



God's transformational engagement with His chosen people for the sake of His global Mission

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West University

Promotor: Prof HG Stoker

Graduation: October 2025

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my work and has not been submitted in any form for another degree or diploma at any university or other institution of tertiary education. Information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text, and a list of references is provided.

Where others have made contributions, these have also been acknowledged.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ignatius', is centered on a light gray, textured rectangular background. A horizontal line is drawn below the signature area.

Ignatius Wilhelm (Naas) Ferreira
Date: November 2024

RESUBMISSION (April 2025)

In response to the examiners' valuable comments and suggestions, I have structured this resubmission to include a complementary section following each chapter and submitted article. These sections directly address the feedback received from the examiners, offering clear and focused responses to the issues raised. The headings of each response section have been thoughtfully crafted to reflect the substance of the examiners' comments, ensuring that each article is situated within a constructive dialogue that upholds the academic integrity of the overall study.

Ignatius Wilhelm (Naas) Ferreira

Date: April 2025

SUMMARY STATEMENT FOR RESUBMISSION

Reimagining Missiology in a Changing World

This PhD, presented in article format, provides a unique and original contribution to missiology by reinterpreting the decline of Western Christianity as a theologically significant event within God's global mission. Rather than viewing this decline through sociological or historical perspectives, the study frames it as a divinely orchestrated reorientation—a missional disruption that invites theological renewal beyond Christendom.

The central innovation lies in its decolonial and missiological rereading of the Barabbas narrative as a typological key for understanding recurring theological distortions in Christian history. By examining movements such as Christian Zionism, Apartheid Theology, and Black Theology through this lens, the research identifies a consistent tendency within Christendom to replace the crucified Christ with politically expedient saviours. This symbolic insight integrates with a biblical-theological vision of cross-cultural diffusion, drawing from Pauline texts such as Acts 15, Galatians, and Ephesians to propose a renewed intercultural hermeneutic for the Church's mission.

While this study draws on decolonial critique to interrogate the theological and political entanglements of Western Christianity, it is grounded in a theological-realist stance that affirms God's active presence in history. Rather than adopting a purely constructivist or sociological paradigm, this study approaches the decline of Western Christianity as a theologically meaningful event within the broader scope of the *missio Dei*. It contends that God's redemptive agency includes the disruption and pruning of Christendom itself, not as a triumphalist narrative, but as an invitation to theological repentance and renewal. In this way, the study engages critically with decolonial insights while also reclaiming a theological perspective that interprets historical shifts through the lens of divine mission, rather than solely through the categories of social construction or power analysis.

While the term 'decolonial' is used in this study, it is employed with theological specificity. The aim is not to approach the biblical text itself with suspicion or to deconstruct its authority, as is common in some forms of liberation theology or Marxist-influenced decolonial readings (e.g., Mosala or Boesak). Instead, this study affirms the authority of Scripture and its central role in shaping a missional imagination that resists all forms of imperial entanglement. The term "decolonial" is thus used to describe a theological and missiological disentangling of the gospel from Christendom's legacy of cultural domination without abandoning a cruciform and redemptive

reading of the biblical witness. In this sense, the study offers a confessional and missiological reappropriation of decolonial impulses—one that is critical of empire yet rooted in the *missio Dei*.

The articles also address the epistemological crisis facing Western Christianity, arguing that the loss of theological clarity and missional identity arises from abandoning the gospel's core of cruciformity. By tracing this crisis throughout history—from the first century to the Reformation to the present—the study demonstrates a unique ability to integrate historical theology with contemporary global realities, including the rise of BRICS and the theological significance of the Global South.

The final article, submitted in response to examiner feedback, explicitly addresses the study's contextual and geographical relevance within an African setting. It incorporates key African theological voices and proposes a decolonial framework for post-Christendom missiological education. This South-South perspective redefines the centre of theological reflection from the margins.

These six articles constitute a coherent and original contribution to the development of a cruciform, post-Christendom missiology that aims for faithful participation in God's transformative engagement with His people for His global mission.

DEDICATION

This study represents an academic endeavour culminating in a deeply personal spiritual journey that began in my youth with the call to Christian ministry. Reflecting on over four decades of ministerial service, I feel humbled and grateful to dedicate this work, which marks the concluding chapters of this journey, to the following.

- The Triune God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - whose infinite mercy and grace have included and utilised me in His Divine plan. Being part of the *'missio Dei'* has been an immense privilege. I have begun comprehending this term's profound magnitude and intricate wonder through recent academic study and reflection. All glory and honour are due to Him.
- The Almighty God, who nurtured me in a Christian home through the love and guidance of devout parents. Their faith prepared me for my ministerial calling. Although my father was called to be with the Lord early in my ministry, his memory and legacy remain in my heart. My mother's ongoing prayers and unwavering support have consistently reminded me of God's abundant grace.
- To my soulmate, my wife, whom God provided as a perfect companion for His purpose in my life. Her countless sacrifices, steadfast love, and unwavering support over 40 years of marriage are a testament to God's goodness and provision. This milestone would not have been possible without her.
- Our children, divine gifts, who have each uniquely blessed me. Their love, memories, and encouragement throughout this journey have been sources of strength and joy - treasures I will cherish eternally. And now our short journey with our grandchildren has started. How blessed are we.
- The colleagues and friends placed along my path by God, from school and university to ministry and academia, both in South Africa and the USA. These relationships have been pillars of support and inspiration, reflecting God's care and provision over the years. A very special acknowledgement to my promoter, colleague and friend Henk Stoker for his unwavering support and guidance throughout many years of shared ministry. I am humbled by the fact that he can still share in this endeavour.
- The three congregations I had the privilege to shepherd, each holding a special place in my heart. Their faith and partnership in ministry enriched my understanding of God's work through His Church.
- The co-pastors with whom I shared the ministry journey, labouring together for the Kingdom: these shared experiences were extraordinary blessings.

For nearly 40 years, my ministry has centred on Christian mission. Early on, I discerned not answering a calling to distant mission fields but to the local church's mission field. Wrestling with the challenges and questions of Western Christianity, I sought to understand God's revelations. This study is the fruit of that journey - a message not merely from my heart but one I believe originates from God Himself.

I pray that this work will honour God and serve His purposes in the future.

Soli Deo Gloria.

IW (Naas) Ferreira

Potchefstroom: November 2024

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

AI-Assisted Tools

During the development and refinement of this PhD thesis, I utilised AI-assisted tools such as ChatGPT (<https://chatgpt.com/>), AudioPen (<https://audiopen.ai/>), and Grammarly (<https://www.grammarly.com/>). These tools facilitated drafting, transcription, language clarity and editing, and structural editing. My critical judgment, academic objectives, and intellectual authorship consistently guided their use. All conceptual content, argumentation, and scholarly interpretation are solely my own.

PREFACE

Justification for Submitting a PhD Study through Academic Articles

The decision to submit this PhD study as a series of academic articles is appropriate and consistent with the University's policy on doctoral research. This method reflects a growing trend in academia, where research is disseminated through peer-reviewed publications that significantly contribute to scholarly discourse. The following points highlight the suitability of this format:

1. Compliance with the University Policy:

The University's policy permits doctoral studies to be presented through a compilation of academic articles if they demonstrate a coherent and focused research trajectory. This study meets these requirements by ensuring academic rigour, originality, and thematic continuity.

2. Enhancing Scholarly Impact:

Publishing the study in accredited academic journals ensures the research reaches a broad audience, enhancing its scholarly impact. By disseminating the findings in reputable, peer-reviewed journals, this study contributes to the global body of knowledge in Missiology and related fields, aligning with the University's mission to promote impactful research.

3. Ensuring Academic Rigour:

Preparing articles for publication involves a rigorous peer review process, which adds an extra layer of quality assurance. The articles in this study have been or are being submitted to accredited journals, ensuring that they meet high scholarly standards. This process validates the research and demonstrates the candidate's ability to engage in critical analysis, methodological precision, and academic writing.

4. Focusing on a Specific Research Theme:

The study is organised around a well-defined research focus: *'God's Transformational Engagement with His Chosen People for the Sake of His Global Mission.'* The articles collectively address an epistemological crisis within Western Christianity from a missiological perspective, forming a cohesive and comprehensive exploration of this vital subject.

5. Increasing Accessibility and Relevance:

Presenting the study through academic articles makes the research accessible to a diverse audience of academics, practitioners, and policymakers. Each article addresses specific aspects of the overarching theme, ensuring the findings are relevant and applicable to contemporary theology and mission studies discussions.

6. Contributing to Academic and Professional Development:

The publication-focused format of this PhD study reflects the author's continued commitment to academic and professional development. It builds on over a decade of scholarly engagement, characterised by significant contributions to academic journals and a dedicated research agenda within Missiology.

In conclusion, submitting this PhD study through a series of academic articles is an academically sound and policy-compliant choice. It demonstrates the candidate's ability to produce high-quality, peer-reviewed research while ensuring the findings are disseminated to maximise their impact and relevance to academia and the Church. This approach represents an innovative and effective means of advancing scholarship while fulfilling the requirements of a doctoral degree.

IW (Naas) Ferreira

Potchefstroom: November 2024

*(For more information also see **Addendum A** – Information on Articles submitted to Academic Journals. **Addendum B** – NWU and Faculty rules on Article format and Personal Motivation letter. **Addendum C** – Additional information required.)*

ABSTRACT

A significant crisis has emerged in the current discourse on challenges facing Western culture. This crisis, often referred to as *'the mother of all crises'* and Western culture's *'civilisational moment,'* is also characterised by a shift from Western Christendom to Global Christianity. This marks the *'dechristianisation of the West and the Christianization of the non-Western world'*. This study addresses the incomplete understanding within Western theological circles regarding this historical transformation.

Christianity has profoundly influenced Western culture by providing a moral framework and shaping education. However, through secularisation and the Enlightenment, Christianity became compromised as it adapted to cultural influences. This led to a gradual decline into what is now referred to as Christendom. The rejection of faith by intellectual elites further contributed to this crisis. The culmination of this growing confusion was evident after the World Wars, which eroded the Christian identity of Western civilisation. Missiological research during this period exposed inadequacies within Western theology that contributed to the current crisis in Western culture.

This study argues that the crisis is not only due to external circumstances but also represents a providential work of God rescuing Christianity from its compromised state. A biblical perspective on religious delusion throughout history may reveal the valid reason for Christendom's dissolution.

Western Christians must awaken from their complacency and engage with the evolving global Christian landscape. Only then can they actively contribute to furthering God's mission.

In conclusion, this study seeks to illuminate the crisis in Western Christianity and urges theological scholars to reassess their perspectives. It emphasises understanding historical context and divine providence and encourages active participation in God's mission for a fresh beginning aligned with the foundation of the Church.

Key terms:

Christendom, 'End' of Christendom, 'Death' of Christendom, Post Christendom, Cross-cultural diffusion of Christianity, Transformation, missio Dei, Decolonial missiology.

ABSTRAK

In die huidige diskoers oor uitdagings wat die Westerse kultuur in die gesig staar, het 'n beduidende krisis ontstaan. Hierdie krisis, dikwels beskryf as '*die moeder van alle krisisse*' en die Westerse kultuur se '*beskawings-oomblik*', word gekenmerk deur 'n verskuiwing van Westerse Christendom na Globale Christenskap. Dit dui op die '*ontkerstening van die Weste en die kerstening van die nie-Westerse wêreld*'. Hierdie studie poog om hierdie onvolledige begrip binne Westerse teologiese kringe rakende hierdie historiese transformasie te belig.

Christenskap het 'n diepgaande invloed op Westerse kultuur gehad, deur 'n morele raamwerk te bied en opvoeding te vorm. Deur sekularisasie en die Verligting het Christenskap egter gekompromitteer geraak namate dit by kulturele invloede aangepas het. Dit het tot 'n geleidelike agteruitgang gelei tot dit wat nou as Christendom bekend staan. Die verwerping van geloof deur die intellektuele elite het tot hierdie krisis bygedra. Die hoogtepunt van hierdie groeiende verwarring was sigbaar na die Wêreldoorloë, wat die Christelike identiteit van die Westerse beskawing ondermyn het. Missiologiese navorsing gedurende hierdie tydperk het die gebreke in die Westerse teologie blootgelê wat bygedra het tot die huidige krisis in die Westerse kultuur.

Hierdie studie argumenteer dat die krisis nie net aan eksterne omstandighede toegeskryf kan word nie, maar ook as die voorsienige werk van God gesien moet word om hierdeur Christenskap uit sy gekompromitteerde toestand te red. 'n Bybelse perspektief op die godsdienstige dwaling deur die geskiedenis mag dalk die ware rede vir die Christendom se ontbinding openbaar. Dit is belangrik vir Westerse Christene om uit hul selftevredenheid wakker te skrik en betrokke te raak by, en begrip te hê vir die nuwe globale Christelike landskap. Slegs dan kan hulle aktief tot die bevordering van God se sending in hierdie tyd bydra.

Ten slotte poog hierdie studie om lig te werp op die krisis in die Westerse Christenskap en om daarop aan te dring dat teologiese geleerdes hul perspektiewe moet heroorweeg. Dit beklemtoon 'n begrip van die historiese konteks en goddelike voorsienigheid en moedig die aktiewe deelname aan God se sending aan vir 'n vars begin wat met die fondament van die Kerk bely is.

Sleuteltermes:

Christendom, 'Einde' van Christendom, 'Dood' van Christendom, Post Christendom, Kruiskulturele diffusie van Christenskap, Transformasie, missio Dei.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

NWU	North-West University
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa
IBR	International Bulletin of Mission Research

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1. Proposed Title and Key Terms

God's transformational engagement with His chosen people for the sake of His global mission.

Key terms: Christendom, 'End' of Christendom, 'Death' of Christendom, Cross-cultural diffusion of Christianity, Transformation, missio Dei.

2. Abstract

A significant crisis has emerged in the current discourse on challenges facing Western culture. This crisis, often referred to as 'the mother of all crises' and Western culture's 'civilisational moment,' is also characterised by a shift from Western Christendom to Global Christianity. This marks the 'dechristianisation of the West and the Christianization of the non-Western world'. This study addresses the incomplete understanding within Western theological circles regarding this historical transformation.

Christianity has profoundly influenced Western culture, provided a moral framework, and shaped education. However, through secularisation and the Enlightenment, Christianity became compromised as it adapted to cultural influences. This led to the gradual decline into what is now referred to as *Christendom*. The rejection of faith by intellectual elites further contributed to this crisis. The culmination of this growing confusion was evident after the World Wars, which eroded the Christian identity of Western civilisation. Missiological research during this period exposed inadequacies within Western theology that contributed to the current crisis in Western culture.

This study argues that the crisis is not solely due to external circumstances but also God's providential work rescuing Christianity from its compromised state. A biblical perspective on religious delusion throughout history may reveal the valid reason for Christendom's dissolution.

Western Christians must wake up from their complacency and engage with and understand the new global Christian landscape. Only then can they actively contribute to advancing God's mission in this time.

In conclusion, this study seeks to illuminate the crisis in Western Christianity and urges theological scholars to reassess their perspectives. It emphasises the understanding of historical context and

divine providence and encourages active participation in God's mission for a fresh beginning aligned with the foundation of the Church.

3. Background and Motivation for the Study

The contemporary discourse on Western culture's challenges reveals a profound crisis, often described as 'the mother of all crises' (Kirk, 1999:157) and Western culture's 'civilisational moment' (Guinness, 2022). This transformative period in global religious history (Jenkins, 2002:1), marked by the shift from Western Christendom to Global Christianity, presents a crucial moment for urgent reflection (Tiéno, 2006:37). Christianity, once central to the shaping of Western civilisation, is now grappling with an existential crisis characterised by the dechristianisation of the West and the Christianization of the non-Western world (Tiéno, 2006:37).

This study addresses the limited understanding within Western theological circles regarding this historical transformation (Poon, 2011:177). Christianity's influence on Western culture, which provided a moral framework and shaped Western education, underwent a compromised adaptation during secularisation and the Enlightenment, leading to the gradual demise of Christendom (Hall, 1999:69). The study traces the historical unfolding of this crisis, emphasising the declining Christendom, also referred to as the rejection of faith by intellectual elites (Muggeridge, 1980:17; Guinness, 2022), and the profound impact of the World Wars on Western Christian identity, which led to an epistemological crisis in the West (Clayton, 1999:78).

The central contention is that the crisis is not merely external circumstances victimising Christendom but rather a providential work of God rescuing Christianity from its compromised state (Walls, 1996:22). A Biblical perspective on religious delusion throughout history underscores the need for Western Christians to awaken to the unfolding global Christian landscape (Hall, 1997: XX). This study encourages active engagement with God's *missio Dei* objectives, urging a relinquishment of delusional sentiments and attachments to the past.

This study seeks explicitly to focus on South Africa, a nation whose history is enveloped in the contradictory names of 'Cape of Storms' and 'Cape of Good Hope.' This historical complexity reflects the political transformation that the nation has undergone over the past 30 years, resulting in the 'Rainbow Nation' or the 'New South Africa.' The study addresses the challenges faced by Western Christianity in South Africa, where ministerial service within the framework of Western theology is shaped by strained social and historical political sensitivities.

Western culture laid the foundation for Christianity in South Africa, shaping its theological perspectives and practices. However, the unfolding context after apartheid and the all-consuming processes of globalisation have challenged the status quo, intensified missional urgency, while perpetuated missional indifference within the church and the academy. What remains prevalent within a broader Western Christianity is also very relevant in South Africa. The researcher's desperation to address the ongoing decline of Western Christianity, particularly in South Africa, and the lack of missional vigour within the Western Church, led to a profound revelation rooted in the Bible. This revelation, seen as a divine response to desperate questions, asserts that God is already effecting change within Western Christianity.

This study's motivation arises from a desire to share an urgent, compelling, and comforting message with those perplexed by the current state of Western Christianity. The purpose is to clarify God's ongoing work in the churches of South Africa amidst changing social, political, and cultural landscapes. The research aims to contribute to the discourse on missional transformation by exploring alternative theological frameworks and challenging Western-centric perspectives. The researcher's unique blend of 26 years as a full-time pastor, academic pursuits, and a decade at a Reformed Seminary affiliated with a Faculty of Theology provides distinctive insights into South African churches' challenges and opportunities in their missional endeavours. Ultimately, this study seeks to guide the Western Church toward a more committed and impactful missional engagement relevant to South Africa and the broader Western Christian context.

4. Preliminary Literature Review

4.1 Introduction

By default, every Western Christian theologian and church leader is not merely a passive observer but an active 'participant' (knowingly or unknowingly) in the profound transformative changes intricately interwoven into the ongoing civilisational crisis affecting Western culture. Therefore, they must acknowledge and understand this crisis and how it influences theological engagement with Western culture. For those embarking on research to comprehend the essence of the epistemological shifts within Western Christianity, a crucial preliminary step involves delving into the understanding and defining the term 'Christendom.' Why is Western Christianity now labelled as Christendom? Understanding this new term will unlock Christianity's challenges within a Western context (Ott & Netland, 2006:15). Numerous studies about the transformation occurring in our time have been conducted. The research focuses on demographic changes, statistical data, and phenomenological responses to derive a humanistic answer to the extent of these changes. Only through a missiological research perspective can the reasons for these changes

be uncovered (Conn, 1984:210; Walls, 2002:222). For this reason, the following literature will play an essential role in what is implied by God's transformational engagement with his chosen people for the sake of his global mission.

- Bosch, D.J. 1991. *Transforming mission: paradigm shifts in theology of mission*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

This standard and groundbreaking work engages deeply with the paradigm shifts facing Western theology over the past few decades. '*The most comprehensive and thorough study of the Christian mission done in this generation, if not this century*' (Alan Neely). It introduces the changing and challenging context that theology and missiology are confronted with in Western Christianity. It identifies the relevant issues within Western Christianity from a missiological perspective, and it alludes to the new context toward which everything moves, but as expected, it cannot yet explain it clearly.

Western culture must be engaged missiologically, but only after clearly understanding and addressing the challenges related to the Christendom paradigm. The following research literature contributes to and uncovers the intricate and transformative changes.

- Jenkins, P. 2002. *The next Christendom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

This book is essential for understanding the transformation and recession of Christianity in the West and for truly grasping what is happening with Christianity globally. With insight into the past, it intentionally maps the envisioned future, effectively challenging the conventional status quo.

- Kreider, A. 2001. *The origins of Christendom in the West*. Edinburgh: Clark.
- Herrin, J. 1989. *The formation of Christendom*. London: Fontana Press.

These resources examine the formation of the 'cultural' Western Christianity as it has developed. Understanding Christendom, its paralysing influence, and the intricate changes it underwent is essential, as it is deciphering their significance. This study will explain the results of a broader perspective on Western 'cultural' Christianity and its missiological deficiencies.

- Buhlman, W. 1974. *The coming of the third church*. Slough: St Paul Publications.

This essential and groundbreaking resource anticipates transformative changes as early as 1974. Although its explanation is understandably not extensive, this study predicted what we are currently experiencing. It commences by creating a rationale and a vision for a globalized Christianity.

- Murray, S. 2004a. *Church after Christendom*. Colorado Springs: Paternoster.
- Murray, S. 2004b. *Post-Christendom*. Colorado Springs: Paternoster.
- Mays, P. 1999. After Christendom, What? Renewal and discovery of church and mission in the West. *Missiology: An International Review*, 27(2):245-258.

These resources clarify the intricate developments that shaped Western Christianity into Christendom. They introduce and explain the 'ingrown' focus, which lacks a missional perspective. They bridge the literary gap and connect the dots regarding what occurred. They contain deep reflections from an emic perspective.

- Muggeridge, M. 1980. *The end of Christendom*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

This resource does not merely focus on the decline of Christianity in the West phenomenologically; it also addresses a definite 'end' that eventually will be realised. There is a deeper reason for what is happening. Christendom must not be saved and will not survive. Therefore, the need to highlight resources that proclaim and even advocate the 'death' of Christendom is prioritised. While there seem to be ample resources focusing on the end of Christendom, not many discuss its death. This resource returns the research to the Bible and questions God's providential purposes in allowing these events to occur. Ultimately, this leads to an entirely new insight into the crisis of Western Christianity.

