept of missional or missio-formation which represents a desire to connect with the *missio Dei*. In this, the mandate of the church is to be the one sent to respond, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to the contemporary postmodern condition. In this the agents of mission are “the whole people of God”, not just some expert class of people. This article therefore argues that how people are engaging with the existential challenges that threaten their daily lives should help reset the agenda of how missio-formation education of leaders is to be done. In line with this, an illustration of one of the emerging contextually friendly paradigms for missio-formation is given and its implication for curriculum formation in Africa is discussed.

Key words: Missio-formation, Swaziland, language game, World Council of Churches, together toward life



Source: <http://caringcars.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/aboutus.jpg>

Introduction

This article is the result of reflection on the new World Council of Churches (hereafter, WCC) ecumenical mission affirmation by the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (hereafter, CWME), *Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes* (hereafter, TTL) (Keum ed. 2013). This affirmation deals with the changing landscape of world Christianity that has been taking place over the past three decades. We believe that the key phrase, TTL, in the statement implies that mission is a process, a quest or a search for authentic Life which demands critical discernment of feasible and adequate missional approaches that can facilitate and enable 'the together – the whole people of God' to realise 'the fullness of Life'. In order for these approaches to be mutually owned by the people of God, it is imperative to engage in mutual discernment. One of the best ways to mutually discern some of these possible approaches is through missio-formation.

Affirmably, Christianity is at the core of an immense paradigm shift that will revolutionize the manner in which the future missio-formation will be done. Harvie Conn (1984:54) has reminded that "revolutionary thinking is not created by new information but by new paradigms that allow information to be fitted more fully and adequately." First, this implies that the emergence of a new paradigm is inevitable. Second, new paradigms emerge as a response to accrued inadequacies in the old paradigm as result of the dynamic process of social change. Accordingly, any adequate understanding of missio-formation in contemporary society must be underpinned by the fact that "there is a growing awareness that we live in an era of change from one way of understanding reality to another (read "perceptions" — the authors)" (Bosch 1991:185). Transforming missions also entails rethinking the meaning of concept of missionary and how missionaries are educated. In other words, to construct a viable missio-formation model requires a clear understanding of what the concept of mission means in the 21st century. When the term 'mission' is used, people usually assume everyone has a common understanding of what the word means. Unfortunately, such is not always the case.

In trying to create missio-formational theory, it is helpful to realize that the term 'mission' means different things to different church traditions, theologians and laypeople and is applied differently in different contexts. As missio-formation continues to evolve from the colonial to the neo-colonial period, definitions of the concept of mission has radically shifted from *missio ecclesiae* - Church-centric missionary thinking, to the *missio Dei (missio Trinitatis)* - Trinitarian-centred mission consciousness.

Looking at missio-formation from this perspective raises some missional questions: what does it mean to be a missionary in this contemporary world? How does one define missio-formation in an ever-changing landscape of World Christianity? What are its aims and goals? Who is the target for missio-formation? What difference does the context make to the way we approach missio-formation? Are there examples of emerging paradigms for missio-formation? Or more concretely, which innovative practices exist that may offer new missio-formational paradigms? What is the new ecumenical mission affirmation suggesting? (A new trajectory?) What is the mode of missio-formation that the affirmation is suggesting? What kind of pedagogy should

undergird missio-formation? The aim of such questions is to provoke more questions than answers.

In response to some of these questions, we begin by framing and locating this article within the debate on missio-formation in Africa¹ that evolved from colonial to postmodern times. We will proceed to give a concise example to illustrate the emerging new paradigms of missio-formation in which the educators and those being equipped do not bear the classical title of missionary. Rather they become missional agents of the God of life. This example emerges from our involvement in a programme called the Church Leaders' Training on Health, Gender and Theology that is done in collaboration with the Church Forum on HIV and AIDS in Swaziland².