- Ott, G.N. & Harold, A. 2006. *Globalizing theology: belief and practice in an era of world Christianity*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

The transformative and seismic shift from Western Christendom to Global Christianity must be understood as a God-initiated process following the contours of Western cultural history. This resource highlights the necessity for Christian theology to extend beyond the traditional Western enclave. This study specifically focuses on the context of Western Christianity.

4.2 The Historical Influence of Christianity on Western Culture

From its early days, Christianity has significantly impacted Western society by influencing moral values, shaping education systems, and playing a prominent role in politics and culture. However, with the rise of secularisation and the Enlightenment, Christianity underwent changes that compromised its beliefs. This transformation is observable, yet it is challenging to articulate effectively.

As Western civilization increasingly interacted with diverse cultures and religions, missiological research emerged to examine how Western theology approached and engaged with these varied

cultural landscapes. In its engagement with other 'cultures', missiological research uncovered the need for 'contextualisation' within theological research. The following resources illuminate the historical development of Western theology's interactions with 'foreign' cultures. Over time, it became evident that Western theology exhibited a bias toward these cultures and subtly compromised its values to align with prevailing Western norms.

- Kurth, J. 2003/2004. Western Civilisation: our tradition. *The Intercollegiate Review*, 5-13.
- Mullin, R.B. 2008. *A short world history of Christianity*. Revised ed. Westminster: John Knox Press.
- Walls, A.F. 1996. *The missionary movement in Christian history: studies in the transmission of faith*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
- Shenk, W.R. 1991. Missionary encounter with culture. *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 15: 104-109.
- Wells, D.F. 1993. *No place for truth: or Whatever happened to evangelical theology?* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

The contributions from several historical mission conferences and the individual input of various missiologists have conclusively served as a new waypoint for diagnosing and confronting the crisis in Western theology. Missiology's historical 'absence' as a discipline within Western theology has effectively impoverished the field in genuinely understanding its theological dilemma. It is high time for missiology to elevate the standard of its theological contributions to address the crisis that has already reached a terminal phase.

- Newbigin, L. 1988. The significance of Tambaram: fifty years later. *Missionalia*, 16(2):79–85.
- Hoedemaker, L.A. 1980. The legacy of Hendrik Kraemer. *Occasional Bulletin*, April: 60–64.
- Nicolaysen, J.B. 2012. Beyond Christendom: Lesslie Newbigin as a post-Christendom theologian. *Exchange*, 41:364–380. DOI: 10.1163/1572543X-12341239
- Guder, D. 1998. *Missional church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Guder, D. 2000. *The continuing conversion of the church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Johnson, W.S. 2001. Rethinking theology: a postmodern, post-Holocaust, post-Christendom endeavour. *Interpretation*, January: 5–18.
- Walls, A.F. 2000. The mission of the church today in the light of global history. *Word and World*, XX:17–21.
- Sanneh, L. 2003. *Whose religion is Christianity? The gospel beyond the West*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans

- Hiebert, P.G. 1994. *Anthropological reflections on missiological issues*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.
- Hiebert, P.G. 1985. *Anthropological insights for missionaries*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

4.3 Missiological Responses and the Epistemological Crisis

There is no doubt that the emergence of missiological research in the past few decades has influenced the development of new theological narratives. It must be acknowledged that, due to historical reasons, it did not have sufficient influence within the broader Western theological fraternity. Identifying the *missio Dei* as the Biblical base of mission and the unmasking of the absence of missional ecclesiology in Western Enlightenment theology (Walls, 2002: 223) are two of the most important developments that should inform Western theology of its inherent deficiencies. The boiling point of the crisis in Western culture and theology has now been reached at the 'epistemological' Rubicon it faces.

- Kirk, A.J.V. & Kevin, J. 1999. *To stake a claim: mission and the western crisis of knowledge*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
- Hoedemaker, B. 1999a. The ends of the earth and the end of time: bringing together missiology and epistemology. In: Kirk, A.J.V., ed. *To stake a claim: mission and the western crisis of knowledge*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books. 205-206.
- Hoedemaker, B. 1999b. Toward an epistemologically responsible missiology. In: Kirk, A.J.V., ed. *To stake a claim: mission and the western crisis of knowledge*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books. 217-233.
- Kirk, A.J. 2004. The confusion of epistemology in the West and Christian mission. *Tyndale Bulletin*, 55(1):131-156.
- Kirk, A.J. 2011. *Christian mission as dialogue: engaging the current epistemological predicament of the West*. Nijmegen: Nijmegen Institute for Mission Studies.

4.4 The Delusion of Christendom and Radical Missiological Diagnosis

Christendom has become 'inadequate' in the Western theological context (Laing, 2009:11). It claims to serve God while merely using His Name to serve itself. Western Christianity, which has become Christendom, is now confronted with a mission field at its doorstep but lacks a missional ecclesiology or voice to engage with this new reality. This is why Christendom cannot persist. Exploring a missiological diagnosis that calls for the 'end' and 'death' of Christendom is essential. This study will delve deeply into Biblical history to examine the delusional tendency of the Jewish

people (Jeremiah 7:4) in Old Testament times and find its relevance within our Christendom context today. The following resources have opened a new perspective on what God is doing.

- Johnson, W.S. 2001. Rethinking theology: a postmodern, post-Holocaust, post-Christendom endeavor. *Interpretation*, 5-18.
- Niemandt, C.J. 2012. Trends in missional ecclesiology. *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies*, 68(1):1–9.
- Laing, M. 2009. Recovering missional ecclesiology in theological education. *International review of mission*, 98 (1):11–24.

4.5 Providential Transformation and God's Mission

This study can immensely benefit from Andrew Walls's work, which opened a new perspective on God's providential and transformative role in human history. Engaging with his writings has provided fresh insight into the *missio Dei* as God's activity within human history. God's work will continue to be completed—not because of what the church is doing, but despite what the church is doing and even not doing. God will finish the job.

- Walls, A.F. 2000. The mission of the church today in the light of global history. *Word and World*, 10(1):17–21.
- Walls, A.F. 2008. Afterword: Christian mission in a five-hundred-year context. In: Walls, A.F.R. & Ross, C. eds. *Mission in the twenty-first century: exploring the five marks of global mission*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books. 193-204.
- Walls, A.F. 2005. *The cross-cultural process in Christian history*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

4.6 Embracing God's Providence and Participatory Responsibility

It is crucial to understand the transformative time we are currently facing as a gift from God (Hall, 1997: 42). He is moving, and we as His Church need to move with Him. We must focus on what He is doing and become a part of it. It is also important to emphasise the necessity of relinquishing attachments to the past. The following resources indicate the way forward. God's people have a participatory responsibility (Hall, 1997: xx) to understand what is happening clearly and to commit themselves anew to God's future purposes.

- Sills, D.M. 2015. *Changing world, unchanging mission: responding to global challenges*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books.
- Stott, J. *Christian mission in the modern world*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books.
- Escobar, S. *The new global mission*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic.

- Keller, T. 2020. *How to reach the West again*. New York: Redeemer City to City.
- Walls, A.F. 2011. World Christianity, theological education and scholarship. *Transformation*, 28(4):235–240.

4.7 Conclusion

This study urgently highlights the existential crisis that Western Christianity currently faces and emphasizes its significance in the evolving landscape of Global Christianity. By sounding a missiological clarion call and uncovering and interpreting the missiological research mostly overlooked within the broader Western theological community (Laing, 2009:11-14), we must discern the urgency of Christendom's demise as it reaches its Rubicon. What has happened must be understood. A clear Biblical perspective on what God is doing by allowing this to happen is of utmost importance. However, it is also crucial to recognize that the decline of Christendom is not solely due to demographic and historical circumstances, but it is rather God's missiological contingency plan for His chosen people (Hall, 1997:41). This calls for a re-evaluation of our role and participation in shaping the future of Christianity, both globally and domestically. Western Christianity's relevance lies not in resisting transformation but in embracing God's mission for His Church, ensuring its continued relevance amidst the changing dynamics of our world.

5. Paradigmatic Perspective

5.1 Meta-theoretical assumption

The meta-theoretical assumptions of this study are rooted in a Reformed Biblical perspective on the divinely providential creator God.

5.2 Epistemological Assumptions

This study assumes a foundational epistemological stance that knowledge of the world is best understood through divine revelation. The Bible is God's inspired Word, serving as the primary source of knowledge and understanding.

5.3 Ontological Assumption

This research operates under the assumption that a divine providential creator God exists. He created the world and continues to be actively involved in the unfolding of human history.

5.4 Teleological Assumption

This study presupposes a teleological perspective that purpose and meaning are inherent in the universe. God's divine providential creator has intentions and a grand design that can be discerned through studying the Bible and the historical events shaped by Him.

5.5 Theological Assumption

The research is grounded in a Reformed theological framework, which implies adherence to the principles and doctrines associated with Reformed Christianity. This includes belief in God's sovereignty, the authority of the Bible, and humanity's fallen nature.

5.6 Revelatory Assumption

The meta-theoretical framework acknowledges that the divine, providential Creator God reveals Himself through the Bible and His works in human history, despite humanity's fallen nature.

5.7 Historical Assumption

This study recognises the significance of the historical context and proclaims that the divine providential creator God has been, and continues to be, actively involved in shaping the course of history. This perspective highlights the divine influence on historical events to comprehend God's purposes and will.

5.8 Methodological Implications

The meta-theoretical assumptions influence the choice of research methods. They suggest a reliance on methods that align with the Reformed Biblical perspective, including textual analysis of the Bible, historical analysis informed by theological principles, and a hermeneutical approach that considers divine providence.

6. Research Problem

6.1 Introduction

The decline of Western Christianity is a complex phenomenon that has intrigued scholars and theologians. While existing research has explored the symptoms and consequences of this decline, a deeper understanding is required to grasp the roots of this regression, particularly about the transformation of Western Christianity into what is often referred to as Christendom. This research aims to move beyond superficial analyses and delve into the historical processes that

led to the dissolution of Western Christianity, seeking a more profound answer to why and how this shift occurred.

6.2 Primary Research Problem

The primary research problem revolves around understanding the historical regression of Western Christianity into Christendom. The research seeks to uncover the underlying factors and mechanisms that facilitated this decline, moving beyond mere statistical and symptomatic analysis. The inquiry must consider the theological, cultural, social, and political dimensions to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Given the assumption that God is in complete control, the research problem extends to exploring the divine implications or spiritual aspects that might have played a role in this transformation. A biblical perspective on the problem should inform an essential understanding of God's remedial action to address the issue. Therefore, what should Christianity's missiological response be to the dissolution of Western Christendom?

6.3 Literary Research

A review of existing literature on the decline of Western Christianity reveals a prevalent focus on symptomatic analyses, such as dwindling attendance, shifting cultural values, and changing social dynamics. However, a narrower subset of literature must be explored to address the more profound question of how Western Christianity regressed into Christendom. Some relevant themes in the existing literature may include the following:

6.3.1 Cultural Christianity and Christendom

Investigate works discussing the concept of cultural Christianity and its role in the decline of authentic religious practices. Explore writings that examine the historical trajectory of Christendom and its impact on Western Christianity.

6.3.2 Historical Perspectives

Examine historical studies that trace the evolution of Western Christianity while highlighting key events, movements, or periods that contributed to its regression. Identify scholarly works analysing the intersection of political and religious factors in the decline.

6.3.3 Theological Insights

Delve into theological literature to explore the evolving theological landscape within Western Christianity and its implications for the faithful. Investigate writings discussing the relationship

between divine providence and historical events, aiming to understand God's role in the decline. The goal is to learn from history, to serve God better in the future.

6.3.4 Methodology

A mixed-methods approach will be employed to address the research problem. Historical analysis, theological examinations, and sociocultural investigations will serve as the foundation of the research. By focusing on a theological perspective, content analysis of religious texts may be utilized to triangulate findings and provide a comprehensive understanding of the decline of Western Christianity from a historical Biblical perspective.

6.3.5 Conclusion

This research problem sets the stage for a comprehensive investigation into Western Christianity's historical regression, aiming to unearth the root causes and divine dimensions underlying its transformation into Christendom. By integrating various disciplinary perspectives, the study seeks to contribute to a nuanced and deepened understanding of a phenomenon that has profound implications for religious and secular spheres.

7. Aim and Objectives

7.1 Aim

This academic study aims to investigate the historical regression of Western Christianity into Christendom comprehensively. The research seeks to go beyond superficial analysis and delve into the underlying factors and mechanisms contributing to this decline. Embracing a multidimensional approach, the study explores biblical exegetical, theological, cultural, social, and political dimensions to provide a nuanced understanding of the phenomenon. Additionally, the research examines the divine implications or spiritual aspects that may have played a role in this transformation, confirming the assumption that God is in complete control.

7.2 Objectives

7.2.1 To Analyse Theological Shifts in Understanding Christendom's Current Crisis

The objective is to examine historical shifts in the theological perspectives within Western Christianity, focusing on doctrinal changes, theological controversies, and their impact on the overall trajectory of the faith. One must explore the cultural dynamics that shaped and influenced Western Christianity's regression into Christendom, including the changes in religious practices,

cultural assimilation, and the evolving role of Christianity in society. This analysis includes social and political dimensions that seek to go beyond surface symptoms to understand the root causes and contributing factors.

7.2.2 To Assess Divine Implications on Transformation

The purpose is to explore a biblical perspective on God's engagement with His chosen people as revealed in biblical history. One must uncover the spiritual and divine dimensions of the historical, theological, and spiritual regression of the people of Israel, consider the roles of divine providence and spiritual renewal, and consider other theological factors that may have shaped the transformation trajectory in God's engagement with His chosen people. What should we learn from history to understand what God wants to do with our future?

7.2.3 To Provide a Comprehensive Understanding of what a Theological Delusion is

Synthesize findings from the biblical exegetical, theological, cultural, social, and political dimensions to comprehensively understand the theological delusion that led to God's people's historical regression in biblical times. This may explain Western Christianity's regression toward Christendom in our own time, and it will equip the Western Church to participate in the *missio Dei* in future times.

7.2.4 To Discover What Divine Transformation Entails

Examine the fully revealed conversion and purpose of God's transformative engagement with His chosen people as established in the New Testament and affirmed in church and mission history. A missiological perspective on church and mission history will reveal God's clear purpose that was not previously recognised.

7.2.5 To Propose Implications for the Future

This study presents insights and recommendations for the contemporary Western Church based on a comprehensive analysis of current events and their underlying causes. It considers how lessons from the historical regression of God's people can inform strategies for revitalisation and resilience amid societal changes in Western Christianity. By pursuing these objectives, the study aims to deepen the understanding of the historical regression of Western Christianity and offer insights that may be relevant to contemporary discussions and future developments within the Christian faith.

8. Central Theoretical Argument

The historical regression of Western Christianity into Christendom is not merely a consequence of surface-level symptoms but a complex phenomenon driven by a convergence of underlying factors across theological, cultural, social, and political dimensions. This regression, marked by a shift away from the core tenets of the faith, is deeply entwined with the interplay of doctrinal transformations, cultural assimilation, changing social dynamics, and political influences. A comprehensive understanding of this regression necessitates exploring beyond the secular lens, acknowledging the divine implications and spiritual aspects that may have guided or responded to this transformative process under the assumption of God's complete control. By unravelling these multifaceted layers, the research aims to provide a nuanced perspective on the historical trajectory of Western Christianity, offering insights into the intricate interconnections between earthly dynamics and divine providence that shaped this significant transformation. This study will employ inductive reasoning, moving from specific observations of historical regression to a broader and more complex understanding, recognising patterns and exploring various dimensions to provide a nuanced perspective.

9. Study Design

9.1 Exploring the Epistemological Crisis: A Missiological Analysis of the Theological Impulse in Christendom

The first section analyses the Western culture's epistemological crisis and evaluates Christendom's theological impulse. The methodology includes conducting a literature review, identifying pivotal moments in Western culture, developing a missiological analysis framework, critically examining the theological impulse, engaging in comparative analysis, integrating philosophical insights, and synthesising the findings. The expected outcomes are a better understanding of the epistemological crisis and uncovering potential delusions influencing Christianity's transformation in Western culture.

9.2 Unveiling Theological Transformations: A Literary and Exegetical Analysis of God's Engagement with His Chosen People

This section aims to understand the theology of God's engagement with His chosen people through literary and exegetical analysis. It will focus on the purpose and role of the temple in Jerusalem within the Jewish religion. The study will specifically analyse Mark 11:1-21 and explore quoted Old Testament passages to discern the reasons for Jesus Christ's final visit and departure from the temple. The methodology includes a literary analysis of relevant Old and New Testament

passages, an exegetical examination of Mark 11:1-21, and an exploration of intertextual connections between the quoted Old Testament passages. The chapter will identify the climactic moment in Jesus's ministry, represented by His last visit to the temple, and investigate potential theological delusion among the Jewish people. The theological implications and comparative analysis with historical events, such as the temple's destruction, will be explored. The expected outcome is a comprehensive understanding of God's engagement with His chosen people, highlighting the transformation initiated by Jesus's actions and their relationship to theological delusion.

9.3 Unravelling Theological Deviation: An Exegetical and Cultural-Historical Analysis of Jewish Religious Delusion

The objective of this section is to provide evidence for the claim that Jewish religious delusion represents a theological and religious deviation. This study will analyse Matthew 27:15-26 and review literature on the challenges faced by the Jewish people during Jesus's time. It will apply reformed systematic theology to highlight how these deviations from biblical theology have resulted in false practices. The rejection of Jesus Christ will be explored as the primary reason for God's altered relationship with His chosen people. The methodology includes exegetical analysis, literature review, identification of the Jewish mindset, application of reformed systematic theology, analysis of theological deviation, correlation with God's transformation, comparative analysis with biblical theology, and a conclusion substantiating the claim. The expected outcome is a comprehensive understanding of the theological dynamics leading to God's transformed engagement with His chosen people.

9.4 Cross-Cultural Diffusion in the New Testament: A Comprehensive Study of God's Transformational Engagement

This section examines cross-cultural diffusion in the New Testament as a principle of God's transformative engagement. It will analyse various passages and theological perspectives, explicitly focusing on Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Historical research on church and mission history will be used to confirm the implementation of this principle. Anthropological insights will also be gathered to inform missiological practice. The chapter seeks to demonstrate that God is transforming Christendom through cross-cultural diffusion, which leads to the formation of global Christianity. The methodology involves examining New Testament passages, analysing theological perspectives, discussing Ephesians in detail, reviewing historical research, gathering anthropological insights, conducting comparative analyses, exploring missiological implications, synthesising findings, and concluding with the significance of cross-cultural diffusion in forming

global Christianity. The expected outcome confirms cross-cultural diffusion as a transformative principle in God's engagement and its role in shaping contemporary missiological contexts.

9.5 Toward Resolution: Synthesizing Findings for Transformative Impact on Theological Establishment and the Church

This integrative section aims to synthesise the findings from previous chapters and propose solutions for the research problem. By guiding their activities based on insights gained throughout the study, the chapter intends to benefit both the Western theological establishment and the culturally compromised Christian Church.

10. Research Methodology

The research methodology for this academic thesis will involve a multidisciplinary approach that integrates insights and perspectives from multiple disciplines. Books and scholarly articles will be accessed to find relevant research to unravel the research problem. The goal is to develop an integrative understanding and ideas to address our world's increasingly complex and diverse issues (Gilbert, 2018). To achieve this, the researcher will adopt a movement of methodologies, as suggested by Cilliers (2022: 7). Cilliers is adamant that no single method or theology can claim to have arrived because God moves through history; God moves history; God moves us (2022: 8). The researcher also acknowledges that God plays a role in history and therefore embraces a holistic perspective. The goal of research must be to find common ground to understand the bigger picture (Cilliers, 2022: 11). This involves seeking areas of overlap between different research approaches and disciplines to understand the topic at hand. This also means using various research methods and techniques without relying on a single methodology or theology.

Missiological research is distinguished from other theological research by its focus on and concern for the *missio Dei* (Elliston, 2011: XXI). Dressel and Marcus (1982) argue that since there is no unique and distinctive methodology, all theological research methods can support the Christian Church's mission and contribute to the growing body of missiological theory.

Therefore, the research methodology for this academic thesis will involve integrating insights from various disciplines, adopting multiple research methods and approaches, finding common ground among different perspectives, and utilising theological research methods to support the Christian Church's mission and contribute to missiological theory. This research must benefit both the academy and the local church in mission.

11. Ethical Considerations

This research will consist of a literature review, with no primary qualitative or quantitative surveys conducted. Consequently, there are minimal or no ethical risks involved in the study.

12. Provisional Classification of Chapters

From the above study design, we may give a tentative index of the contents as follows:

- Chapter 1 – Introduction
- Chapter 2 – Article 1: Exploring the epistemological crisis in Western culture and the dissolution of Christendom. Title: *'Unravelling the Regression of Western Christianity into Christendom: Theological, Cultural, and Political Intersections in a Divinely Shaped Historical Shift'*.
- Chapter 3 – Article 2: Unveiling Theological Transformations: A Literary and Exegetical Analysis of God's Engagement with His Chosen People: Title: *'The missiological implications of Jesus's Final Departure from the Temple for Western Christendom.'*
- Chapter 4 – Article 3: Unravelling Theological Deviation: An Exegetical and Cultural-Historical Analysis of Jewish Religious Delusion. Title: *'Missional Insights on Socio-Political Realities, Religious Vulnerability, and the Choice of Barabbas.'*
- Chapter 5 – Article 4: Cross-Cultural Diffusion in the New Testament and Church and Mission History: A Comprehensive Study of God's Transformational Engagement. Title: *'From Temple to Nations: The Missio Dei and the Cross-Cultural Expansion of God's People from Jewish Roots to a Global Faith.'*
- Chapter 6 – Article 5: Toward Resolution: Synthesising Findings for Transformative Impact on Theological Establishment and the Church. Title: *'From Christendom to Global Mission: Proposing a Theological Framework for Post-Western Christianity.'*
- Chapter 7 – Article 6: Addressing Contextual and Geographical Relevance within the African Setting. Title: *'From Barabbas to Christ: Theological Delusion, the Death of Christendom and Decolonial Missiology in the Age of BRICS.'*

13. References

The references mentioned in the introduction:

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14. Complementary to Chapter 1: Theological, Contextual, and Methodological Landscape

This prologue enhances the study's theological, contextual, and methodological clarity. It provides a unified framework for interpreting the themes explored in each article-based chapter, ensuring conceptual coherence. It aims to highlight the African context, clarify key theological terms, refine the problem statement, and explain the chosen research design.

14.1 Theological and Exegetical Foundations of the Study

This study is deeply committed to preserving the integrity of Christian witness to God's redemptive mission as revealed in Jesus Christ. Theologically, it is anchored in the biblical narrative—spanning Jesus Christ's final departure from the Temple in Jerusalem, the public's choice of Barabbas over Jesus (Mark 15:6–15), the cross-cultural discernment of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), and Paul's articulation of the gospel's mystery (as seen in Galatians and Ephesians). These texts trace a coherent theological trajectory in which divine election, covenantal responsibility, and mission are continually reconfigured across cultural and political boundaries.

The study engages primarily with Christology, *missio Dei*, and ecclesiology, in sustained dialogue with political theology and public missiology. Within this framework, the 'Barabbas delusion' is a recurring theological crisis in which communities, often under socio-political pressure, exchange the crucified Messiah for political or ideological saviours. The apostle Paul's reflection in 1 Corinthians 15:9 underscores the futility of a merely existential trust in Jesus Christ, detached from the cruciform reality of the gospel.

14.2 Clarifying Key Terms and Concepts

Several contested terms that will be explored within the different articles require clarification:

- *Missio Dei*: This refers to the Triune God's initiative in redeeming creation. The Church's mission is derived from this initiative situated in and flowing from the Triune God. Traditionally, within Western theology, 'mission' was in 'ecclesiology'. This thesis confirms

the new perspective in missiology: the church does not have a mission. Only God has a mission. God's mission (missio Dei) must have a church.

- Christendom: It critically refers to the historical intertwining of the Church with political authority, often undermining its prophetic role. This thesis defines it as the manifestation of Western cultural Christianity.
- The "Barabbas delusion" refers to a theological phenomenon where faith communities, particularly during times of pressure or crisis, choose expedient or violent solutions instead of following Christ's redemptive path. This thesis aims to define and establish this term as a new conceptual framework.
- Decolonial missiology: This praxis resists a Western epistemological dominance, while articulating faith and mission from local contexts, particularly in the Global South.
- Christian Zionism, Apartheid Theology, Black Theology: Explored as contextual responses to existential threats that are shaped by historical and political environments.

14.3 Repositioning the African Context

From a biblical perspective, this study traces a theological trajectory that moves from a global Christendom focus to the African context, which has profoundly shaped the legacy of Western Christianity. Western Christianity exerted global influence for over two millennia, significantly impacting Africa through colonial-era mission enterprises. While international in its scope, the study ultimately centres on Africa as a recipient of this legacy and as a vital theological space for confronting the crisis it left behind and discerning a way forward.

Africa's postcolonial theological landscape - defined by the tensions of mission, empire, and resistance - offers a crucial context for reimagining the Church's missional identity in light of the gospel. The lived realities of African Christians sharpen the focus of this research as they navigate inherited Western theological frameworks, the complexities of local political instability, and the pressures of competing ideological movements.

By foregrounding African theological voices and contextual realities, this study aligns itself with the growing body of African scholarship advocating for a decolonial theological engagement that is biblically faithful, contextually honest, and globally resonant. The African Church emerges as a prophetic witness, uniquely positioned to critique Christendom's enduring legacies and reassert the primacy of God's mission as revealed in Jesus Christ.

14.4 Refining the Problem Statement

This study addresses a central and recurring problem: the distortion of Christian mission through political and ideological alliances that undermine the Church's redemptive witness. This distortion is not merely a contemporary issue but is deeply rooted in the biblical narrative. Spanning 2,000 years of Old Testament history, the pattern is diagnosed in the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ. It has continued throughout the subsequent 2,000 years of Christian history up to the present day.

The study brings this theological and historical insight into dialogue with the contemporary challenges facing global Christianity, mainly African Christianity. Whether manifested in Christian Zionism, nationalist theologies, or other political ideologies, the choice of Barabbas over Christ remains an urgent and recurring crisis for the Church.

This research explores how such distortions arise, why they persist, and what theological resources are required to confront and resist them. It seeks to answer how the Church can recover a Christocentric missional identity rooted in the biblical narrative within both post-Christendom and postcolonial realities. In doing so, it calls for a renewed vision of mission that is faithful to the crucified and risen Christ.

14.5 Methodological Framework

This qualitative theological study employs content analysis as its primary method. Rather than collecting empirical data, it analyses biblical, theological, historical, and ideological texts to trace patterns, expose distortions, and propose constructive missional responses.

Content analysis is chosen over empirical methods to engage in theological interpretation and missiological reflection. It utilizes theological exegesis, historical critique, and contextual analysis for a layered approach to complex theological problems.

The study comprises interrelated articles addressing dimensions of the central question: **How can the Church resist ideological distortions and recover a missional identity rooted in Jesus Christ's redemptive work?**



CHAPTER 2: (ARTICLE 1)

‘Unravelling the Regression of Western Christianity into Christendom: Theological, Cultural, and Political Intersections in a Divinely Shaped Historical Shift’

(This article was submitted to *Missionalia*. More information is in the Addendum.)

1. Abstract

The historical regression of Western Christianity into Christendom is not merely the result of surface-level symptoms but a complex phenomenon driven by theological, cultural, social, and political factors. This study argues that this shift signifies a departure from core Christian tenets and underscores the interplay of doctrinal transformation, cultural assimilation, shifting social dynamics, and political influences. The research acknowledges earthly and divine factors, recognising that spiritual dimensions may have guided or responded to these changes under the assumption of God's sovereignty. By exploring beyond a secular lens, this study provides a nuanced understanding of how divine providence and human forces shaped the historical trajectory of Western Christianity. Through inductive reasoning, the analysis progresses from specific historical observations to a broader, more complex understanding of the multifaceted regression into Christendom. This approach reveals the intricate relationship between earthly events and divine involvement, offering a comprehensive perspective on the significant transformation of the Christian faith in Western history.

2. Introduction

As scholars in the field of missiology, we are reminded that the *missio Dei* - the mission of God - has always been oriented toward the redemptive engagement of all nations and peoples, firstly introduced in God's call to Abraham in Genesis (12:3). This divine mission unfolds throughout the scriptures, with the Old Testament representing the Jewish phase of the *missio Dei*, marked by several periods of spiritual decline and renewal. The New Testament then heralds a transformative shift, presenting the continuation of God's mission through the person of Jesus Christ, "in the fullness of time" (Gal 4:4), and the expansion of this mission beyond Israel through the Christian Church to encompass the entire world. God's mission was saved from Jewish cultural suffocation by the cultural diffusion recorded in New Testament times (Walls, 1996:18).

Christianity's historical expansion reflects a dynamic and complex process from its origins in Jerusalem to its eventual institutionalisation within the Roman Empire and ultimately cultural dominance in Europe. It is essential to view this trajectory not as a linear progression but as a cyclical movement, where periods of growth, consolidation, and decline recur (Bediako, 2000:315). As Andrew Walls and others suggest, understanding the rise and fall of Christendom through the lens of cyclical phases rather than an unbroken progression helps us interpret the meaning of its demise in our present age (Walls, 2005:3-26).

Throughout this history, God's continuity in mission remains steadfast. As Darrell Guder asserts (1985:4), God remains personally involved in human history and experience, guiding the Church's journey through changing times. This extensive history of the Christian Church, born in Jerusalem, clothed in Hellenism, institutionalised in Rome, and exists as an European culture, spans over two millennia, demonstrating the interplay of divine purpose and human agency in shaping Christian history (Kim, 2012:80).

It is, however, essential to note that in our current era, Christianity is facing yet another significant transition. As David Bosch (1991) and Douglas John Hall (1997:1) observe, the global Christian Church is experiencing a profound metamorphosis that compels us to urgently and comprehensively reassess Christendom's legacy. The decline of Christendom, marked by the waning influence of institutional Christianity in the West, must be viewed not merely as a symptom of cultural shifts or demographic changes but as part of a more considerable theological, social, and political regression into Christendom - a period during which the Church's identity became intertwined with earthly power and cultural hegemony.

By examining this historical regression, we acknowledge the divine hand at work in the Church's past and present circumstances (Hall, 1999:72). If we do not learn from this history, we risk repeating the mistakes that have led to the current crisis. This study aims to explore the multifaceted evolution and eventual regression of Western Christianity into Christendom, considering the theological, cultural, social, and political forces that have shaped this path. Through this exploration, we seek a deeper understanding of how God's mission was affected during this transformation and how the Church can reclaim its missional identity in a world where Christendom has largely faded (Bass, 2012:14).

3. Christianity's Cyclical Phases Examined

Various scholars, including Kwame Bediako (2007), Andrew Walls (1996:16-25), Bosch (2012:185-267), Kreider (2005), and Phyllis Tickle (2012), have proposed different frameworks for categorising the historical phases of Western Christianity's evolution. Nonetheless, it is

essential to acknowledge the inherent difficulty in accurately classifying these phases due to their intricate and multifaceted nature. This section aims to provide a concise overview of the history of Western Christianity, substantiating the conclusion that Christianity has undergone significant and distinct transitions throughout its history. Understanding the factual and phenomenological aspects of this development will also offer insights into the theological implications of God's divine presence in shaping the history of Christianity according to His will and purpose.

3.1 From Jewish to Hellenistic Culture: New Testament Christianity (1-500 AD)

The New Testament's historical narrative illustrates the profound theo-political and cultural transition as God shifted His mission from a predominantly Jewish context to the broader Hellenistic world. This transformation unfolded against the backdrop of the Roman Empire's destruction of Israel and the Jewish state, culminating in the Temple's destruction in Jerusalem and the subsequent exile of the Jewish people. This collapse of the Jewish socio-political and religious identity initiated the formation of Christianity, which persisted during this transformative phase until the Roman Empire disintegrated under barbarian invasions. Within this tumultuous milieu, a new Christian minority emerged - initially persecuted by its Jewish kin and later by Roman authorities.

This period of upheaval holds tremendous theological significance as it reveals a paradigmatic shift in God's redemptive mission toward humanity, describing socio-political events and offering insight into divine purposes. The question for Christian inquiry is not merely 'what happened,' but 'why did it happen?' - challenging believers to discern the descriptive and seek to understand the potential implicit prescriptive dimensions of God's revelation within this transition. The destruction of the Jewish state marked a divine transformation, wherein God moved away from Israel toward a broader Hellenistic context where Christianity would transcend Jewish identity and become a global faith.

During this pivotal phase, Christianity infiltrated Hellenistic culture, spreading across the eastern Mediterranean and extended to regions such as Iran, Upper Egypt, and Ethiopia (Mullin, 2008:29). This expansion was driven by an eschatological impulse- a sense of urgency surrounding Christ's imminent return- which Bosch describes as an apocalyptic paradigm (Bosch, 1991:183). This paradigm shaped the early Christian mission, fuelling missionary zeal that led to the gospel being preached far beyond the borders of the Roman world, even as Christians were dispersed under persecution. By the 3rd century, Christianity had become as much an Asian as a European religion (Mullin, 2008:50).

The socio-political realities of this time also facilitated the growth of Christianity. The persecution of Christians in Jerusalem and elsewhere forced rapid dissemination across cultural and

geographical borders. By the 4th century, Christianity had established a firm foothold in its new cultural milieu, forging a new identity within the Hellenistic world. The Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) underscores the initial cultural struggle between Jewishness and the emerging Christian identity within early congregations, ultimately resolved through a broader theological and missiological engagement with the Gentile world.

The turning point came with Emperor Constantine and the Edict of Milan (AD 313), transforming Christianity from a persecuted minority into an institutionalised majority. This shift marked the beginning of Christendom, where Christianity became deeply entwined with political power, ultimately altering its missional posture. The integration of Christian theology into the collapsing Greco-Roman intellectual world filled the vacuum left by the decline of classical thought (Bosch, 1991:193), as new questions and challenges arose that broadened and enriched Christianity's biblical response to the world. Christianity emerged as a significant creation of the pagan world, providing spiritual direction to an Empire that had lost it. It acknowledged its Jewish heritage without being bound, merging Judeo-Christian monotheism with Greco-Roman civilisation (Kim, 2012:89).

This period confirms Walls' assertion (2002:217) that Christian scholarship follows and derives from Christian mission. The early Church's socio-political realities - the destruction of Jewish religious structures, persecution by Roman authorities, and eventual political acceptance under Constantine - shaped Christian thought and identity in ways that continue to influence the Church today. The Christian Church was primarily influenced by Greek thought for nearly three centuries. However, a new mode of Christianity emerged, making Latin the dominant language. The Latin Church concentrated on the correct doctrinal formulation and systematised inherited doctrines (Bosch, 1991:214-215). Understanding these theo-political and missiological dimensions of the transition is essential for comprehending Christianity's evolution and mission. Following the fall of Rome in 476 AD, the Roman Catholic Church became the stabilising institution of Western society.

3.2 The Barbarian Phase: Monastic or Latin Christianity (500-1000 AD)

This subsequent phase in the evolution of Christianity, often referred to as the Middle Ages (500 - 1500 AD) in general vocabulary, or the Dark Ages by Protestant scholars, or the Golden Age by Catholic scholars, was characterised by an intricate interweaving of theology, politics, and culture. This era extended from the fall of Rome (476 AD) to the advent of modern Europe and was significantly influenced by the geopolitical upheaval following the collapse of the Roman Empire. As Cairns (1996:165) notes, this period experienced unprecedented mass migrations across Europe, with barbarian invasions playing a crucial role in reshaping both the socio-political

landscape and the trajectory of Christianity. Contrary to the common perception of barbarians as mere destroyers of Roman civilisation, many of these tribes had already encountered Christianity through earlier missionary efforts, complicating the narrative of civilisational decline.

Confronted with preserving the Hellenistic-Hebraic cultural heritage and proclaiming the gospel to wandering barbarian tribes, the Christian Church faced a new socio-political reality (Cairns, 1996:118). The fall of Rome caused a dramatic shift in the locus of the Christian influence from the urban centres of Mediterranean civilisation to rural and tribal territories in northern and western Europe. In this context, missionary monks emerged as essential actors, effectively bringing the gospel to these new barbarian rulers. The monastic movement not only ensured the survival of Christian scholarship (Walls, 2002:219) but also played a decisive role in shaping Christian Europe's future (Bosch, 1991:211). Amidst the collapse of the Roman urban life, monastic communities preserved the Christian traditions and scholarship; they became sanctuaries of intellectual and spiritual life during the widespread social disintegration (Cairns, 1996:148).

The tribal peoples of Europe, predominantly peasant cultivators and semi-nomadic raiders, embraced a form of Christianity that blended the indigenous animistic practices with Christian beliefs, creating a syncretic model of faith (Tickle, 2012:16). This fusion marked a significant shift from Roman Christianity's universal aspirations to a more localised and tribal expression. Once expansive and tied to the vast Roman Empire, the faith became connected to the ethnic and political identities of specific barbarian groups. In many cases, entire tribes converted, incorporating Christianity into their cultural and political fabric and turning it into a marker of both spiritual and political allegiance.

This shift gave rise to Christendom - a territorial and political form of Christianity aligned with a single inherited notion of civilisation. Christendom was not merely a spiritual domain but also a socio-political order where Christianity merged deeply with governance and cultural identity (Walls 2000:21). As Christianity became the official religion of these newly formed tribal kingdoms, it transitioned from a universal religion to a localised one with varying regional expressions. The adoption of faith often signified the entrance of a tribe into the 'civilised' world, with Christianity serving as a spiritual and civilisational marker.

Despite their reputation for social and political chaos, the Dark Ages were also a time of dynamic development under divine direction (Cairns, 1996:160). It was a period of rich Christian creativity and cultural transformation (Walls, 1997:150). Christianity firmly established itself as Europe's dominant religion and cultural force, setting the stage for the later theological and cultural transformations that transpired during the Renaissance and the Reformation. Amidst this era's turbulence, the monastic movement safeguarded religious traditions and Western intellectual

heritage. Monks meticulously copied ancient texts and preserved Christian teachings and became custodians of Western Christianity through centuries of socio-political upheaval (Bosch, 1991:216).

The consolidation of Christianity during the Middle Ages represents a critical phase in its socio-political evolution. From the fusion with local tribal identities to the establishment of Christendom, Christianity became deeply embedded within Europe's power structures and culture. This period shaped the future of Western civilisation and redefined the missional focus of the Church. As faith adapted to new political realities, it transitioned from a universal mission to a more territorial expression of Christianity, foreshadowing future theological and socio-political challenges.

3.3 Western European Christian Formation: Protestant Christianity (1000-1500 AD)

Islam was already a significant factor in the early geopolitical landscape of Christianity's growth. The theo-political influence of Islam on Christianity, particularly from the 7th to the 13th centuries, was profound. The Crusades, far from being solely religious wars, were deeply rooted in both spiritual and geopolitical ambitions. European monarchs from nations like England, France, and the Holy Roman Empire used the Crusades to defend Christendom and expand their political influence. This period saw the emergence of Christendom as a unified Christian empire, where governance and faith were inseparably linked, resulting in a fusion of political and religious authority.

The papacy played a central role in this theo-political structure. By asserting spiritual supremacy over secular rulers, the papacy wielded immense power, shaping political landscapes through tools like excommunication and the development of canon law. The Crusades further consolidated papal power, blending political and spiritual realms, reinforcing its leadership of Christendom, and cementing the control of the Church over European governance.

Feudalism, the dominant socio-political system of the time, was also deeply intertwined with theo-political ideas. The Church legitimised the feudal hierarchy, upholding the divine right of kings and binding political power to religious authority. This ensured that the influence of the Church over the socio-political order remained absolute, creating a political theology that united temporal governance with spiritual oversight. However, the Reformation in the 16th century shattered this unity. Theological dissent against perceived corruption in the Catholic Church ignited a revolution that fractured Christendom. Protestant rulers, particularly in Germany, leveraged the Reformation to assert independence from the Church and the Holy Roman Empire, leading to nation-states with distinct religious identities. This fragmentation sadly culminated in violent conflicts, such as the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648), which devastated Europe and solidified the growing divide between Catholics and Protestants.

The fall of Constantinople in 1453 and the rise of the Ottoman Empire heightened theo-political tensions between Islam and Christianity. The Ottoman Empire's expansion into Europe was perceived as a direct threat to Christendom, reinforcing the notion of Christianity as a civilisation under siege. This geopolitical rivalry further intertwined theological motivations with political realities.

During this time, the first universities were founded, with the conviction that theology is the queen of the disciplines (Muggeridge, 1980: viii) and that mission is the mother of all theology (Kähler, 1971:190). These universities were free to govern themselves, provided that they taught neither atheism nor heresy. This further grounded the Judeo-Christian foundation of Western civilisation (Guinness, 2022).

An intense social, intellectual, and cultural change accentuated the gradual transition toward a new age. The Renaissance marked the progressive shift from the late Middle Ages to modernity. It was characterised by an effort to revive and surpass the ideas and achievements of classical antiquity. Thinkers of the era combined Christian theology with classical philosophy, challenging the Church's monopoly on knowledge and power. The Renaissance also laid the groundwork for political theories that questioned the divine-right monarchies, fostering the growth of secular governance and democratic ideals. Over time, it diminished the Church's socio-political dominance by promoting humanism and critical thought, gradually initiating Christianity's decline within Western Europe.

4. Receding Christianity and Expanding Europe: Christendom (1500-2000 AD)

God controls His Church's destiny for His mission's sake (Matt 28:18-20). Despite the divisions and schisms that arose during the Reformation, Christianity remained the professed religion of most Europeans. However, in hindsight, two significant developments affirm the apex of Western Christianity's global influence and marked the beginning of the end of Christendom.

4.1 De-Christianisation of the West (Tiéno 2006:37)

'While the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church, the assimilation of the church to the world silences the witness.' (*Tertullian in his 'Apologeticus' - circa AD 197*)

The decline of European Christianity, commencing around 1850, was a gradual process influenced by the Enlightenment and the societal transformations of modernity (Kim, 2012:121; 129). The Enlightenment, prioritising reason, individualism, and scepticism toward the traditional authorities, introduced a critical approach to religion and an orientation toward Biblical criticism

(Kim, 2012:120). Christendom adapted to this evolving consciousness until the concept of Christian faith as a matter of individual decision and application became a hallmark of Western Christianity (Walls, 1996:21). This shift resulted in perceiving the Bible as symbolic rather than historical, with a greater emphasis on the ethical teachings over the divine authority (Guder, 1985:4). Reason supplanted the divine as the basis for thought and action (Wells, 1993:60). Freedom replaced the sacred as humanity's highest ideal (Kim, 2012:125).

Faith increasingly became rooted in reason and moral reflection, reducing religion to a personal and private affair detached from all sociopolitical realities and public influence (Wells, 1993:60). The objective of intellectual labour was to develop universal principles that adhered to stringent scientific criteria and were universally applicable, rendering context irrelevant. Western culture subsequently emerged as the normative manifestation of universal knowledge and the benchmark for Christian practice (Shenk, 2003:19-20).

This intellectual shift redirected theology toward an inward focus on personal morality, thereby marginalising its involvement with broader societal issues. This phenomenon is the 'crisis of secularisation' (Kim, 2012:125-126). C.S. Lewis (cited by Noll, 2012:246) refers to it as 'the greatest of all divisions in the history of the West'. Owen Chadwick (1975:5-9) identifies 1650-1750 as the 'seminal years of modern intellectual history,' noting that its effects permeated the broader European society a century and a half later. He elucidates this by stating that 'The Enlightenment was of the few. Secularisation is one of the many.'