Revising the Meaning of *Missio Dei* for Postmodern Humanity

The temptation to define a concept within a postmodern frame is always at one's own peril. Postmodernism is repulsive to any rigid and monolithic definitions. A wrong understanding of *missio Dei* inevitably leads to a wrong missional praxis. Therefore, a pure definition of *missio Dei* is elusive because the concept remains contentious. However, we nevertheless argue that in order to make a qualitative missional difference in our contemporary world, such engagement must transcend structures or systems that are limited to facilitating fullness of life especially for those who live on the margins of life. To be missional one must embrace a divine purpose for human identity and vocation and recognise that human systems should serve as life affirming agents. This paper argues that the *missio Dei* is deeply Trinitarian³ and embodies the human struggle to reach out to God who took the initiative to lay the foundation for humanity to reclaim, recover and reconstitute the 'divine breath' in their humanity.

The aphoristic upshot of the emphasis on the *missio Dei* is that 'the mission is God reaching to humanity and all creation', which the theology articulates over and against the church's historically self-centred mission practices. This sheds light on the nature of humanity – to become authentically human is to manifest the divine in us. Hence, mission is always a dialogic and inclusive praxis because all human beings are in the process of becoming 'human'. This is what the phrase "together towards Life" is understood to mean. It is an affirmation of the singularity of life in which all human beings, regardless of socio-political, religious and economic status, are invited to participate. The *missio Dei* exists to facilitate fullness of life for all creation. Therefore divine presence in human beings is an antithesis of life denying realities such as oppression, exploitation, ecological disaster, Ebola, and gender injustice that are often the result of rogue human behaviour.

¹'Africa' and its adverb 'African' in this article refers to Sub-Saharan Africa.

² The Church Forum is an ecumenical entity that coordinates the various churches' responses to HIV and AIDS in Swaziland.

³ In this article, the concept of 'Trinitarian' refers to the Christian affirmation that of the oneness of God as "triune," or three beings in one. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, are three separate, eternal beings, but one in nature and essence.

Nicholas Walterstoff (in de Gruchy 2010:43) stresses that in the *missio-Dei*, “the vision is one of peace, of healing, of justice, and of inclusion.” Therefore, the praxis of a holistic liberation is aimed at the realisation of an authentic and full humanity as created by God. This means that the *missio Dei* is never neutral and neither can its relevance be restricted to debates over theological and “privatized epistemological faith” and its individualistic agenda (Hopkins 1998:73). Furthermore, the definition of *missio Dei* cannot be situated within the domesticating confines of any one particular ecclesial tradition, but within the intrinsic being of God. Steven Bevans argues that “God is a verb” an action word, expressing God as “self-diffused love, freely creating, redeeming, healing, challenging that creation” (Bevans 2010:201-203). The mission of God is demonstrated in the context where life-giving actions are done and the humanity of all is affirmed and valued. This gives the church its identity and value as agents of God’s justice and a participant in God’s mission of recreating a new humanity.

Therefore, *missio Dei* embodies the God of life’s self-giving action in the redemption of humanity and all creation. This constitutes a process in which humanity journeys together towards life in the interest of all creation. This perspective constitutes a hermeneutical departure for envisioning what ought to be the contemporary expression of *missio-formation* in an ever-changing global religious landscape. Since *missio-formation* is meant to prepare and equip the whole people of God for missional response to contextual challenges, it is the agenda of world that shapes the curriculum for their training needs.

The document “Together towards Life” has postulated the key trends that make up the changing landscape of mission and this paper seeks to identify what are the implications for the education of missional personnel. Namsoon Kang has reminded us that one cannot write a kind of ‘universal’ perspective for theological education in world Christianity because of “the questions of identity and subject-hood, authenticity, representation or interconnectedness of power-knowledge” (Kang 2010:31-33). This perspective is also valid for the education of missional leaders. Therefore the implications for missional formation of leaders, if it is the out-working of the *missio Dei*, will engage with and embrace the ‘spirit of inquiry’ for understanding, and will go wherever the spirit leads. This can be a very disruptive path that may lead to the displacement of previous ‘certainties’ about missional engagement in a world that is ever changing.

Missionary Education for Religious Colonization⁴

Many theologians and missiologists have argued that the missionary education that served the modern missionary movement was profoundly shaped by the

⁴ In discussing the manner in which Christian mission thought has mutated through different epochs, Bosch follows Hans Kung who has given a six fold paradigm shift in mission. The transformation from each successive epoch is gradual but each has its own distinctive traits. The six major paradigms according to Kung are: 1) The apocalyptic paradigm of primitive Christianity; 2) The Hellenistic paradigm of the patristic period; 3) The medieval Roman Catholic paradigm; 4) The Protestant (Reformation) paradigm; 5) The modern Enlightenment paradigm; and 6) The postmodern paradigm. In this article we specifically focus only on two paradigms which seem applicable to the context of African Christianity in the Sub-Saharan Continent (See, Bosch 1991:185ff).

Enlightenment worldview (Bosch 1991; Conn 1984; McCool 2000). These scholars have highlighted that missionaries did not function in 'a vacuum' but were the intentional agents of missionary education and formation which was "profoundly influenced by their historical backgrounds, culture, understanding of reality, personalities, social positions, ecclesiastical tradition, personal context, motivation and ideologies" (Lewis and Steyn, 2003: 101). Their missionary work originated in the wake of the Western colonial project that did not radically differentiate between evangelism and colonialism. Harvie Conn (1984:36) argues that "colonialism was often seen by early missionaries as the handmaid of the process of civilising. And it could easily be defined as the grand movement of Europe that promoted the cause of rational behaviour in the face of barbarous superstition." This understanding underlines that the relationship between missionary education and the colonial Enlightenment consciousness not only informed the curriculum, the pedagogical approach and the worldview of individual missionaries involved but also influenced and transformed the very landscape of missionary activity in the non-Western world (Roberson 2012:vii).

The critical tenets of Enlightenment ideology have been succinctly outlined by scholars to include the following: it was the age of reason; there was a profound belief in human progress; a dual percept of between humanity and nonhuman creation was assumed; all problems could be solved by science and reason; the belief in God was substituted by mechanistic view; humans were regarded as autonomous; scientific knowledge was viewed as factual, neutral and value free; and religion was seen as a subjective experience from which humanity should be liberated (Bosch 1991:264-267; Lewis and Steyn 2003:202). These tenets had significant impact on European Missionary education and its accompanying theological imagination that was constructed and essentially "monolithic and assimilating" (Vinayaraj n.d:1). It was mission understanding and engagement from West to the 'rest' with no desire or expectation of reciprocity. The 'rest' had no contribution to make to the process of mission understanding and praxis. It was ideologically and theologically informed by Euro-centric thinking that adopted Matthew 28:18-20, the Great Commission paradigm to 'go, teach, baptise', as an imperative unidirectional framework of mission from the powerful to the powerless. Its practice became the implementation of the "Great Commission" that resulted in costly mis-evangelisation and misrepresentation of Christ. Because it was primarily about saving souls to escape their context for another place, referred to as heaven. It consciously constituted a 'missiological alterity' by denigrating those who were perceived as not yet influenced by the Enlightenment to be 'uncivilized and primitive' and in need of enlightenment. Yahu Vinayaraj (n.d:1) observes that "the modern missionary movement bears the scars of its epistemological inclination with the colonial modernity." Its agenda paralleled the colonial agenda which is revealed in militaristic terminologies used such as "conquering nations for Christ" (Baago 1966: 324). The agenda was to 'evangelize' the 'heathen and barbarian' such as Africans. The mission curricula were framed within this triumphalist conquering and submission of others.

One of the most important modules in the missionary education curricula was Comparative Religion which included all major religious faiths of the world - but not African Indigenous Religions. This was not acknowledged as a genuine religious

system but a concoction of superstitions which were to be eliminated and therefore was unworthy or unqualified for in-depth critical studies in order to understand their context. According to Alison Hodge, who engaged in research work on the education for missionaries in Africa, argued that the modern thought relegated “Africans to the bottom rung on a metamorphic ladder of human development” (Hodge 1971-1972:92, see also Bediako 1995). In this context, the missionary education for work within Africa was envisaged within the paradigm of colonial modernity as an instrument for bringing the light of civilization into the Dark Continent. They were educated in theologies of empowerment to go ‘bring light to people living in darkness’, and “‘lift up’ the ‘weak’ and the ‘vulnerable’ to the modern/civilized/developed civil life” (Vinayaraj n.d:2). This shows the profound impact that Enlightenment ideas had on missionary consciousness and practice (Lewis and Steyn 2003:202; Ashley 1980:28-38; Ashley 1982:49-58) that motivated Bosch to classify the modern missionary movement as “a child of the Enlightenment” (Bosch 1991:274; Lewis and Steyn 2003:102).