By the end of the 19th century, a new post-Christian Europe had become visible across the continent (Noll, 2012:247). The intelligentsia of the West rejected the Christian faith that had shaped Western civilisation (Guinness, 2022). Muggeridge (1980:17) describes this as 'Christendom's dissolution in the minds of its intellectual elites.' The intellectual aspirations of the Enlightenment seemed poised to terminate the religious influence, leading to the deterioration of Europe's established church at the heart of Christendom by the conclusion of the century (Shenk, 2003:11-12).

A significant challenge has emerged in the contemporary discourse on Western civilisation, which Russell Kirk (1999 b:157) famously termed 'the mother of all crises.' This crisis, profoundly philosophical and epistemological, is intertwined with the diminishing influence of Christianity in the intellectual and cultural life of the West. Historically, Western culture, profoundly shaped by Christian thought, held theology in high regard, positioning it at the centre of academic and intellectual endeavours. However, the rise of secularism and the increasing cultural indifference toward religion have eroded the stature of theology within academia. Sanders (1999:57) contends that these converging crises have increasingly marginalised theology among the scholarly

disciplines. The Enlightenment's vision of a universal, foundational knowledge has collapsed under its contradictions, leaving theology and other fields in an epistemological crisis.

While Western culture remains influenced by the Enlightenment ideals of reason and progress, it is now characterised by scepticism and uncertainty regarding the foundations of knowledge. This growing epistemological crisis, as Kirk (1999 a: xiii) notes, has destabilised various disciplines, including theology, undermining its traditional role. Kirk (1999 b:170) observes that at the core of this crisis lies the philosophical bankruptcy of Western thought itself, revealing an emptiness that Wells (1993:60-61) likens to a growing intellectual void. This state of intellectual fragmentation has exposed the fragility of Western culture's foundations, with the waning influence of theology leaving Western civilisation confused regarding its intellectual and cultural identity.

This intellectual erosion is inseparable from the crisis within Western theology itself. Theological formation in Europe during a period of relative isolation produced what Laing (2009:11) terms an 'abnormal' theology. This inward-looking 'mission-less' ecclesiology did not engage with the wider pluralistic world. The church, secure within Christendom, became introverted, focusing on internal structures rather than outward mission. The emphasis of the Enlightenment on individualism and rationalism exacerbated this crisis, deepening the disconnection between theology and society. This period can be described as the missional reductionism of Western ecclesiologies (Guder, 2009:13), where the church focused mainly on its preservation. It would ultimately have catastrophic consequences for the Western Church in history (Dreyer, 2015:2).

Theological introversion leads the church to become part of an epistemologically confused culture and 'voiceless,' unable to address social, moral, and spiritual crises meaningfully. The Western Church stands embarrassed by its inability to respond effectively within this growing crisis of Christendom's demise (Clayton, 1999:79; Dreyer, 2015:3). When confined to cultural maintenance or institutional preservation, the church ceases to function as a true church, revealing the bankruptcy of Christendom's ecclesiology (Laing, 2009:22). The paramount crisis facing Christendom is that, rather than engaging in the *missio Dei*, it becomes preoccupied with serving its members and protecting institutional boundaries. This shift leads to its degeneration into mere human activity, ultimately causing it to cease functioning as a true church (Dreyer, 2015:4).

It must be concluded that during the 19th century, theological reflection within academic institutions became increasingly abstract and decontextualised, focusing on ecclesiology while neglecting real-world contexts (Laing, 2009:12). This intellectualisation generated knowledge detached from the cultural and missional realities that the church is called to address. Consequently, theology was perceived as universally normative and exportable but remained ill-

suited for engaging with diverse global contexts where Christianity is flourishing. The trajectory of the Western Church towards self-preservation and inward reflection has inevitably led to Christendom's decline.

The Industrial Revolution compounded this decline by radically transforming economies and social structures, leading to urbanisation, new class dynamics, and political ideologies. Once deeply associated with European culture, Christianity lost its social influence and intellectual confidence. It became more culturally conditioned (Laing, 2009:11), even culturally compromised, and increasingly misaligned with a secular, modern world (Kim, 2012:122).

4.2 De-Westernisation of Christianity (Tiéno, 2006:37)

'The church is always in a crisis and its greatest shortcoming is that it is only occasionally aware of it' (Hendrik Kraemer, Tambaram 1938).

Western Europe underwent a significant transformation within its borders and regarding global influence. The Age of Exploration (15th-17th centuries) was a transformative era for Western Christianity, as the European nations extended their worldwide influence through exploration, colonisation, and religious missions. Motivated by economic ambition, political rivalry, and spiritual zeal, European powers sought to bypass the Muslim-controlled trade routes to gain direct access to the Asian markets. This quest for new resources and economic dominance was facilitated by advancements in navigation, shipbuilding, and geographical knowledge, enabling the European nations to establish colonial empires. This period laid the foundations for Europe's global dominance and inaugurated a new phase in the expansion of Christendom.

One of the defining features of this expansion was its religious dimension, driven by a missional mandate deeply connected to European colonial ambitions. The Catholic Church played a pivotal role in endorsing and supporting colonial ventures as vehicles for spreading Christianity. This intertwining of religious and political goals positioned European powers as economic and political rulers and missionaries of Western civilisation and Christianity. European colonisers viewed themselves as divinely ordained to uplift the 'heathen' societies by imposing both their faith and culture.

The socio-political impact of colonialism during this period cannot be overstated. While the European dominance brought about technological advancements and trade networks, it also led to the exploitation and subjugation of non-Western peoples, primarily through the establishment of the transatlantic slave trade. Christianity, intricately woven into the fabric of the European imperial expansion, often justified and reinforced social hierarchies that benefited colonisers at

the expense of the colonised. This entanglement of religion and empire gave rise to Christianity, which became deeply associated with Western culture and civilisation.

From a missiological perspective, the Age of Exploration initiated a global missionary movement. Missionaries, often accompanying or preceding colonial expeditions, aimed to convert indigenous populations to Christianity. However, their efforts frequently involved applying European cultural values, resulting in the perception that Christianity was synonymous with Western civilisation. This legacy of associating Christianity with imperialism led to future challenges as the faith spread into non-Western regions, where it was perceived as a tool of oppression rather than liberation.

As Western missions propagated Christianity, they operated under the assumption that European culture and theology represented the universal Christian standards (Shenk, 2003:19-20). This notion began to wane significantly after World War I (Noll, 2012:284), as Christendom experienced what scholars have called a 'crisis of civilisation' (Newbingen, 1988:80). The devastating effects of two World Wars, combined with the decline of European colonialism and the rise of secularism, prompted a profound reassessment of the relationship between Christianity and Western imperial power (Kim, 2012:121; Shenk, 2003:10). The global mission conference in Edinburgh in 1910 signalled a turning point in Christian missions, marking the end of the period when Christianity could be predominantly equated with Europe and North America (Noll, 2012:264).

Christendom's decline accelerated after the wars, particularly in the 1950s and 1960s. The modern missionary movement originating from the West, along with other developments within Western Europe, contributed significantly to the disintegration of Western Christendom, despite this outcome not being envisioned (Bediako, 2000:316). Thus, while the Age of Exploration marked the height of Christendom's global influence, it also set in motion the forces that would ultimately lead to its decline.

Christianity's spread beyond Europe, particularly in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, signalled a new era in which it was no longer confined to Western civilisation (Noll, 2012:118). This global expansion of Christianity, free from European imperialism, offered new opportunities and challenges as it sought to redefine itself in a post-colonial, multicultural world.

4.3 Conclusion: The Formation of Global Christianity (2000 AD and beyond)

Jerusalem was the first heartland until the Romans levelled it, and the Jewish church ceased to exist. Then came Rome, until the northern Vandals sacked it; Constantinople, until Islam overran it; northern Europe, before the Enlightenment scepticism cut its heart out. The gospel made a great escape at each turning point, crossing over into an unknown culture just before disaster

struck. History suggests that Christianity lives according to this pilgrim principle (Andrew Walls, as cited by Tim Stafford, 2021).

The demise of Christendom and the concurrent epistemological crisis in the West signify a critical juncture in the history of Christianity, reminiscent of earlier transitions within the faith. The process initiated in the fourth century is now concluding (Hall, 1997:1), marking the end of an era in which Western Christianity no longer wields the cultural or political dominance it once held. The dissolution of Christendom is unmistakable, although its full implications are not always immediately apparent to those entrenched in Western church institutions (Hall, 1997:5).

The post-Christian reality in the West, characterised by secularisation and the detachment of religious identity from cultural life, has precipitated what Kirk identifies as a crisis of knowledge (1999a: xiii). This epistemological crisis has reshaped the theological and socio-political foundations of the church, creating a divide between traditional Christendom structures and the dynamic forces of global Christianity.

The global transition from Christendom to post-Christendom is not merely a geographical or demographic redistribution of believers; it represents a fundamental transformation of Christian identity and influence. The significant growth of Christianity in regions such as Latin America, Asia, and Africa indicates a profound reorientation of the Christian mission. Walls (2000:17) emphasise how the 20th century redefined Christian demographics and influence, shifting the faith from its Western heartlands to the Global South. This new phase in Christianity's evolution demonstrates its capacity to adapt, integrate, and flourish in diverse cultural contexts, as Bediako (2007:2) also suggests.

The socio-political realities that shaped Christendom - such as the Great European Migration - have now reversed, with Christianity increasingly influenced by the Global South's theological, cultural, and political concerns. This Great Reverse Migration (Walls, 2011:237) challenges the former Western-centric narrative of Christianity and offers new frameworks for understanding the *missio Dei* in a rapidly changing world. Once exported from the West to other parts of the world, the faith is now being re-imported into the West in radically transformed ways.

Acknowledging this seismic shift is essential for Western Christianity. As Nikolajsen (2012:364) observes, the Western world is no longer the epicentre of Christianity. Unless Western Christians engage with this global expression of faith, they risk becoming isolated from the broader missional narrative of the Church. The mission of the Church is now unequivocally global, necessitating that Western Christians move beyond merely preserving remnants of Christendom to embrace the unfolding, diverse, and decentralised nature of global Christianity.

Ultimately, this period signifies not an end to Christianity but rather the conclusion of a particular expression - Christendom. As Christians, we are experiencing the pain of the 'death throes' of the Enlightenment (Wright, 1999:3) and, subsequently, also the 'death' of Christendom. The end of Christendom is part of a broader historical pattern in which Christianity evolves and finds new life in different contexts. As the West contends with its epistemological crisis, global Christianity continues to thrive, offering fresh theological insights, socio-political engagements, and missional opportunities for the future. Thus, the 'death' of Christendom represents not a tragedy but a new beginning (Hall 1997:51) - a new chapter in the unfolding of the *missio Dei*.

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6. Complementary to Chapter 2: Theological-Missiological Methodology and Contextual Orientation: Positioning the Study

6.1 Theological and Exegetical Engagement

This article, while primarily historical and theological in focus, is fundamentally an exercise in theological interpretation. It seeks to understand Western Christianity's regression into Christendom not merely as a socio-political phenomenon, but as a theological crisis with significant historical and biblical implications. At the heart of this investigation is a commitment to discern the missional trajectory of the *missio Dei* as it intersects with cultural and political developments in Christian history.

Christendom, defined as the historical intertwining of the Christian Church and the Constantinian empire, is viewed as a distortion of the Church's redemptive mission. This article presents this entanglement as a theological deviation from Jesus Christ's kenotic nature, who, according to Philippians 2:5-11, emptied Himself and embraced suffering and servanthood.

Contrary to triumphalist interpretations of Christian history, which view the Church's alignment with political power as a providential advancement, this study employs a Christocentric hermeneutic grounded in the Nicene confession of Jesus Christ as fully divine and human. From this theological foundation, it critiques Christendom.

Though not strictly an exegetical article, this study serves a hermeneutical role that lays the groundwork for exegetical and contextual analyses in later articles. Interpreting the rise and decline of Christendom through a theological lens encourages the Church to return to its biblical foundations and reimagine its identity independently of coercive power structures. While alternative theological interpretations, such as those found in certain neo-Constantinian or 'supremacist' viewpoints, are acknowledged, they are critiqued for deviating from the suffering witness of Christ and the early Church. The result is a theologically grounded framework that views the decline of Christendom not as a loss to mourn but as a divinely permitted disruption aimed at renewed faithfulness.

6.2 Missiological and Contextual Implications

While this article primarily focuses on the development of Christendom within the Western context, its implications are extensive, particularly for the African Church in the postcolonial era. Africa has inherited the theological legacies of Western Christendom, along with its institutional structures and often uncritical theological frameworks. In many African contexts, the Church continues to wrestle with the remnants of Christendom thinking, which appears as ecclesial paternalism, state-church entanglements, and imported theological systems that often suppress indigenous theological voices.

This article highlights the importance of deconstructing Christendom as a critical missiological task, particularly within Africa. The decline of Christendom in the West offers the African Church a unique opportunity to reimagine its identity, not as a continuation of Western Christian hegemony, but as a vibrant expression of God's global mission contextualized within African realities. This shift necessitates a commitment to decolonial theological reflection - biblically grounded, contextually honest, and globally engaged.

The African Church is positioned not merely as a recipient of theological traditions but as a co-contributor to the global theological conversation. The dismantling of Christendom enables the

African Church to assert a missional identity shaped by justice, reconciliation, and grassroots ecclesiology rather than imperial assumptions of cultural superiority or political dominance.

6.3 Clarifying Methodology: Content Analysis and Theological Reasoning

The methodological foundation of this article - and indeed the entire study- is qualitative theological inquiry, with a specific emphasis on content analysis. This approach involves close reading and theological interpretation of historical, ecclesial, and biblical texts to uncover underlying themes, theological shifts, and missiological implications. This article applies content analysis to key theological and historical texts, enabling a critical exploration of how the Church's identity has been shaped by its political entanglements.

The rationale for selecting content analysis over empirical research methods is aligned with the research question. This study is not primarily concerned with measuring behaviours or gathering statistical data but with tracing theological trajectories and interrogating ideological developments. Content analysis allows for a nuanced examination of theological texts and movements, facilitating the depth of reflection necessary for critiquing long-standing ecclesial paradigms.

In this article, content analysis serves as the analytical lens through which the development and decline of Christendom are evaluated. By engaging with historical theological sources, church history, and contemporary missiological critiques, this method reveals how theological justifications for power have evolved and encountered challenges. This approach aligns with the broader aim of the study: to discern how God's redemptive mission has continued to unfold, often despite institutional distortions.

6.4 Framing Theoretical Coherence and Anticipating Counter-Perspectives

This article establishes a theoretical foundation for the study by providing a critical theological analysis of Christendom's development and decline. It argues that Christendom signifies not the maturation of the Christian mission but rather its regression. It represents a departure from the cross-shaped path of discipleship and witness. By aligning itself with the empire, the Church compromised its prophetic vocation and often became complicit in systems of domination.

This thesis engages a variety of counter-perspectives. For instance, some theologians and historians view Christendom as a necessary stage in civilization or an instrument of moral order in society. While acknowledging these perspectives, this article contends that any gains attributed to Christendom must be weighed against the theological and missional costs incurred. These include the marginalization of dissenting voices, the suppression of contextual theologies, and the loss of ecclesial credibility in the public sphere.

Furthermore, this article establishes the conceptual groundwork for the exegetical articles that follow by emphasizing that biblical interpretation must be conducted with full awareness of the Church's historical missteps. It advocates for a hermeneutic that resists ideological captivity and recovers the gospel's radical, countercultural nature. Rather than merely representing a historical shift, the decline of Christendom is presented as a providential moment of theological recalibration and missional renewal.

In conclusion, this article serves as both a theoretical anchor and a methodological guide for the study. By interpreting the regression into Christendom theologically, highlighting its contextual relevance for Africa, and clarifying the use of content analysis, we ensure that the following articles are grounded and guided by a coherent theological vision. This coherence is essential for scholarly rigor and the Church's ongoing participation in the *missio Dei* in a world beyond Christendom.

CHAPTER 3: (ARTICLE 2):

“The missiological implications of Jesus’s final departure from the Temple for Western Christendom.’

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Original Research

The missiological implications of Jesus’s final departure from the Temple for Western Christendom

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1. Abstract

This article analyses the final departure of Jesus Christ from the Temple in Jerusalem during his last days on earth, signifying a critical juncture in God’s interaction and engagement with his chosen people and consequently establishing the foundation for the spread of Christianity. By examining this event and contextualising it within the framework of God’s prior actions concerning the Temple, this article aims to clarify the underlying rationale for this transformation in his relationship with his chosen people. Using a missiological perspective, the study extracts fundamental biblical principles that may serve as criteria for evaluating modern Christendom and the Western Church’s current existential crisis, which urgently highlights its failure to fulfil God’s mission in today’s dynamic world. Through understanding the factors that contributed to this historical shift in God’s engagement, valuable insights can be gained to urge the Western Church to reassess its contemporary missiological disposition promptly.

Contribution: The article contributes significantly to the journal’s mission of advancing Reformed Theology by examining Jesus Christ’s final departure from the Temple, identifying it as a pivotal event in God’s interaction with his people and the foundation for Christianity’s dissemination. Additionally, it offers a missiological viewpoint to assess present challenges confronting the

Western Church, prompting a re-evaluation of its mission strategy within contemporary contexts, thereby enriching the discourse on Reformed Theology and its relevance in today's world.

Keywords: Western Christianity; Christendom; Death of Christendom; religious delusion; missional ecclesiology.

2. Introduction

For approximately a millennium, during the era of the Old Testament, a physical sanctuary existed wherein God engaged with his chosen people, Israel. The arrival of Jesus Christ on earth, under God's providential timing (Eph 1:10), signified a paradigmatic shift in his relationship with his people. In the closing days of Jesus's earthly ministry, He deliberately entered and subsequently departed from the Temple in Jerusalem for the very last time. This act foreshadowed the Temple's destruction approximately 30 years later, an event He predicted to his disciples shortly after leaving the Temple (Mt 24:1-2). Although the Bible indicates that this was not the first instance in redemption history where God chose to disengage from his chosen people, it was a definitive moment within salvation history that catalysed a total transformation in God's divine relationship with his chosen people.

Fast forward nearly two millennia to discover Western Christianity experiencing an existential crisis increasingly referred to as the 'death' or end of Christendom (Guder, n.d.: 1). The Christian Church, rooted in the New Testament, faces a desperate struggle for survival within Western culture. Western theology remains stagnant, maintaining a paralysing status quo mentality (Sanneh, 2003:3). A startling wake-up call arises from the depths of missiological isolation, demanding an urgent inquiry beyond the visible and perplexing geo-political global events of our time (Ott & Netland, 2006:15). This call seeks to comprehend the causes behind these transformative developments, affecting both the world and the Christian Church. It is a call for a return to the Bible. The question arises: What is prompting the providential God to permit this transformative period in human history? This article aims to provide a biblical answer, clarifying the reasons and purpose for the current paradigmatic shift in God's engagement with Western Christianity.

3. God's engagement with his chosen people from the Old Testament perspective

3.1 A universal perspective on redemption

From the very beginning of time, the Creator God established a profound and enduring relationship with the first humans, whom He created in his image (Gn 1:26). This relationship was intended to continue eternally. The unfortunate fall of the first humans in the Garden of Eden permanently disrupted this intimate connection between God and humanity. The Bible, however, reveals that the fall did not extinguish God's relationship with humanity but prompted another redemptive response from Him. As early as Genesis 3:9, God interacted with Adam and Eve as they attempted to conceal themselves from Him. This redemptive re-engagement by God to restore their relationship signified the initial disclosure of the *missio Dei* (the mission of God), as explained by Flett (2010), a plan preordained by God before creation (Eph 1:10).

Despite the fall and its grave repercussions, the Bible explicitly reveals that God wants to reconcile with all of humanity. Acknowledging human sin in the book of Genesis and its intensification leading up to the flood narrative (Gn 3–9), God recommences his redemptive journey with Noah and his descendants (Gn 9–10). The account of the Tower of Babel underscores humanity's inherent sinful nature in their collective enmity but also unveils God's gracious perseverance in continuing his outreach. God enables humanity's proliferation throughout the earth by dispersing individuals across the globe into diverse nations and languages (Gn 11). Genesis 12 subsequently discloses the intricate particulars of God's redemptive re-engagement with fallen humanity when He enlisted Abram and his descendants as a chosen people for his global mission (Gn 12:1-3). God aimed to extend his reach and bless all of humanity through Abram and his descendants.

It is crucial to acknowledge that God's redemptive re-engagement with fallen humanity would transpire within the context and over the unfolding millennia of fallen human history. Abram's calling set the stage for the Old Testament phase of the *missio Dei*. The biblical revelation of Israel's history in the Old Testament unveils God's sustained redemptive concern for all of humanity. As the Creator and Lord of the entire world, the God of Israel must consistently be recognised in relation to the histories of all nations. God's involvement with Israel's history can only be understood in conjunction with his connection to other nations (Bosch, 1991:18). The divine election of Israel should not be misinterpreted as a rejection of other nations (Wright, 2006:263).

3.2 A particularistic perspective on redemption

God's universalistic redemptive involvement with all of humanity simultaneously demonstrates a highly particularistic emphasis (Wright, 2006:252). A covenantal framework established, disclosed, and fully actualised within Old Testament history serves as the basis for the initial development of the *missio Dei*. This engagement with Israel as God's chosen people manifests in his redemptive presence among them, consequently facilitating their redemptive presence and mission within the broader human community.

3.3 The presence of God among his chosen people

Initially, the focus of God's presence amid his chosen people revolved around an altar. Introduced in Genesis 4, the altar symbolises the transformative re-engagement God initiates and establishes with sinners following the fall. The required sacrifice on the altar unveils the specific new rules of engagement with the holy God. The renewed relationship between God and his people must facilitate reconciliation through atonement and reestablish devotion through sacrifice (Leder, 2019:60-61). The Old Testament altar serves this purpose within the religion of God's people, facilitating complete atonement for human sin while simultaneously requesting and initiating total dedication to his service. The altar of atonement, as a focal point for interaction between a merciful God and the fallen humanity, represents both the complete renunciation of sin and the unconditional, self-sacrificial commitment to follow God's will. God's chosen people are saved to serve.