Here we look at three of the most significant Enlightenment legacies. The first was the introduction of Euro-anthropocentric worldview in missionary education in which ‘the Europeans’ imposed their ethnocentrism upon other nations and non-human creation. Harvey Sindima argues that “this system of thought manifested itself in various ways, particularly in a cultural imperialism, which was taught in schools and preached in the churches” (Sindima 1990:138). Missionary education through the colonial Enlightenment paradigm therefore perpetuated European rationalised cultural superiority and supremacy over Africans. The second legacy was radical “concentration on the individual as the object of missionary endeavor” (Burns 2002:372). Through this perspective the modern missionary enterprise became infected with the ideology of individualism. In addition, they theology was other-worldly oriented and focused on soul-saving which scholars refer to as a “war for souls in Africa” (Gifford 2002:165-174). Finally, there was confidence in the “regenerative capacity of rational knowledge for the whole of humanity which accompanied—sometimes, but not always, uneasily—the characteristic evangelical emphasis on the redemptive power of faith” (Burns 2002:377). In spite of its Euro-centric agenda, the worldview also provided Africans with plausible structures to reconfigure and systematise African religious faith.

Postmodern Paradigm: The Multiplicity of Missio-formation Languages

The thought systems that informed the colonial missionary enterprise have been completely undermined in the contemporary era, and the mechanical world of the Enlightenment is no longer the world of contemporary missiological consciousness. The emergence of postmodern thinking that dominates education, politics and the media brought the colonial missionary education under a great deal of criticism – not least from Western scholars. This also marked the time of a new missionary education imagination. The notion of postmodernism will not be defined in this paper because any definition is inconsistent with its “...knowledge cannot be systematised into a singular, all-encompassing framework” (Lewis and Steyn 2003:102).

Andrew Lewis and Johann Steyn (2003:102-103) have succinctly summarised Bosch's key characteristics of the postmodern paradigm as follows: first, it rejects the idea that a single, objective and rational account of the world can be reached by any form of knowledge. Second, it advocates for a symbiotic relationship between humans, as well as between humans and nature, and opposes exploitation and oppression. Third, knowledge is understood as partial, local and specific. The local knowledge is understood as a microcosm of universal knowledge. Reality is therefore within worldviews of the local "communities' perceptual frameworks and language." Fourth, the paradigm calls for empowerment, social transformation, political and economic development. Fifth, facts are socially constructed and contextual in nature. Sixth, there is a humble recognition that not all existential challenges are solvable. Seventh, the paradigm advocates for balance between personal conviction and commitment and human interdependence and togetherness. This is the worldview that gives shape to contemporary missionary education. The challenge that confronts missional formation is to identify the methodologies that best facilitate pedagogical models that are emancipatory, liberatory, and oriented toward reconstruction and transformation.

In the postmodern condition, the French Philosopher Jean-François Lyotard (1984; Lyotard and Thebaud 1985) adopted a metaphor of a "language game" from an Austrian Philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein, to refer to different discourses. Lyotard's theoretical approach is relevant in the context of postmodern missio-formation. His metaphor of a "language game" shows the impossibility of consensus in contemporary society. He indicates that there is no possibility of arriving at rational agreements, only potential mechanisms for stabilization in a dynamic process of negotiating for best possible alternatives for being human in a world encroached on by forces of death. He makes three critical observations of the postmodern condition and we analyse them within the context of missio-formation.

First, the rules of a game are "the object of a contract, explicit or not, between the players" (Lyotard 1984:10). When this is applied to missio-formation, the main objective is to promote life in its fullness.

Second, "every utterance should be thought of as a move in a game" (Lyotard 1984:10). Here utterance applies to the activity of doing missio-formation. This means that any missio-formation that is adhering to *missio Dei* as a life-giving activity of God in the world is legitimate in its own right. This is not a pedagogical process that is aimed only at transforming an individual's heart but at confronting the systems that are deeply infused with evil and deal in the business of death in its various dimensions.

Thirdly, "if there are no rules, there is no game, that even an infinitesimal modification of one rule alters the nature of the game" (Lyotard 1984:10). This means that postmodern missio-formation undergirds the *missio Dei* imperative of Jesus; "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10). However, the models which are used in various contexts are open to change and are influenced by other models that may be more viable.

The ongoing discussion highlights that while postmodernism allows for plurality of languages in contemporary missio-formation, it also advocates for firm adherence to a secularist human rights agenda that advocates an affirmation of justice, human and creation rights, human value and dignity. With this mind, in the following section we give a brief example of one of the emerging models of missional education within the context of Swaziland.

Example of an Emerging Paradigm: The Church Leaders' Training in Swaziland

How people are engaging the issues that pertain to threats to life should help reset the agenda of how missional education of leaders is to be done. The following is an attempt to sketch some contours of an emerging paradigm from missional formation in Swaziland through the Church Leaders' Training programme. According to our observation, this paradigm emerged naturally. The focus of the programme is to strengthen the prophetic voice and the role of church leaders in Swaziland as agents of transformation in the context on sexual and reproductive health and rights (hereafter, SRHR) and gender based violence (hereafter, GBV) (Furberg 2013:3). The rationale behind this pedagogical approach is to overcome the entrenched suspicion of missionary activity in Africa and liberate the process of knowledge production and reproduction and the truth-claim by empowering the local people as agents and subjects. The pedagogical approach is embedded in "power-sensitive discourses" such as African theologies, African feminist theologies, post colonialism and postmodernism (Kang 2010: 31) which emphasis "exchange of knowledge and ideas, collaboration and reciprocity" in missio-formation (Furberg 2013:3).

The seminars and workshops have been intentionally and consciously organised to facilitate church leaders' engagement with one another. The church leaders across denominations are enrolled in the programme for one year and are required to attend intensive seminars for three days and four times in a year. The platform has been created by the Church of Sweden in collaboration with the Church Forum on HIV and AIDS in Swaziland and the University of KwaZulu-Natal. It is perceived that through such engagements and collaboration, there is a possibility of enabling church leaders to learn from one another and build ecumenical partnerships and critical solidarity to enable the church in Swaziland respond to its contextual challenges as a unified voice. In this way, this collaboration has also been a way of searching for possible alternative ways of being a church in a context where the church can easily be manipulated by the powers that be, and used as a tool of political repression and economic exploitation (Kaunda 2014).

In an endeavour to promote dialogical seminars, the courses are intentionally formulated within the paradigm of a participatory approach with a vision to promote justice in the seminars, and to enable personal transformation of the participants through critical participation and engagement. We believe that the missio-formation classroom is an arena of activism and transformation. This pedagogical approach has helped church leaders to critically question, challenge and reflect upon their own subjectivity and their Swaziland cultural experiences that have formed them. Thus, the Church Leaders' Training programme in Swaziland is an example of a life-giving missional safe space for churches leaders from diverse backgrounds and

denominations to engage in mutual ecumenical dialogue in order to construct alternative ways of doing *missio Dei* in Swaziland, to promote equality and life for all (Kaunda 2014). What lessons are we learning from the Church Leaders' Training in Swaziland as an emerging paradigm for missio-formation? How can missio-formation become a space for nurturing and nourishing an environment that learns from the other?

First, there is a need for a paradigm shift from teacher to facilitator. This will require acquiring certain competencies in terms of knowledge and skill, to become equipped to engage in critical dialogue and an intentional mutual learning process which overcomes the dichotomy between the missional teacher and the missional student. It is a model that affirms people.