The progression from simple altars constructed by early biblical figures such as Cain, Abel, Noah, and Abram foreshadowed the eventual emergence of a more significant sanctuary within Israel's history (Leder, 2019:58). This physical sanctuary became integral to the lives of God's people, as numerous pivotal events in biblical and historical records transpired within and around Israel's sacred spaces, underscoring their utmost importance in ancient Israel. A very brief historical overview spanning around one thousand years of God's sanctuary among the people of Israel underscores its significance in God's interaction with his people for the sake of his mission.

3.3.1 The Tabernacle

After Israel's exodus from Egypt, God ordered the creation of the Tabernacle, a portable sanctuary for the nomadic nation journeying to the promised land of Canaan. As God's 'earthly dwelling place', the Tabernacle symbolised his presence during their journey through the desert. Meticulously crafted under Moses' guidance at Mount Sinai, it remained the central religious focus for the people of Israel. Nine months after they departed from Egypt, God's glory, manifested as a cloud, descended from Mount Sinai to inhabit the Holy of Holies within the Tabernacle (Ex 26).

It is vital to recognise that shortly after embarking on their desert journey, the people of Israel transgressed against God (Ex 33). God promptly commanded that the Tabernacle be erected outside the Jewish camp and threatened to withdraw his presence from their midst and journey, due to their transgressions. Even at the very start of their journey with God, the Bible is clear that He would disengage from his people when they waver in their devotion and religious commitment. They are different from other nations because of God's presence in their midst (Ex 33:16). If they sin against God, they will become just like all the other nations because God will no longer be in their midst.

3.3.2 The town of Shiloh

The town of Shiloh played a central role in Israel's cultural and spiritual life upon entering Canaan, serving as the hub for worship with the Tabernacle (Jos 18:1). The Tabernacle was erected in this town (Homan, 2007) following their entrance into Canaan. Its significance spanned approximately 369 years, marked by difficult periods during the era of judges and the early monarchy. Shiloh's history can be divided into pre-monarchy, monarchy, and decline phases. During the pre-monarchy era, it unified the 12 tribes, fostering a shared national identity. It remained a religious nucleus in the monarchy period, particularly for the northern tribes. However, Shiloh suffered a setback when besieged by the Philistines, leading to the loss of the Ark, which symbolised Israel's spiritual decline. This decline accelerated with the exile of the northern tribes, reflecting divine retribution for faithlessness. God's withdrawal mirrored Israel's disobedience, marking a pivotal moment in their history.

3.3.3 The First Temple in Jerusalem

The First Temple, also known as the Temple of Solomon, held profound significance as Israel's sanctuary and symbolised their religious and national identity. It was the central religious, political, social, cultural, and economic institution in ancient Israel (Seely, 2019:53). Constructed on Mount Moriah, where Abraham faced the trial of sacrificing Isaac, it represented Israel's faith and unity, particularly during the eras of prophets like Jeremiah and Isaiah. However, as Israel drifted from devotion to God, as warned by their spiritual leaders, the Temple met its demise. The Assyrian conquest of the northern kingdom in 722 BCE and the Babylonian exile of Judah in 586 BCE led to the destruction of Solomon's Temple after 360 years. This destruction, within the geo-political context of the ancient world, served as a divine retribution for Israel's failure to repent and align with God's purpose.

3.3.4 The Second Temple (Temple of Zerubbabel)

Following Cyrus of Persia's conquest of Babylon in 539 BCE, the Jews were allowed to return from exile and began rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem. The Second Temple, also known as the Temple of Zerubbabel, became the new centre of Jewish worship and religious life. Its completion in 515 BCE ushered in a period of relative tranquillity. Regrettably, this respite was short-lived as power shifts within the dominant Empire led to Jewish subjugation under Antiochus Epiphanes from 175 to 164 BCE. The courageous Maccabean revolt culminated in the Temple's rededication in 165 BCE during a challenging time for the Jewish people. Israel never really recovered their independence. Within those exceedingly tricky and challenging geo-political realities, the Temple in Jerusalem remained the centre of their religious engagement with God.

3.3.5 The Temple of Herod

The Temple during Jesus's time was constructed by Herod the Great, who the Romans appointed to serve as king of Judea from 37 to 4 BCE. Despite the grief and fear he instilled in the Jewish people, Herod was a master builder, and the Temple was the crowning achievement of his accomplishments. It was to this magnificent structure that Jewish pilgrims from across the Mediterranean came to worship. It is this 'Second Temple Judaism' (Salo, 2011:3) that Jesus Christ encountered when his earthly ministry commenced. Nearly 1000 years of God's redemptive engagement with his chosen people at a physical sanctuary was coming to a climactic end.

4. Second Temple Judaism and the Temple in Jerusalem

4.1 Onset

The Jerusalem Temple was a multifaceted institution, serving not only as a spiritual Centre for the Jewish people but also as an economic powerhouse deeply connected with the sociopolitical context of Judea within the Roman Empire. Its significance transcended mere religious worship, embracing intricate economic and political dynamics that shaped the landscape of Second Temple Judaism (Casey, 1997:320). It is very important to understand this context as a background to Jesus Christ's last visit to the Temple.

4.2 Ethical and religious implications of Temple economics

Economically, the Temple functioned as a bustling commercial hub, often likened to the 'Royal Bank of Judea' (Hamilton, 1964:370). Many transactions occurred within its precincts, especially in the Court of the Gentiles. The influx of money during significant festivals, notably Passover, was considerable, with the historian Josephus recording the sale of hundreds of thousands of

sacrificial animals (Evans, 1993:93) during such an event. The financial activity of the Temple extended beyond local boundaries, with substantial contributions flowing into the Temple from both Palestine and the Diaspora. These funds supported ongoing construction projects within the Temple and financed various initiatives benefiting Jerusalem as a whole. The Temple Bank, managed by the High Priestly Aristocracy, was a pivotal link between the religious and the economic spheres (Hamilton, 1964:367). While essential for sacrificial worship, the involvement of merchants and money changers also highlighted the complex economic relationships between the Jewish elite and Roman authorities (Casey, 1997:315). This convergence of religious and economic interests raised ethical concerns regarding the Temple's sanctity as God's dwelling place.

4.3 Political landscape of Judea during the Second Temple period

Politically, Judea simmered with tension as diverse religious and cultural factions competed for influence. The presence of zealots and brigands underscored the volatile atmosphere characterised by resistance to Roman rule (Casey, 1997:313). Crucifixions, indicative of Roman repression, often followed outbreaks of nationalist zeal, reflecting the difficult balance of power at times when violent nationalistic resistance against Rome was prevalent among the Jewish people (Wedderburn, 2006:4). These were specifically turbulent years in the history of the Jewish people. The Jewish-Roman war would commence within just a few years after Jesus's earthly ministry (AD 66–70).

4.4 Closure

The Temple in Jerusalem's centrality in the Second Temple Judaism period cannot be overstated, as it served as the epicentre of Israel's national, political, economic, and religious identity. Any crisis within the Temple naturally reverberated throughout the Jewish community and economy, highlighting its pivotal role in the socio-economic landscape of Judea. Therefore, understanding the Temple's economic, cultural, and political significance is paramount in comprehending the events surrounding Jesus Christ's final visit to the Temple (Salo, 2011:15).

5. God's transformative engagement with his chosen people from the New Testament perspective

5.1 Onset

It was prophesied throughout Old Testament times, and therefore expected, that the Messiah would visit God's chosen people (Is 7:14). His coming to this world at God's appointed time is

therefore the ultimate apex in God's redemptive engagement with his chosen people and all of humanity.

In the final days of his earthly ministry, Jesus visited the Temple in Jerusalem for the very last time. This event is consistently documented across all four Gospels, with each providing a unique perspective. Scholars have underscored the significance of this Temple incident in comprehending the events leading to Jesus's arrest and crucifixion and illuminating the purpose of his mission in the world (Evans, 1989:237). This article aims to present a comprehensive account of Jesus's final Temple visit, specifically focusing on its portrayal in the Gospel of Mark. Mark's Gospel is selected due to its distinct narrative structure and extensive use of Old Testament references, which contextualise the Temple cleansing within a broader biblical framework and connect it with comparable Old Testament events (Casey, 1997:307).

5.2 Contextual setting of Jesus's last visit to the Temple

Upon Jesus Christ's entry into Jerusalem, He was greeted as a king by an enthusiastic crowd (Mk 11:1-11). However, Jesus knew that the people's expectations were misplaced and that they did not really understand what was happening, and Luke explicitly states that Jesus wept upon entering Jerusalem (Lk 19:41-42). Mark's narrative subsequently describes Jesus's encounter with a barren fig tree that was subsequently cursed by him (Mk 11:12-14). In Mark's narrative, the encounter with the barren fig tree holds an especially important and strategic place within the context of Jesus's visit to the Temple. It is important to take note of this intentional inclusion in the narrative when seeking to fully understand this passage's message. Following the Temple incident, the fig tree is mentioned again, emphasising that it was now entirely withered and dead (Mk 11:20-21). Jesus's actions towards the fig tree are widely regarded as crucial for understanding his actions at the Temple (Evans, 1989:239).

It must be concluded that the Temple event was not an impulsive act by Jesus Christ, but a very deliberate and calculated undertaking (Lukito, 1993:37). Within the whole of biblical revelation, it is without doubt a decisive and paradigmatic moment that completely altered God's relationship with his chosen people. Jesus's intention transpired shortly after He entered the Temple grounds and reached the Court of the Gentiles (Casey, 1997:309). This dedicated area was the only area accessible to non-Jews and, therefore, symbolically served as a point of contact for Gentiles (non-Jews) to encounter God. Upon entering this outer space at the Temple, Jesus discovered a bustling marketplace (Mk 11:15). The commercial activities, such as money-changing and selling sacrificial animals, although relevant and necessary to Temple service, had eclipsed its primary religious function (Evans, 1989:251). Although it served a purpose within the broader scheme of religious activities, it certainly obstructed the Temple's crucial intended focus as God's dwelling

place. There was no room for non-Jews to meet God. Jesus immediately overturned the merchants' tables and expelled them from the premises, employing language steeped in Old Testament quotations that conveyed not only God's intended purpose for the Temple among his people, but also his profound disdain for the self-serving degradation of their religion becoming visible.

5.3 Old Testament references and their interpretation

Mark's narrative illuminates Old Testament history by underscoring the continuity of God's purpose throughout the era and highlighting Israel's persistent failure to fulfil its missional purpose. By referencing Isaiah 56:7, Jesus affirmed that God intended his Temple to serve as a house of prayer for all nations. However, Jesus's citation of Jeremiah 7:11 condemned the Jewish people and their leaders for transforming the Temple into a 'den of robbers', where individuals pursued selfish desires at others' expense.

These Old Testament citations reveal that this transgression was not new but a recurring sin throughout Israel's history. The reason for God's decisive actions against Israel's sanctuaries in the past remains relevant. This is where Mark's deliberate mention of the incident involving a barren fig tree comes into play. This event confirms a historical truth that symbolises Israel's continued spiritual barrenness and recurring religious delusion (Jr 7:4). It also becomes the central focus in Jesus's final visit to the Temple in Jerusalem.

It is crucial to note that Jesus's climactic diagnosis represents the culmination of a thousand years of Israel's spiritual delusion, where they were practically using God to serve their interests. The same attitude already exposed and condemned by the Old Testament prophets is their default religious delusion. God would not allow it to continue.

5.4 Jesus's prediction of the Temple's destruction

Following His dramatic act in the Temple, Jesus's disciples sought clarification from Him, as recorded in Matthew 24:21. Jesus responded unequivocally, predicting that no stone of the Temple would remain intact; everything would be torn down. This prediction of a future catastrophe was fulfilled approximately 30 years later and serves as a stark reminder of previous events at Shiloh (Ps 78:60 and Jr 7:12-14) and the same Temple during earlier times (Lm 2:6). The final destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem occurred during the Jewish-Roman war, resulting in its complete devastation.

5.5 Closure

The Old Testament phase of the *missio Dei* highlights God's concern for the nations and Israel, exposing Israel's failure to fulfil its role as God's chosen people in advancing his global mission. Throughout the Old Testament, as confirmed again by Jesus's last visit to the Temple in Jerusalem, Israel's misuse of the physical sanctuary – a symbol of God's redemptive presence – reveals their self-serving tendencies rather than their God-intended purpose of being a light to the nations. This pattern persists throughout history and into Jesus's time, as evidenced by his final entrance into and eventual last exit from the Temple in Jerusalem. His assessment of the situation within the Gentiles' court confirms the historical trend of Israel exploiting God's name for selfish gains, reflecting the pervasive religious distortion of the Second Temple Judaism during his earthly ministry.

6. Exploring God's engagement with his chosen people amid Western Christianity's existential crisis

6.1 Onset

In the contemporary Western world, the Christian faith grapples with a profound dilemma that extends beyond mere cultural consequences to the very essence of Western Christianity itself (Hall, 1997: vii). Recognising the gravity of this crisis, Western theology has embarked on a rigorous research journey, seeking to fully comprehend its nature and implications (Ferreira & Chipenyu, 2021). The aim of all this statistical investigation is not merely to quantify the scope and depth of the issue, but to lay the groundwork for empirically based solutions.

However, assuming that an exhaustive understanding of the problem will yield unambiguous remedies may prove overly simplistic. The crisis confronting Christianity in the West is multifaceted, intricately interwoven with contextual factors and the complicated geopolitical dynamics of our era. These diverse components contribute to the formidable challenges confronting the Christian Church in the West.

Embarking on the research endeavour of this article necessitates recognising a critical truth: in our quest for solutions, we risk neglecting to contemplate our own role as part of Western Christianity in exacerbating the problem. To address this crisis more effectively, we must humbly seek divine guidance, reflecting on the profound implications of why such challenges have emerged under God's providence. Through this prioritised introspection, guided by humility and reverence, we may better comprehend our predicament and delineate a course towards meaningful resolutions.

The subsequent exploration of this article delves into a missionary-focused historical overview of Christianity, tracing its trajectory from Jesus's departure from the Temple in Jerusalem to the emergence of the Church's global mission over the past two millennia. This second phase of the *missio Dei* (mission ecclesia) will be evaluated from the correct biblical perspective gleaned during the first phase of the *missio Dei*.

6.2 From the Temple of Jerusalem to the formation of global Christianity

Jesus's final departure from the Temple in Jerusalem draws attention to what He was leaving behind and highlights his purposeful progression towards God's transformative re-engagement with his chosen people. Jesus Christ commenced the revival and restoration of God's redemptive global mission at the divinely appointed time. It is crucial to recognise that this re-engagement, as it was from the outset, is again centred on an altar – specifically now, the cross at Calvary. This 'altar' would fulfill all Old Testament redemptive symbols and prophecies, highlighting God's engagement with sinful humanity.

As in the Old Testament era, the sacrifice on this altar establishes redemption and initiates a renewed sacrificial commitment from all of God's people who partake in Jesus's redemptive atonement. Through death, God elicits new life. Jesus Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension fulfilled everything the Old Testament rituals indicated. He became the perfect sacrifice to secure final and complete redemption and constituted the new Temple – the Church of the New Testament (Eph 2:20-22). Those incorporated sacrificially into his body ultimately become part of God's mission. God's chosen people are saved to serve.

The stage was now prepared for the second phase of the *missio Dei*: the mission of the Christian Church [*missio ecclesia*], equipped and dispatched by Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth, until the end of time (Ac 1:8). A significant missional and cross-cultural emphasis emerged within New Testament theology, demonstrating a deliberate shift from an Old Testament Jewish cultural context to a multicultural Hellenistic context. God used an ultimate Jew (Saul – Phil 3:3-9) to become the apostle to the Gentiles (Eph 3:7), introducing Christianity as the sole true religion for all humanity.

This section of the article aims to provide a missionary-focused historical overview of Christianity as it evolved into a world religion and a global reality over the past 2000 years. This succinct 'missional audit' aims to offer a novel and elucidating perspective on the existential crisis that Western Christianity is confronted with today.

6.3 Christianity and the development of Western culture

The history of Christianity represents a complex narrative spanning numerous decades, encompassing detailed accounts of various time frames, periods, and eras. It is beyond the scope of this article to address all theological nuances emerging during this extensive period in detail. This section of the article aims to avoid oversimplification of intricate historical and theological developments, striving to facilitate a more granular examination of historical trends and to provide a nuanced understanding of the continuous and interconnected developments in the history of Christianity. The innovative approach of Phyllis Tickle (2008, 2012b), which divides human history into 500-year time frames, proves beneficial to this endeavour. Furthermore, David Bosch's (1991:181) employment of Hans Küng's 'historico-theological' subdivisions, dividing the entire history of Christianity into six major paradigms, also offers valuable insights. These paradigms (ages or time frames) distinguish the subtle changes influencing Western Christianity's transformation into Christendom (Western Cultural Christianity). The premise of this article posits that Christianity's metamorphosis into Christendom constitutes the primary reason for God's transformation in his engagement with Western Christianity – a claim this article seeks to substantiate.

1 CE – 500 CE: Early Christian Church and New Testament writings

The first age of Christianity marks a pivotal period characterised by the initial cross-cultural diffusion of the Christian faith. In this time frame, as described by Bosch's apocalyptic paradigm, the early Christians embraced a thoroughly missional ethos, anticipating the imminent return of Jesus within their lifetimes. The persecution of the Jerusalem Church led to the 'forced' expansion of Christianity through the known world of that time (Ac 8:1). The Jewish landscape of God's chosen people changed entirely with the tumultuous Jewish-Roman war, leading to the disappearance of the Jewish state. Notably, it was in the Gentile city of Antioch where believers were first dubbed 'Christians', signifying a notable transition in the Christian movement's identity (Ac 11:26). The formation of the New Testament Church clearly reveals God's transformative engagement with a chosen people for the sake of his global mission. The cross-cultural diffusion of God's people saved the *missio Dei* (Walls, 1996:18).

500 CE – 1000 CE: Hellenistic-Roman institutionalisation and state religion

The second age witnesses Christianity's transition from a mission-focused movement to a more institutionalised entity. It is called the period of the ecclesiasticisation of salvation (Bosch, 1991:217). The Hellenistic-Roman civilisation that Christianity now penetrated offered a total system of thought to the Christian faith, with the result that orthodoxy was established (Walls 1996:19). Institutionalised Christianity needed to define its beliefs within a new cultural context

and amid growing intellectual challenges and even heresy. Over time, Christianity evolved into a state religion, ushering in theological and missional changes (Young, 2006a). In this age, the Christian faith developed from a persecuted minority to the instituted majority within the dominant cultural context of the Roman Empire.

1000 CE – 1500 CE: Barbarian and Western Europe

The third and fourth ages unfold against the backdrop of the so-called Dark or Middle Ages. The end of the Hellenistic-Roman phase of Christianity came with the collapse of the Western Roman Empire before the barbarians (Walls, 1996:19). It can be equated with the end of a Christian civilisation. However, a new age (Walls, 1996:19-20) not conditioned by a city-based literary, intellectual, and technological tradition, but by the circumstances of peasant cultivators and their harsh, uncertain lives developed. It started the barbarian phase, wherein Christianity became a people's religion. According to Phyllis Tickle (2012 b:14), this was the age when Christianity moved into monasticism that would protect, preserve, and characterise it for six centuries. The cultural gap bridged during this phase was just as great as that between Jew and Greek of the first phase. The Christianity of a classical civilisation became the faith of peasant cultivators, and the new idea and concept of the Christian nation was born (Walls, 1996:20).

The fourth stage culminates as a natural development from the third. Christian practice and faith in its Hellenistic-Roman form interacted with the culture of the Northern peoples to produce a remarkably coherent Christian religious system across Western and Central Europe (Walls, 1996:20). It was the birth of what can be called 'territorial Christianity'.³ Walls (1996:20) explains it as a new hybrid Western form of Christianity that became the dominant representation of Christianity, which was radically revised in the 16th-century Reformation.

1500 CE – 2000 CE and beyond: Global domination and the Western world

The fifth and sixth ages herald a period of unparalleled global influence for Christianity, which was firmly established within Western Europe by this time. The age of expanding Europe was established. Christianity's influence shaped the foundational establishment and extension of Western civilisation profoundly. Rooted in Jewish tradition, Christianity was pivotal in moulding the modern world (Guinness, 2022). The resulting Christian consensus within Western culture impacted the Western world's political, cultural, economic, and religious dimensions, granting Christianity an imperial status (Hall, 1997:1). The West was called the *Corpus Christianum* [Christendom]. In the wake of the Enlightenment (Bosch, 1991:262–345) the Western missionary movement inserted into the momentum of European expansion, and colonisation increasingly aligned God's kingdom with the culture and civilisation of the West (Bosch, 1991:271). Colonisation and Christianisation not only went hand in hand but were two sides of the same coin

(Bosch 1991:275). Religious superiority spawned cultural superiority (Bosch, 1991:291) and the cross-cultural 'transplantation' of Christianity (Walls, 1996:21).

The sixth age started with a time called the 'great confusion', or 'great betrayal' (Newbigin, 1988:81) – exposing the failures of Western 'Corpus Christianum' [Christendom]. It dawned when two devastating World Wars shook Western civilisation to its very core. The stage was set wherein the rapid and all-consuming process of Western globalisation and secularisation contributed to challenging traditional notions of Western religious dominance. Again, as in every age or phase described above, Christian civilisation within the current dominant cultural form seems to be in an existential crisis. Christendom has become suspect. A missiological diagnosis at the Mission Conference at Tambaram in 1938 already hinted at the fact that 'the birth of a new Christendom is needed at the very moment when the old Christendom seemed to be almost doomed to destruction' (Newbigin, 1988:85). This is the start of the emergence of a new ecumenical paradigm (Bosch, 1991:349–510) – highlighting the need for a cross-cultural transmission of Christianity (Walls, 1996:22). This is precisely what the New Testament and Church and mission history is so clearly revealing and again demanding. God's transformative engagement with his chosen people is for continuing his global mission.