Further, such a space would:

- ✓ Create a community based pedagogical model of engagement that takes context, criticality and conscientization into account.
- ✓ Intentionally and consciously focus on purpose not status.
- ✓ Facilitate radical learning through a process of ecumenical learning that embraces dialogue and collective ownership of problems and takes a team approach.
- ✓ Deliberately focus on simultaneously strengthening the individual and the community to confront their own situations.
- ✓ Create critical solidarity among group members by helping people to love where there are and being a group.
- ✓ Broaden the horizon of the church by including, as part of their network, other organisations involved in life-giving projects, thereby helping the church to connect with resources beyond their congregation.

Many questions may be raised as to how this paradigm relates to the new mission statement - or more concretely, in what ways does this paradigm affirm the critical tenets of the new ecumenical mission affirmation? And what could be some of the implications for missio-formation curricula?

Implications for Missio-formation Curriculum Development

As argued above, we believe that TTL entails new approaches to missio-formation and education. It is a call for a reframing of the nature, purpose, and practice of missio-formation. The implications of this are that the affirmation leads to what could be considered a Spirit-shaped vision of missio-formation. As the aim of statement postulates, the Church leaders' training in Swaziland was a significant space that helped us to discern "the directions for a renewed understanding and practice of mission and evangelism in changing landscapes" (CWME 2012:250-280). During this period that we have been facilitating the Church Leaders' training in Swaziland, we discovered that the dominant role that organized missionary enterprise from the west once played in controlling the lives of people on a grand scale has been seriously weakened by the modern construct of postmodernism and secularism.

Scholars have observed that secularization challenges the life-worlds of individuals and communities by subjecting them to the rationality of politics and economics (Hoedemaker 1998:5). The people's worlds are so fractured that they long for a refreshing Spirit to take the center stage in their communities. We realize that the hermeneutical departure of TTL is the 'Spirit' (the statement is coloured with the notion from the cover on the back page) who permeates every aspect of existence (Keum ed. 2013:1-81). In line with the TTL outcomes missional approach, the intention in this section is not to design a curriculum⁵ but to suggest some points of departure for missio-formation curriculum design. These signposts emerge from reflecting on four fundamental features of TTL and our experience in Swaziland. We suggest four hermeneutical points of departure below.

The first hermeneutical point of departure for designing a missio-formation curriculum is to reclaim a Spirit-uality⁶ centred consciousness and perception of reality. TTL is a pneumatological centred affirmation. The Spirit is perceived as the transforming missio-epistemology, liberating people from that which is life-denying and embedded within them, so that they are emancipated from the socialized and oppressive consciousness and perception of reality to a liberated consciousness and perception of reality. A relevant and difficult question to answer is how can a Spirit-uality thought system be used as a point of departure for designing the missio-formation curricula?

Scholars have demonstrated that spirituality thinking was at the centre of many indigenous people as a way of knowing and comprehending reality (Dei 2002:4). In the context of Swaziland, spiritual realities remain a significant force for making meaning, judging reality and acting. It colours and defines every facet of daily life. The notion of Spirit-uality embraces all cosmic relationships of God, humanity and nonhuman creation. It shapes values, beliefs, and ideas of integrity and dignity, shaping both individual and collective consciousness into a unified existence. The concept of spirituality we use is defined by Majid Rahnema (1992:130) as:

... sensitivity, the art of listening to the world at large and within one, from the hegemony of conditioned 'me' constantly interfering in the process; the ability to relate to others and act, without any pre-defined plan or ulterior motives, and the perennial qualities of love, compassion and goodness which are under constant threat in economized societies.

Elsewhere, Chammah Kaunda argues that spirituality thought systems constitute a process of constructing "contextually informed knowledge for human progress, social transformation, economic emancipation and political development" (Kaunda 2015:16-17). It calls for "harmonious coexistence between people and the environment, a totality of life which gives order, meaning, and pleasure to social, political, economic, aesthetic, and religious norms" (Dei 1994:6). It is grounded in love, justice and dignity.

⁵ "The curriculum is a scientific-accountably designed document that includes selected, ordered and evaluated content as well as didactic considerations that are instrumental to attaining its stated aims in the school's didactic-pedagogic situation" (See Kruger 1989: 1 footnote 2).

⁶ The concept is deliberately hyphenated to emphasize the significance of the Holy Spirit in such a thought system.

Spirit-uality as a hermeneutical point of departure for designing a missio-formation curriculum entails a recovery of ecclesiastical-consciousness rooted in the “radical theology of oneness (singular) of life driven from the common source – perceiving the Spirit of God as an ultimate reality” in all things (Kaunda 2015:15). It is a reclaim, recovery and reconstitution of “the essential unity between self and other, self and the entire cosmos, consciousness and unconsciousness, spirituality and materiality, organic and inorganic, science and religion, sacred and profane – a recovering of integrated” (Kaunda 2015:15) and interdisciplinary approaches to reality. Rather than perceiving reality in dichotomies, the Spirit-uality thought system understands the world as a one whole, the “Breath of Life”. This breath is a healing breath, come to undo injustice and redo justice. This consciousness is critical in equipping missional leaders who can respond appropriately to Martin Conway. Conway (2010:25) names three global challenges: (a) the presence of world religions in every major world city, (b) the need to set new economic goals and expectations and (c) the challenges of climate change (To these we can add, (d) health epidemics (Ebola, HIV and AIDS) and (e) terrorism).

Taking Spirit-uality thought and wisdom as a point of departure naturally leads to Life as a critical category and abiding context for missio-formation hermeneutics. Many theologians around the world have long acknowledged that experiences from the margins are valid and authentic sources of theological knowledge construction. Therefore, the question is not whether marginal experience can be a source of the theology of missio-formation, but how to critically and accurately utilise it in the context of formation (Leonard 2013:44). According to Teresa Okure, Life “is a reality that imposes itself. Emerging and liberative trends in [missio-formation]....require that readers address their life situations as part of [missional imagination]” (Okure 2000:209). Mission-formation is about facilitating the process in which people can struggle to understand the meaning of life in relation to God. This is a pedagogical approach used in Swaziland in which the margins, through dialogical engagement, become empowered to formulate their own mission strategy.

Roderick Hewitt (2014:5) observes that “the TTL document argues that missional position of the church in this contemporary age of secularism is at the margins because transformation never genuinely happens at the centre but at the margins where the reality of people seeking ‘fullness of life’ that becomes a “new creative core”. In other words, the TTL is arguing for a curriculum with a more academic activism-oriented missio-formation which must reflect the resistance emerging from marginal communities. It demands that the church refuse to remain silent in a context of any form of oppression by acting as a counter-consciousness and counter-hegemony in society. Missio-formation based on pedagogy of Life entails reclaiming, restoring and reconstituting the cultural identities of margins and enables them to overcome a sense of internalized oppression through mutual humanization. This approach seeks to mutually engage in ways of creating knowledge that can enable those who live on the margins to live with love and compassion, forgiveness, and inspiration by resisting and confronting death-dealing circumstances in their community.

Building on the above, a third point of departure is affirming that “the church ‘gestated within the deeds of everyday’” (Katongole 2002:230). According to

Emmanuel Katongole, this task “is essentially a call for recovering the link between revelation and history”, recognition “that it is the community of the church in her concrete history and practices that is the link” (Katongole 2002:230). The argument is based on Jean-Marc Ela’s interpretation of revelation not as a doctrine but a promise “which inevitably assumes a historical and social form.” Founded on an African reading of Exodus accounts, Ela argues that it was God’s revelation that stirred up a “community in exodus, whose mission is not only to live in expectation of the fulfilment of the promise, but also to promote the historical transformation of the world and life” (Ela 1986:35; Katongole 200:230).

The church therefore is an embodiment of an alternative narrative of a world made possible through God’s mission in Jesus Christ. The church is meant to be God’s demonstration of what it means to live alternatively in which the abundant life that God made possible becomes a reality. Here we are not talking about a denominationally enslaved church but the church as was envisioned by Jesus Christ - the church as it should and will be. Ultimately, missio-formation is a dynamic process of recovering the link between revelation and history. Arguably, the ecumenical affirmation, “*Together Toward Life*” is a search for an alternative history which is simultaneously a “search for a different experience of the church, one through which Christians can begin to experience a new world ‘not in the sense of a world-beyond, but in the sense of a different world right here, a world being gestated in the deeds of everyday’” (Katongole 2002:230). This is a “church on the move” with the ability to communicate the gospel beyond the material-spiritual distinctions. In this way, the gospel will become the good news within particular social historical contexts.