7. Christendom and Western theology

7.1 Onset

Throughout the annals of Christian history, Walls (1996:53) identifies two distinct forces in tension. The first is an indigenising principle, a homing instinct that nurtures a sense of belonging within a culture. The second force is a 'pilgrim' principle that generates a feeling of displacement within the Christian community, as it perceives itself not entirely at home in this world. These opposing principles influence the Church's vision: the indigenising force tends to localise it, whereas the pilgrim principle seeks to universalise it. Consequently, the Church may become excessively entrenched in and compromised by local customs and traditions, legitimising a particular group's economic, social, and political interests. This phenomenon is referred to as civil religion – a persistent danger when Christianity becomes firmly established within any given community (Walls, 1996:54). It seems as if this is precisely the compromising challenge that Christianity succumbed to within Western culture. Murray's inquiry (2004:44) may be affirmed: 'Had the Empire co-opted and domesticated Christianity?'

7.2 Christianity becoming Christendom

From a historical perspective, it becomes clear that Christianity consolidated and institutionalised from the late New Testament era onward. As it entered a new cultural context, the focus of the Church shifted from missional outreach to a more structured organisation with established rules and traditions (Dreyer, 2013:2). It is also clear that every prevailing cultural milieu that Christianity entered during its historical path influenced and shaped its development and its theological agenda.

When Christianity transformed from a movement into the official religion of the Roman Empire under Constantine (AD 313) and Theodosius I (AD 380), its sense of missionary purpose about the world diminished (Shenk, 2005:74). As the Church no longer faced a pluralistic context, the connection between mission and theology dissolved, leading to the emergence of an introverted theology (Laing, 2009:12). As the gospel passed through the cultural framework of the Western Church, Christianity became a Western cultural expression of the gospel, laying the groundwork for Christendom. In its 'hybrid' (Walls, 1996:20) form within Western cultural expression, it became 'tribal' and 'territorial', four branching into competing 'Christendoms' (Murray, 2004). It is also an era that was mainly characterised by internal debates among Christians and apologetic arguments against heretics (Bosch, 1991:244). The Church ceased to perceive itself as a missionary community, shifting its focus from missional outreach to the pastoral care of its members. All ministerial energies focused exclusively on Church maintenance, pastoral care, and teaching (Murray, 2004:129).

7.3 Christendom and Western theology

The traditional understanding of missiology as the mother of all theology (Kähler, 1971:190)⁵ and theology as knowledge of God (Farley, 1983: xi) was never in doubt for nearly the first 11 centuries of Christian history (Mullin, 2008: xii–xiii). With the advent of the Western University and the dawn of the Enlightenment, theology as knowledge (divine wisdom) changed into theology as a science.⁷ Theology became a technical and scholarly undertaking as systematic theology (Farley, 1983:39). A Christianised form of the Enlightenment developed: a Christianity shaped to fit the Enlightenment worldview that became the dominant Western expression of Christianity (Walls, 2002:223). The Enlightenment challenged traditional modes of thought, replacing them with critical and rational ways of understanding that facilitated the introduction of these modes of thought into culture, education, and religion. It persists even today in the form of ideals of scholarship, evidence, and criticism (Farley, 1983:40). It changed the Western academy so that modern Western theology is Enlightenment theology (Walls, 2002:223).

Muggeridge (1980:17) is convinced that while previous civilisations were overthrown by barbarians from the outside, Christendom dreamed up its dissolution in the minds of its intellectual elites. He is supported in his conclusion by Guinness (2022), who affirms the argument that Christendom's dissolution happened because the 'intelligentsia' of the West rejected the faith that made the West. According to Walls (2002:222), the tragic results are that the Western academy is as sick as the Greek Academy was in the early days of Christianity. He proclaims that in some areas it is corrupted (Walls, 2002:223). Western Universities are becoming increasingly bound to Mammon⁸ because career-driven academics (Young, 2006b) embark on research projects, focusing on their academic interests and the advancement of their professional careers (Walls, 2002:222). The context of the Western academy is now more interested in profits than prophets (Wells, 1993:115).

Once the bastion of Christian thought and the representative of a Christian consensus within Western culture, the Western academy is now devoid of any substantial Christian influence. Its theology is transformed into career-driven and professional scholarly pursuits, divorced from any lived experience of the Christian Church. Missiology as a theological 'focus area' is relegated to an expendable extra (Bosch, 1991:492), as 'real' scholars are not inclined to missions. On the other hand, ten mission practitioners have separated themselves from academic theology, resulting in mission becoming merely a human response to human needs (Young, 2006b). The distance between the Church and the academy has grown with only an academic compromise, wherein the academy endeavours to provide professional training for Church ministry.

The consequence for the Christian Church is that an 'abnormal theology', namely a mission-less ecclesiology, developed within Christendom theology (Laing, 2009:11). Andria & Saayman (2003:503) call it a defective ecclesiology, as neither the structures nor the theology of the established Western traditional churches is missional. Shaped by the legacy of Christendom (Guder, 1998:5), the area of ecclesiology confronts the Western Church with its most significant problems (Guder, n.d.: 4). It is also confirmed by Shenk (2001:5) that the fundamental theological issue of the Western Church is an ecclesiology without mission. Theology, therefore, became scholarly reflection in the academy and ministerial practice in the Church. The social space became completely emptied of theology (Wells, 1993:108).

The results are indeed indicative of a significant issue. As Western civilisation faces an unprecedented crisis – 'the mother of all crises' (Kirk, 1999a:157), also referred to as its 'civilizational moment' (Guinness, 2022)– Western Christianity simultaneously finds itself in a state of total dissolution, described as its 'death throes' (Hall, 1997: ix). More and more researchers are now speaking of the 'death' of Christendom. The pervasive influence of Western culture, coupled with the all-encompassing process of secularisation, has led to Western

Christianity's cultural compromise and ultimate and complete assimilation into the fabric of Western society. Its theological underpinnings served to validate and promote the expansion of Western culture; however, it ultimately succumbed to an extensive history of cultural compromise and even captivity (Guder, n.d.:3). This decline originated from within the religion itself and has resulted in Christianity now facing the paramount crisis of being entangled in the epistemological confusion that is prevalent in Western culture. The epistemological crisis arises from an idolatrous faith in reason's capacity to regulate and comprehend the entirety of nature and experience. Currently, the West faces a crisis of knowledge (Clayton, 1999:78), characterised by epistemological uncertainty and a decreased confidence in establishing an adequate foundation for knowledge acquisition.

7.4 'Christendom' as a 'religious delusion'?

'Christendom' today finds itself without any influence and voiceless within a culture that has completely forsaken its spiritual moorings. It has become a mission-less Church within a cultural context that has become a mission field. The tragedy is that, in some way, it is still 'business as usual' within the academic environment of Western culture and the Christian ministry of the local Church. Western theology is still part of the scholarly context of the Western University, but relegated to a domesticated corner, where it tries to be culturally relevant,¹³ as the 'chief spiritual support' of the dominant society (Wink, 1993:28), with an appealing spiritual message (2 Tm 4:3-4). It also tries to serve the Western Church with 'professional ministerial theological education', while the Church desperately struggles in a survivalist-maintenance mode. The biggest problem, however, is that complacency and self-deception are the greatest dangers facing the Christian Church (Hall, 1999:70).

Andrew Walls (1996:145) is convinced that Western theology has been the least affected by the new global transformation of the Christian world. His concern is echoed by Lamin Sanneh (2003:3), who posits that Church leaders are unable to comprehend fully, still less to respond effectively to, the magnitude of the de-Christianisation of the West and the Christianisation of the non-Western. It must therefore be concluded that the Western theological academy is not in any way able to give theological leadership to the Church of the 21st century (Walls, 2011:239).

The paramount threat faced by the Christian Church is undoubtedly the peril of introversion (Hendrikus Berkhoff, quoted in Busch, 2010:87). As soon as this becomes the prevailing attitude, the Church neglects its calling to partake in the *missio Dei*, leading to stagnation and, consequently, disobedience. The fact of the matter is that a Church that abandons its missionary purpose ceases to fulfil its purpose (Bosch, 1991:494). Although it might seem very harsh to express it, it must be done with a sense of sadness: Christendom's time is over (Hall, 1997:19).

A sentiment echoed mainly from a neglected missional perspective. As God's mission continues with Christianity, now growing exponentially within a Third World context, Christendom is stuck in a 'bubble of self-delusion', mostly unaware of, but certainly unable to respond biblically to, the missiological challenges of our time (Buhlman, 1974). It seems as if much of our ecclesiology and Church polity is informed by a corporate rationalisation process aimed at justifying the status quo (Hall, 1997:7).

This is the Great Emergence, or transformation that Phyllis Tickle (2012a:76-77) refers to. Within the context of a generalised social, political, economic, intellectual, cultural shift during concomitant political, financial, and social upheavals (Tickle, 2012a:13), or about every 500 years the empowered structures of institutionalised Christianity, whatever it may be at that time, become an intolerable carapace that must be shattered so that renewal and new growth may occur (Tickle, 2012a:10).

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, the Christian Church confronts its most significant perils in the forms of complacency and self-deception, which have directed it along a profoundly erroneous path, akin to the failures of ancient Israel (Smith, 2010). Despite the lessons derived from Old and New Testament Scriptures, the Church has succumbed to a self-inflicted illusion, oblivious to its decline and incapable of taking corrective measures. Just as divine intervention occurred in biblical times to expose and transform religious delusions, there is an urgent need for a similar intervention within Western Christianity, which has reached an irreversible point marked by the demise of Christendom. This downfall necessitates a fundamental shift in ecclesiology, leading to the acknowledgement of the Church as a missionary community, rather than an institutional vestige of a past era (Newbigin, 2011:104).

Contemplating historical transitions of Christian heartlands from Jerusalem to Rome, Constantinople, and northern Europe, each yielding to external pressures or internal scepticism, it becomes evident that Christianity flourishes through adaptation and integration into new cultural contexts. Just as the gospel made a great escape before calamity struck at each turning point, the Church must adopt this principle of adaptation and renewal to navigate contemporary challenges. Consequently, the collapse of Christendom signals not the cessation of Christianity but an opportunity for its revitalisation through a renewed dedication to its missionary essence and a willingness to confront the realities of its complacency and self-deception (Stafford, 2021).

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10. Complementary to Chapter 3: Theological Methodology, Hermeneutical Framing, and Missional Relevance: Positioning the Temple Exit

10.1 Exegetical and Theological Framing of the Temple Exit

This article explores Jesus' final departure from the temple as a pivotal moment in the gospel narrative, laden with theological, ecclesiological, and missional significance. At the heart of this

study is the conviction that Jesus' exit from the temple was not merely a narrative transition but a deliberate, prophetic act with enduring implications for how God relates to institutional religion. It marks a divine judgment upon the temple system, which has become entangled with political power, economic corruption, and spiritual barrenness. Through this act, Jesus reveals the limitations of a religion obsessed with sacred space while disconnected from God's redemptive mission.

Theologically, the temple's exit reflects the prophetic tradition of divine departure found in Ezekiel 10, where the glory of God leaves the temple before its destruction. It signifies divine displeasure and a shift in God's presence toward a new covenantal reality. This article interprets Jesus' departure as inaugurating a post-temple era in which the focus of God's presence is no longer a geographical structure but a missional community. This interpretation aligns with the broader Johannine and Pauline witness, where the body of Christ and the community of believers become the new temple (John 2:19-21; 1 Corinthians 3:16-17).

Alternative theological interpretations abound. Dispensationalist readings often view the temple exit as temporary, anticipating a future restoration of the temple in Jerusalem. Others interpret Jesus' departure as a moment of lament rather than judgment, emphasizing divine sorrow over Israel's rejection. While acknowledging the emotional tone of Jesus' lament (e.g., Matthew 23:37), this article confirms that His departure was also a decisive act of withdrawal - a theological indictment of a religious system no longer aligned with God's purposes.

This leads to the provocative theological question: Is the decline of institutional religion in the West part of God's will? From a redemptive-historical perspective, the answer must consider the patterns of divine judgment and renewal seen throughout Scripture. Just as Jesus' departure from the temple paved the way for a new mission era through the Church, so too might the decline of Christendom signal a divine invitation to rediscover the Church's identity apart from power, privilege, and place. Rather than mourn the loss of religious influence, the Church is called to discern the presence of Christ outside the gates - among the marginal, the broken, and the missional fringe.

10.2 Missiological Implications for the Global and African Church

The missiological implications of Jesus' temple departure are profound and far-reaching. In contexts shaped by the legacy of Christendom, including much of the African Church, the temptation remains to equate God's presence with institutional permanence, architectural grandeur, and ecclesial dominance. Yet the biblical narrative points in a different direction: God is not bound to structures but is present wherever His mission is faithfully embodied.

For the African Church, which has inherited many of the institutional assumptions of Western Christendom, the temple exit serves as both a warning and an invitation. It warns against placing ultimate theological significance on sacred spaces, hierarchical structures, and clerical authority. It invites the Church to embrace a more fluid, incarnational, and prophetic witness that reflects the mobility of Christ's ministry and the dynamism of the early Church.

This article challenges African ecclesiology to interrogate its assumptions about where and how God's presence is mediated. In many African urban centres, cathedrals and mega-churches are symbolic replacements for the temple, drawing theological legitimacy from size, status, and spectacle. Yet Christ's absence from the temple underscores that religious form does not guarantee divine presence. The Church must re-centre its identity not around sacred buildings but sacrificial mission, prophetic justice, and kenotic love.

This shift is especially urgent in postcolonial African societies where the legacy of Christendom persists in the form of theological dependency, ecclesial mimicry, and political entanglement. A missiology shaped by the temple exit calls the African Church to become a temple not made with hands - a dispersed, indwelling community of presence instead of a centralized system of control.

10.3 Conceptual and Theoretical Coherence

Conceptually, this article contributes to the study's overarching thesis by framing the temple exit as a theological symbol of God's judgment on religious systems that fail to reflect His mission. It reinforces the broader claim that Christendom's decline is not a sociological anomaly but a theological necessity - a divine unmasking of religious compromise.

By aligning the temple exit with the prophetic tradition, this article situates itself within a theological trajectory that prioritizes obedience over ritual, justice over sacrifice, and presence over power. It challenges the Church to read Scripture not as a justification for institutional continuity, but as a call to continual reformation and missional renewal.

In engaging with counter-perspectives, this article acknowledges that some traditions view the temple as integral to God's eschatological plan. However, such views often rely on a reading of Scripture that overlooks the finality of Christ's redemptive work and the shift from temple-centric to Spirit-centric theology. The argument presented here maintains that Jesus' departure signifies a decisive theological break - a movement away from the centralisation of sacred space toward the decentralisation of divine presence in the world.

This reading reinforces the New Testament's missiological thrust, where the Church is sent into the world not to preserve a religious system but to embody God's reconciling presence among

the nations. This way, the article maintains coherence with the study's broader critique of Christendom and its call for a post-institutional, mission-shaped ecclesiology.

10.4 Methodological Clarification

As with the other articles in this study, this article employs a qualitative theological methodology grounded in content analysis. This method facilitates close reading of biblical texts and theological themes within their socio-political and canonical contexts. It enables the article to derive theological meaning from narrative structure, intertextual allusion, and historical resonance without relying on empirical data or social-scientific measurements.

The research question is rooted in the decision to use content analysis rather than empirical methods. The goal of this article is not to measure perceptions or behaviours but to uncover theological patterns and implications embedded in Scripture. Content analysis offers the necessary depth and flexibility to interpret biblical texts theologically and missiologically, making it an appropriate tool for examining the significance of Jesus' temple departure.

Furthermore, this article is shaped by the overarching research design articulated in the first article of this study, which established the decline of Christendom as a divinely shaped historical shift. That framing informs the present analysis by offering a theological rationale for interpreting Jesus' departure not merely as a historical event but as a paradigm of divine disengagement from compromised religion.

This article contributes to the study by focusing on the theological significance of divine absence and the reconfiguration of sacred space. Unlike the other articles, which engage more directly with political ideologies, inter-theological debates, or Pauline theology, this article emphasizes the symbolic rupture between institutional religion and divine mission. It affirms that the Church's future does not lie in reclaiming lost sacred spaces but in embodying God's redemptive presence wherever He is already at work.

In conclusion, the departure of Jesus from the temple serves as a theological anchor for the entire study. It articulates a decisive moment in redemptive history when God's presence leaves a corrupted institution and reappears in the margins, among the least and the lost. This moment offers judgment and hope for the global Church - especially for the African Church. It exposes the insufficiency of inherited Christendom models and calls the Church to recover its identity as a pilgrim people, dwelling in tents of presence rather than fortresses of power. This theological and methodological clarity ensures the article's distinctiveness and coherence within the broader research project.

CHAPTER 4: (ARTICLE 3)

‘Missional insights on socio-political realities, religious vulnerability, and the choice of Barabbas.’

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Original Research

Missional insights on socio-political realities, religious vulnerability, and the choice of Barabbas

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1. Abstract

This article presents a missional perspective on the complex interplay between socio-political realities, religious vulnerability, and the formation of political ideologies among Western Christians, drawing insights from the biblical narrative of the choice of Barabbas at Jesus’s trial. In today’s world, Western Christians are confronted with numerous socio-political challenges that can compromise their spiritual discernment, leading to religious delusion and, potentially, the adoption of politicised ideologies. We seek to unravel the underlying dynamics through a deep dive into the Jewish choice of Barabbas over Jesus. By examining the socio-political context of Roman occupation and Jewish societal pressures, we illuminate how these external factors influenced the religious vulnerability of the Jewish people. Furthermore, we explore how this vulnerability manifested in the decision to prefer Barabbas, a figure representing worldly resistance, over Jesus Christ, the embodiment of divine grace. From a missional perspective, we reflect on the implications of this historical event for contemporary Western Christian engagement with socio-political issues. We argue that understanding the delicate interplay between socio-

political context, religious vulnerability, and political ideology is essential for Western Christians seeking to embody the transformative mission of Christ in today's world.

Contribution: This article contributes to missional theology by offering insights into how believers can navigate socio-political complexities with spiritual discernment and faithful witness.

Keywords: Christendom; missio Dei; Barabbas; Religious delusion; religion and politics; socio-political vulnerability.

2. Introduction

2.1 Religious vulnerability of God's chosen people (The Jews – Israel) during the first coming of Jesus Christ

This article is written from a Reformed Biblical perspective. To truly affirm the Bible as God's revelation and deepen our understanding of Jesus Christ, it is essential to engage with the historical narrative of God's redemptive interaction with humanity as recorded in Scripture (Jn 3:16). The Bible reveals the divine story, mainly through God's chosen people, Israel, and invites us to explore the socio-political realities that shaped key moments in Old Testament history. However, the Bible provides limited details on the socio-political landscape of Jewish history between the Babylonian exile (586–539 BCE) and the Roman occupation during Jesus' earthly ministry. Therefore, a concise overview of this period is vital for a fuller grasp of the context into which Jesus Christ was born, in which he lived, taught, and carried out his redemptive work until his ultimate trial and crucifixion.

Considering the contemporary pursuit of understanding the 'historical Jesus,' this article does not question His existence but seeks a more profound knowledge of him to enrich our Christian discipleship. Understanding the socio-political dimensions of Jesus' message and ministry is of the utmost importance to fully appreciate the significance of his life and teachings (Borg, 1995:962; Wright, 2002:2).

2.2 From Babylonian exile to Roman occupation

The Babylonian exile and Persian period

The socio-political context of Jesus' ministry can be traced back to the Babylonian exile (586–539 BCE), a period that significantly transformed Jewish culture and religious life. Following Cyrus, the Great's conquest of Babylon in 539 BCE, he allowed some Jews to return to Jerusalem to

rebuild the Temple (Ez 1:1-10:14). This era witnessed a revival of Jewish religious practices, the compilation of the Hebrew Scriptures, and an increasing aspiration for political autonomy.

The Hellenistic period

In 333 BCE, Alexander the Great's conquest of Persia introduced Hellenistic influences that reshaped Jewish culture. After his death, Palestine came under the control of the Seleucid Empire.³ In 168 BCE, King Antiochus IV's efforts to impose Greek culture led to the desecration of the Temple and a prohibition on Jewish practices. The successful Jewish revolt led by the Hasmonean family (Maccabees) (Knight, 2024) symbolised hopes for independence and became a powerful emblem of resistance.

The Hasmonean rule

The Hasmonean period (142–163 BCE) ushered in Jewish autonomy and cultural revival, with early rulers promoting Jewish identity and prosperity. However, later Hasmonean rulers adopted Hellenistic practices, leading to internal divisions and marginalising traditional religious authorities. This disillusionment deepened the longing for a leader who would secure enduring freedom.

Roman intervention and Herodian rule

Rome's intervention in 63 BCE, followed by Herod the Great's⁴ rule as Rome's appointed king, exacerbated Jewish discontent. Although Herod expanded the Temple, his harsh rule fuelled resentment. After his death, direct Roman governance intensified oppression, culminating in severe rule by prefects such as Pontius Pilate. This ongoing political turmoil and dissatisfaction with earthly rulers set the stage for 1st-century Jewish hopes for a Messiah – a divinely anointed leader who would deliver them from oppression and restore Israel's sovereignty.

3. Socio-political context of 1st-century Jewish society

The socio-political landscape of 1st-century Judaism (Sanders & Pelikan, 2024), particularly during the latter part of the Second Temple Period (63 BCE – 70 CE), was profoundly influenced by the harsh realities of Roman occupation, internal Jewish divisions, and conflicts among various Jewish sects. This era, characterised by oppression and volatility, intensified the Jewish people's aspirations for liberation and their hopes for a revolutionary Messiah. In Theo-political terms, this period represented the 'fullness of time' (Eph 1:10) for the advent of Jesus Christ. First-century Palestine was moving towards a boiling point.

Economic and social structure

First-century Palestine was an agrarian, peasant society with a significant wealth disparity (Borg, 1995:966). Most of the Jewish population lived in poverty, burdened by heavy taxation and land rentals imposed by a wealthy elite, including the Herodian court and priestly aristocracy (Borg, 1995:967). This exploitative system extracted wealth from the labouring masses, transferring it to the urban elite who did not engage in agricultural work. Consequently, ordinary people faced immense hardship under this oppressive economic order, creating intense social tension.

Class conflict and social fragmentation

Class conflict intensified as urban elites, particularly wealthy Jewish landowners and priestly families based in Jerusalem, augmented their wealth through exploitative practices such as tithing and Temple taxation. These powerful families, often aligned with high priestly rulers and economically intertwined with the Temple, exacerbated the peasants' plight. This growing disparity fuelled frustration among ordinary people, transforming their desire for justice into a simmering revolutionary potential.

The role of the temple

The Temple in Jerusalem was the centre of Jewish worship and an economic powerhouse. Controlled by high priestly families elevated by Herod, the Temple was central to a financial system that benefited the aristocracy at the expense of ordinary people (Borg, 1995:980). These wealthy families, closely allied with Roman authorities, maintained their influence by exploiting their people (Horsley, 1986:176), increasing resentment and division within Jewish society. Many perceived the Temple as a symbol of both spiritual sanctity and economic oppression.

Political alliances and internal divisions

The alliance between the Jewish aristocracy and Roman authorities solidified a socio-political context of oppression and division. The Sadducees, aligned with the priestly aristocracy, supported the status quo, while other groups, such as the Pharisees, although not formally political, often represented more popular interests. As competing factions vied for influence, divisions within Jewish society deepened because of both political and religious tensions.

Religious diversity and sectarianism

Amidst this tense environment emerged a rich diversity of religious expressions reflecting distinct responses to Roman rule and internal Jewish divisions (Casey, 1997:316):

- Pharisees: Approximately 6000 Pharisees wielded indirect influence through the Sanhedrin by focusing on religious purity and adherence to oral traditions.
- Sadducees: Wealthy and politically powerful, representing the priestly elite allied with the Romans to uphold the status quo (Hamilton, 1964:369).
- Essenes: Isolated in monastic communities, rejecting Temple corruption, they dedicated themselves to purity and asceticism.
- Zealots were primarily poor peasants who advocated violent resistance against Roman rule. Their hatred for both Roman occupiers and Jewish collaborators exemplified revolutionary potential.

The brewing revolution

The intricate interplay of religious, economic, and political tensions rendered 1st-century Palestine a volatile environment primed for revolt. Deep-seated grievances, financial exploitation, and spiritual disillusionment with the ruling classes created explosive potential. Crucifixion – Rome’s method of suppressing rebellion – became a brutal yet familiar spectacle aimed at stifling revolutionary passion. As Jesus’s ministry unfolded within this context, his message of hope, justice, and liberation resonated profoundly with the oppressed populace. Understanding the convergence of social, political, and religious sentiments during this period is crucial for comprehending the Jewish reaction to his message of deliverance.

Approaching the climax of his earthly ministry, Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem during the Passover festival marked a pivotal moment in human history. Against the backdrop of Jewish prisoners destined for crucifixion, the stage was set for the entrance of Barabbas, one such prisoner marked for execution. This event symbolised and confirmed the desperate struggle of the Jewish people.

4. Introducing Barabbas

During the peak of divine interaction with humanity, embodied by the birth and life of Jesus Christ, a curious and enigmatic figure briefly emerges in the Gospel narrative: Barabbas. This silent character, who appears momentarily during Jesus’ trial before Pontius Pilate, subsequently fades into historical obscurity. Early Christian texts provide no insight into Barabbas, leaving his role and significance largely unexplored (Maclean, 2007:311). Despite his fleeting presence, Barabbas represents a critical and underexamined perspective that remains relevant today. An intersection where Jewish and Christian Messianism meet. His story unveils the socio-political realities that shaped the context in which Jesus ministered and was ultimately apprehended.

In contemporary times, there is an urgent need to reexamine historical biblical contexts, mainly as our faith is rooted in actual historical events, challenging the notion of a non-historical Jesus.⁹ The pertinent question concerns the insights we can derive from this context for our challenging socio-political realities. What can and should we learn from the Jewish messianic expectations exhibited at Jesus's trial? Is it an 'ideological delusion'? Barabbas serves as a focal point in all four Gospels (Maclean, 2007:309), each offering a distinct view of the religious vulnerability of the Jewish people during that period (Hart, 2019:293). These narratives reveal how deeply entrenched religious expectations can give rise to significant spiritual delusions – another crucial perspective from which we can learn.

This article contends that Jesus' trial and the crowd's choice to release Barabbas instead of the Messiah exposed a profound spiritual crisis - one that led Jesus Christ to depart from the Temple in Jerusalem. The tragic decision to choose Barabbas over Jesus reveals the ultimate Jewish rejection of Christ, underscoring Jesus' departure from the Temple and highlighting the spiritual turmoil of the time.

Matthew

The Gospel of Matthew provides a more detailed version of the Barabbas narrative, including a significant textual variant where Barabbas is referred to as 'Jesus Barabbas' in Matthew 27:16-17, a name unique to this Gospel. Church Father Origen, writing in 240 AD, acknowledges the inclusion of this name despite his objections against it, recognising its importance as a 'verum mysterium' (Hersey Davis, 1942:66). The key question is why Matthew, who addresses explicitly a Jewish audience, includes the name 'Jesus Barabbas' in his account. The rationale may lie in a more profound theological message, possibly referring to Matthew 24:5, where Jesus warns his disciples about false messiahs. Barabbas is portrayed as a deceptive figure, a nominal Messiah aligned with Jesus' warning about those who would lead people astray.

Matthew describes Barabbas as 'notorious' (Hart, 2019:299), indicating his prominence within the Jewish community. Barabbas represents the kind of Messiah the Jewish people of the time desired – a political insurgent committed to overthrowing Roman rule in the name of God. This contrasts with Jesus Christ, who preached a different kind of liberation focused on spiritual and social transformation. Matthew's account highlights the socio-political implications of Jesus' message (Hart, 2019:298) and the choice presented to the Jewish people between two 'liberative' figures: Jesus Barabbas and Jesus Christ. The preference for Barabbas reveals the type of Messiah they were seeking – one who promised immediate, worldly liberation, rather than the spiritual and holistic salvation offered by Jesus Christ.

Mark

The Gospel of Mark, thought by most scholars to be the oldest account of Jesus' ministry and trial, is definitive about Barabbas' revolutionary involvement (Mk 14). He was not an ordinary criminal who was killing people randomly, but Barabbas was actively participating in the Jewish revolt against Rome (Hart, 2019:294). He was not opposed to utilising religious violence to gain a political victory. According to Mark, Jesus and Barabbas represent fundamentally different kinds of revolutionary practice – violent and non-violent, both of which have led to a common fate: prison and impending execution. Mark's portrayal thus sets up a stark contrast between two forms of resistance to Roman rule, highlighting the radical nature of Jesus' non-violent mission in the face of violent revolt. The idea that Barabbas was some lunatic who turned into a mass murderer is thereby nullified. Barabbas fought for his people's political liberation (Hart, 2019:294).

Luke

Luke offers a distinctive perspective on Jesus' trial, particularly about Barabbas (Cuany, 2017:441). Unlike other Gospel writers, Luke shows little interest in exploring the theological rationale for Jesus' death or its redemptive significance, focusing instead on the legal aspects of the trial. This approach diverges significantly from the other Gospels, emphasising the socio-political charges brought against Jesus and his innocence about these accusations (Hart, 2019:298).

Luke highlights Barabbas' socio-political identity, contrasting it with the charges against Jesus. While many evangelical interpretations emphasise Jesus' sinlessness, Luke zeroes in on whether Jesus is guilty of the socio-political acts alleged by the Roman authorities. The narrative unfolds in two key segments. The first segment (verses 13–16) details the preliminary proceedings, where Jesus appears again before the Sanhedrin, Pilate, and Herod. After consulting with Herod, Pilate declares Jesus innocent of the charges. Both rulers agree on this verdict.

The second segment (verses 18-25) focuses on the substitution between Jesus and Barabbas. Despite Jesus being declared innocent, the Jewish crowd demands his execution and calls for Barabbas, a convicted insurrectionist and murderer, to be released instead. Luke's narrative emphasises this unjust exchange: the innocent Jesus is condemned while the guilty Barabbas is set free (Cuany, 2017:449). This portrayal underscores the legal injustice that leads to Jesus' crucifixion.

John

The Gospel of John presents an explicit theological portrait, compared to the more subtle theological narratives of the Synoptic Gospels. Even the Johannine account focuses on Barabbas' political act of resistance. He is called 'Iesai', a bandit or insurrectionist. For the Gospel of John, Barabbas' socio-political act of resistance is a key element of his portrayal. Barabbas was a Jew who sought to engage in religious insurrection as a freedom fighter, believing his resistance aligned with how God had acted on Israel's behalf in the past. His religious revolt aimed to gain political freedom, motivated by frustration and anger that oppressors occupied his land, mocked his God, and exploited his people. Ironically, Jesus's disciples initially responded similarly, ready for insurrection. All four Gospel writers seem to portray the disciples as eager for liberation, although differing on how to attain it. John's account underscores the political implications of Jesus' mission and the contrasting approaches to achieving liberation.

5. Summary

This article attempts to coin the phrase 'Barabbas delusion'. It refers to the critical misjudgment made by the Jewish people during Jesus' trial. They deliberately chose political liberation, as symbolised by Barabbas, over the divine purpose of liberation embodied by Jesus Christ. This delusion is rooted in the socio-political context of Roman occupation, where the Jewish people, longing for immediate freedom from oppressive rule, conflated their messianic expectations with the hope of imminent political liberation. They yearned for a Messiah who would lead a violent uprising against their oppressors and restore their national sovereignty. The more profound message of Jesus Christ and His 'kingdom that was not of this world' did not resonate with their actual felt needs.

Barabbas, a known insurrectionist, embodied this militant vision of liberation. By choosing him over Jesus Christ, the people revealed their preference for a political saviour rather than a spiritual one. This choice was not merely a momentary lapse in judgment but a profound misinterpretation of God's purpose for His people. Their self-serving religious delusion was not only displayed (and punished) throughout Old Testament history. Still, it was again exposed and identified during Jesus's last and final visit to the Temple in Jerusalem. The 'Barabbas delusion' at the trial confirms and finally encapsulates this tragic ideological deviation. This delusion had far-reaching consequences. The choice of Barabbas over Jesus not only signified a rejection of God's divine plan for His chosen people but also led to devastating outcomes for them. Their focus on political liberation contributed to the eventual destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. and the catastrophic loss of their homeland. Their failure to recognise and align with their divine purpose as part of the *missio Dei* resulted in the unravelling of their socio-religious identity and a missed opportunity to fulfil their mission as God's chosen people. A persistent historical sin God mercifully corrected

throughout history was now conclusively addressed. Consequently, Judaism failed to be instrumental to the *missio Dei*.

The 'Barabbas delusion' is a powerful cautionary revelation in this context. It illustrates the dangers of allowing political aspirations to overshadow spiritual truths and the peril of misunderstanding God's purposes. For contemporary Christians, revisiting this delusion offers vital insights into the risks of conflating a self-centred faith with political ideology. It underscores the importance of prioritising the teachings of Jesus, which advocate for a holistic approach to liberation – one that integrates both spiritual and social dimensions without sacralising secular ideologies. By understanding the 'Barabbas delusion', Christians can better navigate the complex interplay between faith and politics, ensuring that their actions remain true to divine purpose and are correctly aligned with the mission of Christ.

6. Religious vulnerability of God's chosen people (Christendom), anticipating the second coming of Jesus Christ

6.1 Introduction

To fully grasp the Theo-political landscape of Western civilisation requires a comprehensive acknowledgement of its origins and evolution. Rooted in the ancient cultures of Greece and Rome and deeply influenced by Judeo-Christian values, Western civilisation has been shaped over the past 2000 years by many socio-political realities and challenges. From the remnants of ancient empires, it has woven together philosophy, law, and religion into a robust cultural fabric. The Renaissance (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024c) rekindled an appreciation for learning, the Enlightenment (Duignan, 2024) confronted ignorance, and the Industrial Revolution (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024b) catalysed remarkable advancements. Western civilisation has championed individual rights throughout this continuous evolution, fostered innovation, and profoundly impacted global history and culture. Western culture has extended its influence globally through the all-consuming process of globalization. Today, it is, however, experiencing its 'civilisational moment' (Guinness, 2022) and is on the brink of collapse. The very core of this existential emergency is the 'epistemological crisis' that Western civilisation is facing. It can be called 'the mother of all crises' (Kirk, 1999:157).

6.2 Religion and politics

Undoubtedly, Western civilisation was built on a firm Judeo-Christian foundation.¹² It is in total collapse because it has left the very foundations on which it was built (Guinness, 2022). The history of Western Christianity's transformation into Christendom parallels Western cultural

development and is deeply embedded in it.¹³ The deep intertwining of religious and secular authority marks this developmental process. A very brief overview to contemplate this evolution will suffice. It is evident in pivotal events such as the establishment of the Roman papacy, the unification of Europe under Charlemagne,¹⁴ the violent contact with Islam during the Crusades, the Reformation and the subsequent religious wars (Barzun et al, 2024), as well as the complex interplay between politics and religion during the era of colonisation (Webster, Nowell & Magdoff 2023). In more recent times, the persistent entanglement of religion and politics remains evident in phenomena such as 'Apartheid theology' in South Africa and the complex dynamics of liberation and black theology worldwide. These examples highlight the enduring and intricate relationship between Christian faith and worldly power, demonstrating how deeply intertwined they are in shaping individual and collective identities within Western civilisation. These milestones underscore how political and social forces have profoundly influenced the development of Western Christianity, shaping its doctrines, practices, and global reach. However, the devastation wrought by two world wars severely undermined Western Christendom, stalling its missionary endeavours (Walls, 2011:236) and challenging its influence and relevance on the global stage.

6.3 The 'death of Christendom'

Western Christendom today faces an existential crisis, often described as the 'end' of Christendom (Muggeridge, 1980). The decline of Christianity in the West is mirrored in the weakening of the Church, coinciding with the waning influence of Western cultural dominance. Ironically, the culture that once sent missionaries worldwide has become a mission field. Yet, Western theology and its ecclesiology, gripped by an epistemological crisis, lack the missional focus or clarity to address this new reality (Dreyer, 2013:1). The Western Church, consumed by the existential anxiety of its members is unsure of the principles that should guide its engagement with society, seems increasingly disconnected from the world it seeks to reach. Recent studies have convincingly shown that mainstream Protestant and Roman Catholic denominations are steadily disappearing (Wagner, 2005:230). Christendom, ensnared by cultural captivity, has become insular, self-serving, and primarily focused on survival and institutional maintenance rather than fulfilling its missional calling. Amid contemporary socio-political realities, all individuals within Western civilisation, including Christians, face heightened vulnerability to economic instability, political polarisation, and societal fragmentation. Forces such as globalisation and urbanisation have dismantled traditional community structures, while a resurgence of nationalism reveals a widespread and urgent desire for identity, security, and autonomy. Confronted by these influential trends, the Western Church finds itself paralysed by accelerating decline and increasingly unable to respond meaningfully to these challenges. Its struggle to redefine purpose

and relevance in this shifting landscape has left it ill-equipped to address the profound existential crises of the present.

6.3.1 The rise of 'conservative evangelicalism' (Dispensationalism)

Like the present, Christians have often anticipated the world's end during transition periods. This expectation may explain why, for example, dispensational theology has remained so prevalent in Western Christianity, now a default belief in many evangelical churches worldwide (Deik, 2020:76). As the influence of Christendom declines in the West, a particular 'version' of Western Christianity continues to shape global socio-political dynamics. It is therefore critical to examine the impact and significance of these remnants in contemporary times.¹⁶

The second part of this article will explore the intricate relationship between the Christendom Church's mission to prepare the world for the second coming of Christ (Mt 28:20) and its connection to Israel within the context of 'end-times' prophecy. This exploration will be set against the backdrop of the diverse socio-political challenges currently confronting Western civilisation, explicitly focusing on the missiological implications of Christendom's response to these crises.

6.3.2 The Christian church and the Jewish people

Shaping Western civilisation and Christianity by Judeo-Christian values is a well-established concept. Yet, the scholarly examination of the enduring and complex relationship between Christianity and Zionism remains notably underexplored and below the academic radar for most of its existence (Sweetnam, 2010:191). Goldman's work highlights the extent to which research on this topic has largely been overlooked within academic discourse (2007:246). Particularly under-researched is the political militancy observed in millennial or messianic movements such as Christian Zionism and Jewish Religious Zionism, which exemplifies the intertwined phenomena of the sacralisation of politics and the politicisation of religion (Aldovandri, 2011:114). Rather than providing a comprehensive analysis of Christian Zionism,¹⁷ this article seeks to highlight key aspects of its historical evolution and contemporary beliefs to support the argument that it represents, as identified in the first section of this paper, what can be termed a 'Barabbas delusion'.

6.3.3 Christianity and Christian Zionism

Christian Zionism, an ideology that has evolved over nearly two centuries (Sweetnam, 2010:191), finds its roots in religious thought (Rabkin, 2012:75) and predates the rise of political Zionism (Ariel, 2006:77). This movement originated outside of Palestine and was significantly influenced by the surge in apocalyptic expectations following the Protestant Reformation, which fostered the

idea of Jewish restoration based on a biblical messianic view of the Jews and Palestine. Since the Reformation, the concept of the 'Restoration of the Jews to their Land' has consistently featured in the ideologies of various Protestant denominations (Goldman, 2007:248). The earliest known connection between Christian apocalyptic visions and the 'ingathering of the Jews in Palestine' dates to at least the 16th century (Abraham & Boer, 2009:92). In 1840, the leader of Britain's Evangelical Party, Lord Ashley Cooper (Ariel 2006:74), petitioned the British foreign minister to support the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. The Balfour Declaration of 1917 (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024a), which signalled British support for creating a Jewish national home in Palestine, was deeply rooted in Christian religious beliefs and resulted from a blend of political calculations and Christian advocacy in Britain (Ariel, 2006:79). Christian Zionist Arthur Balfour was instrumental in securing British control over Palestine, a crucial step towards the eventual establishment of the Jewish state in 1948 (Abraham & Boer, 2009:92).

Christian Zionism has also played a significant role in the United States, where it has historically exerted considerable influence on US policies towards the Middle East. Notably, President Harry Truman, who compared himself to Emperor Cyrus because he supported Israel, was influenced by Christian Zionist ideas (Abraham & Boer, 2009:93). The political faith of US presidents has transformed Christian Zionism into political capital, establishing it as a dominant position within the Evangelical Protestant religious right in the United States (Abraham & Boer, 2009:91). As a result, Christian Zionism, particularly in its dispensationalist form, has become one of the most influential theological systems within contemporary Western Christendom (Sizer, n.d.:1).

6.3.4 What is Christian Zionism?

Christian Zionism is defined as Protestant support for the restoration of the 'seed of Abraham' to their promised land, a movement inspired by 19th-century European nationalism (Rabkin, 2012:85). It encompasses Christian theological backing for the establishment and continued existence of the modern state of Israel, aligned with Zionist ideology (Abraham & Boer, 2009:90). Central to this movement is a theology known as dispensationalism, which posits that Christian salvation is intimately connected to the return of Jews to their ancestral land, Palestine. This dispensationalist framework has come to dominate American Evangelicalism, significantly influencing US policy in the Middle East (Campolo, 2005). Aldovandri (2011:117) describes this belief system as 'Armageddon theology', where the prolonged conflict and chaos in the Middle East are interpreted as signs of the end-times, culminating in the return of Jesus Christ to Jerusalem after a cataclysmic war of Armageddon. Within this narrative, Jews are seen as key actors in the Christian Zionist eschatological vision, with Israel playing a crucial role in setting the

stage for the 'Rapture' of true believers (Campolo, 2005). While mainstream Jewish Zionists appreciate the material support – such as tourism, financial contributions and political backing – that Christian Zionists provide, they often maintain a cautious distance from the underlying theology (Abraham & Boer, 2009:99). An ironic dynamic marks the relationship between Christian and Jewish Zionism: Christian Zionists support the Jewish return to the Holy Land on religious grounds, whereas Jewish Zionists do so for political reasons, turning a theological project into a political one (Rabkin 2012:80). The greater irony lies in the fact that traditional Judaism largely rejects Jewish Zionism, while Protestant theologians actively endorse it to fulfil their religious objectives (Rabkin, 2012:75).

6.3.5 Contemporary issues and consequences

Historically, Christians have frequently interpreted socio-political upheavals as indicative of an impending apocalypse. In contemporary times, Western Christendom remains enmeshed in this perspective. The current vulnerability of Christendom is rooted in a recurring pattern across various perspectives: the modification of theology to serve specific ideological or existential aims. On one side, Western Christendom's inward focus on cultural preservation prioritises survival, identity, and security, thereby reducing faith to a means of defending a diminishing cultural heritage. This inward-focused mindset, which fosters a perception of God as primarily aligned with human needs, has made Christianity increasingly self-centred across regions such as Europe, the United States, and South Africa.

6.3.6 Theology meets ideology

Conversely, the outward-facing, eschatologically driven support for Israel among some conservative Christians shifts the focus to advancing an end-times agenda. Despite their distinct focuses, both perspectives exhibit a common tendency: they transform theology into an instrument for achieving human-centred goals, aligning faith with immediate socio-political concerns rather than its core missional purpose.

This convergence reveals how Western Christianity has become susceptible to ideological influences that blur the boundaries between faith and politics. In both instances, theological convictions are repurposed to secure desired outcomes, whether preserving cultural identity or fulfilling eschatological aspirations. Consequently, Western Christianity increasingly appears reactive and self-serving, compromising the essence of Christian belief, centred on transformative mission, and subordinating it to the pursuit of personal or political ends. This dynamic ultimately distorts the integrity of Christian faith, reducing it to a tool for human agendas rather than a call to authentic discipleship and engagement with the world.