The final point of departure is the affirmation of the Good News for all in a plurality of languages. Contemporary missio-formation is being challenged to create an environment that embraces diversity and plurality. Empowering people to learn to live in plural societies and co-exist with others in an atmosphere that values reciprocity built on mutual respect, challenge and tolerance is indispensable. Training leaders in Swaziland raised various question with regard to the place of the Bible in missio-formation in the context of religious pluralism. For instance, how is the Bible to be used? How is the Bible to be reread in the current world disorder? Arguably missio-formation must include a critical pedagogical method for reading the Bible which requires asking some fresh and uncomfortable questions that does not domesticate the missional students. These radical and uncomfortable questions must be asked even when they appear to be hostile to our tradition.

Contemporary society has taught us that “rational truth-claims do not present themselves in terms of one massive system of human reason but rather plural ‘plausibility structures’ corresponding to various fields of human thought and activity, most of which claim to be only useful and effective, not universally valid” (Hoedemaker 1998:66). This means that truth cannot simply be rooted in claims of ecclesiastical institutions but require contestation as they are subjected to the Spirit of truth who validates their viability. Truth rests not in the tradition that the missional facilitator represents – the missionary is no longer the bearer of truth but an instrument for dialogue over contested truth. There was period in which Christianity expressed power over other religions (comparative religion – Christianity was on

pedestal), and evangelism was by force, but can Christianity in its dethroned status function as a religion among other religions? We believe that Christianity does not need status in order to proclaim its truth. It has to follow the Christocentric model of leadership - to serve and not to be served - by grounding evangelism in the values of "humility and respect for all and flourishing in the context of dialogue" (Keum ed. 2013:2). This is a kind of missio-formation which seeks to equip personnel to facilitate new centres of spirituality in an effort to empower people to experience life-giving faith and build new forms of transcendental relationships.

In order to reframe a life-giving missio-formation curriculum, we raise the fundamental principles that have been identified in a joint statement (WCC, PCID and WEA n.d) that advocates an alternative vision of how authentic mission is carried out in an age of secularism. This can be summarised in the following manner in terms of key components in developing missional modules:

- ✓ Reject all forms of violence and discrimination, based on race, gender, ideological orientation, including nonhuman creation.
- ✓ Affirm freedom of religion and practice and profess faith without any fear of reprisal and or intimidation, and with mutual respect and solidarity which promotes justice, peace and the common good of all.
- ✓ Respect all people and human cultures, while also discerning the elements in our own culture, such as patriarchy, racism, casteism, etc., that need to be challenged by the gospel.
- ✓ Renounce false witness and listen in order to understand in mutual respect.
- ✓ Ensure freedom for ongoing discernment by persons and communities as part of decision-making.
- ✓ Build relationships with believers of other faiths and no faith, to facilitate deeper mutual understanding, reconciliation and cooperation for the common good.

All of this leads us to ask, are the approaches of missio-formation adequate enough to enable the church to fulfil its unique capacity to address contemporary challenges? Is missio-formation grounded in contemporary realities?

Conclusion

The purpose of this exercise was not to answer all the questions raised but to steer the discussion in directions that were not envisaged in missional education studies. We conclude therefore that missio-formation must, first, be intentionally interdisciplinary and ecumenical and must take seriously the theological education that shapes its development and examine whether the local congregation remains as the primary agent of God's mission in the world. Second, focus on empowering Christians to discern the power of money in corrupting the identity, vocation and witness of missional leaders that are ill-equipped to deal with the addictive nature of mammon. Third, more emphasis should be given to building strong character formation in dealing with money. It must be a viable tool in equipping leaders with strong moral-ethical stamina for advancing life-giving theological models of business. Fourth, it must be reframed within a contextual model of theological education. For

instance, inculturation of the gospel within the mosaic of the African context has implications for the formation of missional leaders.

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