7. Evaluating Christendom from a missional perspective

From a missiological perspective, contemporary Christendom finds itself at a critical juncture where the boundaries between the sacred and secular are increasingly indistinct, thereby distorting the Church's core mission. The decline of mainstream Protestant and Roman Catholic denominations, coupled with the rise of conservative evangelicalism, signifies a profound transformation in the religious landscape of the West. Rather than participating in a sacrificial missional commitment to God's mission to reach all nations, Western cultural Christianity (Christendom) now appears to use God to serve its interests. This shift mirrors the spiritual and cultural vulnerabilities experienced by the Jewish people during Jesus Christ's first coming.

The article posits that modern Christendom is encountering struggles analogous to those faced by Judaism in biblical times. Just as Judaism wrestled with its identity and purpose within a specific socio-political context before Christ's first advent, contemporary Christianity faces similar challenges as it prepares for the anticipated second coming of Jesus Christ. This analogy highlights the urgency and significance of this pivotal moment, calling for a reassessment of the Church's mission in light of eschatological expectations.

At the heart of the crisis is the entanglement of theology with ideology, leading to a compromise in and a drift from proper biblical Christology. This again echoes the 'Barabbas delusion' during Christ's trial in Jerusalem, where political solutions were prioritised over spiritual truth. Similarly, Western cultural Christianity has moved away from its missional calling, becoming more concerned with self-preservation than with spreading the gospel. This shift has transformed Christendom into a 'den of robbers' (Jr 7:11; Mk 11:17), motivated by self-interest rather than genuine missional concern for all nations (Is 56:7; Mk 11:17).

The current trajectory of Christendom raises significant missiological concerns. The Church's emphasis on maintaining cultural and political status quos, often intertwined with nationalistic intentions, hinders its capacity to engage the world in alignment with Christ's teachings. Rather than aligning with political ideologies or national objectives, the mission of the Church should focus on proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ to all people, fostering justice, reconciliation, and spiritual transformation. One must consider whether the present decline of Christendom represents a divine departure analogous to Jesus Christ's final departure from the Temple in Jerusalem. When the Jews chose Barabbas, they effectively rejected Jesus Christ, indicating that their religious commitment lacked a proper biblical Christology, which is why they entirely missed recognising and ultimately serving the Messiah (1 Cor 15:19).

8. The choice of Barabbas decoded

Barabbas should neither be relegated to the shadows of the Biblical narrative nor should his brief appearance in God's revelation fade into obscurity. His presence at a crucial moment in Christian history demands a more profound examination. The historical encounter, recorded in all four Gospels, where the Jewish crowd chose Barabbas's freedom over that of Jesus Christ, signifies far more than a mere act of substitution. This event encapsulates the complex socio-political dynamics of 1st-century Judaism and, despite its past marginalisation, holds profound relevance for the entire trajectory of Christian history over the past 2000 years. Understanding this episode is essential for grasping the broader evolution of Christianity, which has been intricately woven into the interplay between politics and religion within the socio-political fabric of Western civilisation. Barabbas has never truly disappeared. His shadow continues to loom, challenging us to confront the enduring and intricate ties between faith, politics, and society. His story remains as relevant today as it was 2000 years ago, providing a critical perspective on the ongoing interplay between these powerful forces. Understanding Barabbas is key to comprehending the broader implications of Christian history and the challenges that continue to shape the faith's engagement with the world.

9. Conclusion

This article concludes by asserting that contemporary theo-political and socio-political realities indicate that God is once again altering his interaction with His chosen people (Christendom) to ensure the continuation and eventual completion of his global mission.

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11. Complementary to Chapter 4: Theological Framing, Contextual Integration, and Methodological Clarity: Positioning the Barabbas Narrative

11.1 Theological and Exegetical Engagement

This article engages the Barabbas narrative as a theological lens to interpret the recurring crisis of political misidentification within the history of God's people. At its core, the choice of Barabbas over Jesus is not merely a tragic episode in the Passion narrative but a profound theological moment that exposes the perennial temptation to exchange redemptive suffering for political expediency. As such, the Barabbas narrative is not just historical but paradigmatic; it represents a recurring distortion of messianic expectation, shaped by socio-political fear, ideological captivity, and religious vulnerability.

This study aligns with a cruciform reading of Scripture that prioritises the suffering, self-giving Messiah over triumphalist or nationalistic interpretations. The selection of Barabbas, a violent insurrectionist, reflects a distorted hope for liberation that mirrors the ancient temptation to align salvation with coercive power. This interpretive trajectory resonates with Jesus' rebuke of Peter's sword (Matthew 26:52) and his refusal of the devil's kingdoms (Matt 4:8-10).

Alternative interpretations of Barabbas' role range from literary readings emphasising irony and scapegoat mechanisms to liberationist readings that frame Barabbas as a 'proto-revolutionary' against Roman oppression. While acknowledging these perspectives, this article critically engages with them from a theological standpoint that interrogates political violence and messianic distortion. It argues that the crowd's choice reveals a more profound theological problem: a failure to recognise the nature of God's redemptive mission as revealed in Jesus Christ.

Through this lens, the article examines how the Barabbas episode serves as a theological cypher for the ongoing temptation to align Christian identity with ideological movements—nationalist, populist, or liberationist—at the expense of the cross. The article asserts that fidelity to Christ's mission requires discernment between redemptive suffering and ideological saviourism.

11.2 Missiological and Contextual Implications

The missiological relevance of the Barabbas narrative is particularly acute in contemporary post-Christendom and postcolonial contexts. The article argues that Barabbas's choice is a theological distortion and a missional crisis. When religious communities under pressure abandon the way of the cross for the illusion of political deliverance, they forfeit their prophetic vocation.

This concern is particularly urgent in Africa, where historical and ongoing socio-political instability, combined with the legacy of Western Christendom, has created fertile ground for ideological theologies. In some instances, African churches have embraced nationalist, ethnocentric, or prosperity-driven ideologies that parallel the crowd's choice of Barabbas: a saviour who promises liberation without crucifixion.

Therefore, the African Church must consider the missiological implications of this narrative. The challenge is to avoid political entanglements and discern the nature of Christ's mission in each context. This includes resisting false dichotomies between faith and justice, church and society, and theology and politics. It requires a strong theology to identify political idolatry while embracing Christ's path of suffering.

The article encourages the African Church to engage in theological self-examination by placing the Barabbas narrative within the biblical context of divine election, prophetic resistance, and redemptive suffering. It suggests that progress lies not in selecting Barabbas-like figures who promise quick deliverance, but in rediscovering the suffering servant whose mission is both cruciform and cosmic.

11.3 Conceptual and Theoretical Coherence

Conceptually, this article presents a unique theological reflection on ideological misidentification. It argues that the crowd's preference for Barabbas is not merely a political mistake but a theological failure to recognise the nature of God's mission. This conceptual framing aligns with broader themes in the study, particularly the critique of Christendom and its ideological residues.

By aligning the Barabbas narrative with contemporary examples of Christian complicity in political ideology, such as Christian Zionism, 'supremacist' theology, or religious nationalism, the article delineates the difference between biblical fidelity and ideological distortion. It also engages with counter-perspectives, including liberationist readings that valorise political struggle, affirming the need for justice while questioning the methods used to achieve it.

The article maintains theoretical coherence by consistently employing a Christocentric hermeneutic rooted in the Nicene confession. This hermeneutic provides the necessary theological ballast to evaluate competing claims concerning redemption, power, and presence. In doing so, the article preserves theological balance by affirming the importance of contextual engagement and the non-negotiable centrality of the cross.

11.4 Methodological Clarification

As part of the broader study, this article employs a qualitative theological methodology based on content analysis. This method is well-suited for theological interpretation, facilitating deep engagement with biblical texts, theological traditions, and contemporary contextual realities. It enables the article to examine the Barabbas narrative as a historical account and a theological archetype.

The choice of content analysis over empirical methods is deliberate. While empirical research may provide insights into contemporary perceptions, it cannot reveal the theological dynamics present in the narrative. In contrast, content analysis allows for tracing theological patterns, ideological shifts, and missional implications across time and context.

This article is shaped by the research design established in the first article of the study, which outlines a theological and missiological critique of Christendom. That framework informs the interpretive lens, providing methodological consistency and theological depth. It also distinguishes this article within the broader study by explicitly focusing on the biblical-theological dynamics of political misidentification and its implications for Christian witness.

In conclusion, this article provides a theologically rich, contextually engaged, and methodologically precise examination of the Barabbas narrative. It affirms that the choice between Jesus and Barabbas remains an ever-present dilemma for the Church, particularly during political instability and theological vulnerability. The article contributes to the study's overarching aim: to recover a missional identity faithful to the crucified and risen Christ by rooting the discussion in Scripture, engaging alternative interpretations, and applying a consistent methodological approach.

CHAPTER 5: (ARTICLE 4)

‘From Temple to Nations: The *Missio Dei* and the Cross-Cultural Expansion of God's People from Jewish Roots to a Global Faith.’

The article was submitted to *Missiology*. More information can be found in the addendum.

1. Abstract

Since the dispersion at Babel, the divine mission - *missio Dei* - has shaped human history. A pivotal shift occurred when Jesus Christ departed from the Jerusalem Temple for the final time, signalling the end of the Old Testament phase of God's mission. His crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension initiated a new era, as recorded in the Gospels.

The New Testament, particularly Acts and Paul's writings, reveals a transformative expansion of God's engagement - from a Jewish-centred mission to a global one reaching the 'ends of the earth.' This shift redefined God's people and their role in His ongoing mission.

This article examines the transition and its missiological implications, analysing the theological and historical dynamics that reshaped the early Church. By exploring this paradigm shift, it seeks to illuminate lessons for contemporary missionary priorities amid globalisations. Understanding God's strategic redirection offers fresh insights into the *missio Dei* and its relevance today as the Church evolves into an increasingly multicultural entity.

2. The Book of Acts: History and Theology of the Early Church's Mission

The Book of Acts within the Bible is renowned for its theological significance and historical intricacy (Achtmeier, 1986:1). It claims to provide a historical account of the Early Church's development from Jerusalem to Rome (Acts 1:8-Acts 28). The theology of Acts emerges from this complex interplay of history and theology (Dockery, 1990:43), creating a narrative that has incited considerable scholarly debate, particularly in its central section, Acts 13 to 19 (Culpepper, 1974:487-497). This portion of Luke's second volume is a focal point of academic scrutiny, highlighting the challenging relationship between Christianity and Second Temple Judaism. In Acts 13-19, the narrative reaches its peak intensity (Culpepper, 1974:487) as the Early Church contends with God's directive to extend the Gospel to the Gentiles, heightening Jewish-Gentile tensions.

The 'theology' of Acts has been a subject of intense scholarly debate for many years. Scholars such as Ferdinand Baur argue that Luke's theological agenda shaped Acts, resulting in contrasting accounts between the book of Acts and the apostle Paul's writings (Dockery, 1990:43). Ernst Conzelmann also questioned Acts' historical reliability (1960:14-17). However, contemporary scholars increasingly recognise Luke as both a historian and a theologian, acknowledging his balance of theological insight with a credible depiction of early Christian life (Dockery, 1990:45).

This article supports the view that, while historically sufficient, Luke's narrative primarily serves a theological purpose, illuminating the New Testament theology distinctively (Dockery, 1990:45). Central to this theology is the work of the Holy Spirit, which marks a new era at Pentecost that universalizes Jesus' mission and inaugurates the church age (Acts 1:8; Acts 2). Through the Spirit, Jesus' ministry continues, empowering the church to transcend individual limitations by uniting believers into an unparalleled fellowship – the church as the body of Jesus Christ. The Spirit's mission-oriented work propels the church forward, directing it to evangelize and embrace new directions while embodying Christ's presence in ever-expanding geographic circles until it reaches the ends of the earth and the end of time.

The book of Acts highlights the evolution of the early Christian community from its Jewish roots, reflecting a distinct theological progression. Explosive growth within Jerusalem's Jewish context (Acts 2:41; Acts 4:4) and beyond (Acts 9:31; Acts 11:19-21) led to a shift from a Jewish-centric movement to a predominantly Gentile fellowship freed from strict Jewish customs. Acts capture this transition, revealing how the church's identity, rooted in Judaism through Paul's commitment to a universal mission, allowed it to expand across the Mediterranean, embodying a transformed and missional identity. This is why the primary issue in studying Acts is undoubtedly the relationship between theology and history (Dockery, 1990:43).

Luke's narrative style in Acts shapes events to convey a divine trajectory. Rather than providing a straightforward historical recounting, he organizes events within a theological framework. Renowned scholar Hans Conzelmann describes Acts' theology as one of glory, triumph, and growth, with God guiding the church toward ultimate victory (Gaventa, 1988:147). Barrett similarly notes this sense of triumph within Acts, highlighting how the apostles' journeys often reflect the path of the cross, blending suffering with glory (Gaventa, 1988:153). This relationship between cross and triumph is evident in Paul's ministry, where he faces rejection yet persistently proclaims the gospel. His final words in Acts 28:26-28 affirm Jewish rejection and Gentile openness, embodying intertwined themes of gospel persistence and opposition.

Ultimately, Luke's theology in Acts cannot be reduced to simple propositions or systematic doctrine (Gaventa, 1988:157). Despite persecution and hostility, the gospel's triumph is assured; growth and adversity are integral to Luke's portrayal of the church's mission. Through this complex narrative, Luke presents a church advancing under God's unstoppable purpose, grounded in a historical and theological vision of transformation and mission. The enduring question that remains is whether the Apostle Paul, despite his determined efforts, succeeded in unifying Judaism and Christianity. Paul Achtemeier (1986:1) thinks that such unity was never really achieved.

3. Paul's Theology Shaped by Mission: The Missio Dei in Action

The book of Acts holds historical significance as a chronicle of early Christianity and as a narrative highlighting the transformative ministry of the Apostle Paul, a pivotal figure in disseminating the gospel to the Gentiles. Initially, Paul is depicted as a vehement persecutor of the Early Church, involved in the martyrdom of Stephen, who courageously criticised Jewish exclusivism. Paul's zeal in persecuting the new Christian 'sect' is revealed (Acts 8:3). This moment catalyses the book of Acts, symbolising a clash between traditional, ethnocentric Judaism and an emerging Christian mission. Paul's eventual conversion, detailed in Acts 9:15, marks a radical departure from his former life and the commencement of his unique role as an apostle destined to take the gospel to the Gentiles. His calling becomes foundational to his mission-driven theology, rooted in his profound personal transformation experience as reflected in the book of Acts and later in his letters.

Throughout Acts, Paul's ministry encapsulates both the triumph of the gospel and the complexities faced by the Christian community striving to reconcile divergent identities. As the historical narrative unfolds, Christ's message transcends ethnic boundaries. The Holy Spirit moves beyond Jewish spaces into the Gentile world, reshaping what it means to be 'God's people.' This evolution presents significant challenges. A theological and cultural tension arises regarding the relationship between Gentile believers and Jewish customs. While traditional Jewish customs provide clear pathways for Gentiles to integrate into the Jewish faith as proselytes, Paul's approach dismantles these categories. For Paul, Gentile inclusion in the body of Christ does not necessitate adherence to proselyte procedures, thereby establishing an identity for Christianity distinct from Judaism (Polhill, 1981:238).

This separation culminates in significant confrontations within the Early Church, particularly noted in Acts 11 and 15, where debates about the roles and expectations of Gentiles in the community reach a critical juncture. In Acts 11, Peter, the first missionary to the Gentiles, reports to the church in Jerusalem, setting the stage for Paul's continued advocacy for Gentile inclusion. The Jerusalem

Council in Acts 15 addresses challenges posed by conservative factions within the Jerusalem Church, known as Judaisers, by issuing an apostolic decree that formally acknowledges and validates the path forward. Formulated through intense debate, this decree establishes a theological foundation for unity among Jewish and Gentile believers under a common faith. Different perspectives regarding the success of this meeting will be examined subsequently.

In the Acts of the Apostles, Paul's theology emerges as profoundly influenced by his mission and the imperative to challenge established religious boundaries. His missiological insights, developed through lived experiences, articulate a gospel that transcends the confines of traditional Judaism, facilitating Christianity's cross-cultural dissemination. Paul's conviction that Gentiles can partake in God's promises through faith alone signifies a transformative departure from existing religious frameworks, establishing a paradigm of inclusion, grace, and the universal scope of the gospel. This theological shift redefines the church's role within God's global mission, centring its purpose on embodying and extending God's promises beyond ethnic and cultural limitations.

The significance of this issue to Paul's ministry is evident in his letters, especially in his epistle to the Ephesians. This text encapsulates the theology underlying his life's work and his vision for the church's missional purpose. Ephesians serves not only as a summary of Paul's ministry but also as his spiritual testament, expressing the essence of his calling and aspirations for God's church in mission.

4. Acts 15 and the Jerusalem Council: A Defining Moment for Christian Identity

4.1 Introduction

Acts 15 represents a seminal moment in Christian history and theology, marking the Church's first significant internal debate on the nature of Christian identity and mission. As the early Christian movement expanded beyond its Jewish roots to include Gentiles, tensions emerged regarding whether non-Jewish converts should observe Jewish customs, particularly circumcision, to fully integrate into the Christian community. This question extended beyond cultural practices, striking at the core of what it meant to belong to God's people. The Jerusalem Council's resolution ultimately transformed Christianity from a primarily Jewish sect into a universal faith accessible to all, regardless of cultural or ethnic background (Corniche, 2010:837; McKinney, 2024:1).

The context preceding the council underscores the diverse and often divisive influences within early Christianity. With the spread of the Gospel large numbers of Gentiles began joining what

had been an almost entirely Jewish community (Corniche, 2010:873). As Gentiles with pagan backgrounds integrated into the Church, questions arose about their obligations under Jewish law - a matter complicated by Judaism's historically insular nature and its limited emphasis on evangelism, despite that they always welcomed Gentile God-fearers and proselytes (Dunn, 1993:462). In this transitional era, Jewish Christians, especially those with Pharisaic backgrounds, sought to impose Jewish laws on Gentile converts, igniting a theological rift that would shape the trajectory of the Christian mission (McKinney, 2024:6).

4.2 Defining Christian Identity Beyond Judaism

Central to the significance of the Jerusalem Council was its determination that faith in Christ, rather than the strict adherence to the entire Mosaic law, constituted full membership in God's people. By declaring that Gentiles did not need to become Jewish proselytes to be Christians, the council articulated a new understanding of Christian identity rooted in faith rather than cultural markers. This revolutionary distinction was signalling a shift from an ethnocentric view of God's covenant people to a theologically inclusive identity that was based solely on faith in Christ (Mathews, 1909:337-339). This landmark decision allowed the Church to move beyond its Jewish origins and form a distinct identity capable of bridging diverse cultural contexts essential for its mission.

4.3 Affirming Salvation by Faith and Grace

A critical theological outcome of the Jerusalem Council was its affirmation of salvation through grace by faith in Jesus Christ, independent of 'works of the law' (Garland, 1994:171). This foundational doctrine emphasized that God's grace and not human efforts to observe ritual laws, served as the means of salvation. The council's decision reinforced this principle and clarified one of Christianity's core beliefs, setting a precedent for future theological development within the early Church and Pauline theology. Paul would continue to emphasize this theme in his epistles, particularly in Galatians, where he passionately argues against the necessity of observing Jewish law for salvation. This theological stance helped establish a common foundation for the faith of both Jewish and Gentile believers, aiming to foster unity within the growing Christian movement.

4.4 Opening the Door to Cross-Cultural Mission

The Jerusalem Council's ruling marked a watershed moment for the Church's cross-cultural mission. By rejecting the requirement for Gentile converts to adopt Jewish customs, the council effectively removed a significant barrier to spreading the gospel across diverse cultural settings. This decision validated and empowered Paul's ministry to the Gentiles, endorsing the gospel for all nations and legitimising outreach to non-Jewish populations. The council's decision thus laid

the groundwork for a mission strategy that could engage various cultures without imposing unnecessary cultural burdens, ensuring Christianity could transcend ethnic and cultural boundaries.

4.5 Establishing a Foundation for Paul's Ministry

The Jerusalem Council's decision provided theological and practical support for Paul's mission, affirming his calling to preach to the Gentiles. By aligning doctrinal clarity with missional strategy, the council established a framework that allowed Paul to spread the gospel while respecting cultural diversity. Paul's ministry was transformative because it embraced the 'indigenising principle,' allowing Gentile believers to retain their cultural identity within Christianity, and the 'pilgrim principle,' encouraging them to adopt values aligned with the gospel truth (Walls, 1996:7-9). This balanced approach became central to Paul's theology and missional strategy, as seen in his letters to the Galatians and Romans, where he argues against imposing Jewish laws on Gentile believers. The council's decision enabled rapid progress in Paul's mission, resulting in Christianity's expansive growth throughout the Roman Empire.

4.6 Long-Term Impact on Christian Identity and Unity

The council's decision was definitive regarding unity within diversity, creating an inclusivity foundation that allowed Jewish and Gentile Christians to coexist within one faith community without erasing cultural differences. However, this vision of unity faced challenges. Jewish Christians in Judea continued advocating for adherence to Jewish customs among Gentile converts, leading to ongoing tension within the early Church (Doss, 2005:440). Paul's eventual arrest in Jerusalem during intense nationalistic fervour underscored the enduring difficulties of reconciling Jewish and Gentile identities within Christianity (Polhill, 1981:244). Although it established a precedent for inclusivity, unity between Jewish and Gentile Christians remained unresolved within Paul's ministry and early Church history.

4.7 Conclusion

Acts 15 and the Jerusalem Council signify critical junctures in the history of Christianity, establishing foundational principles that have shaped its mission and identity. The council's decisions regarding the nature of Christian identity, salvation by grace, the cross-cultural scope of the mission, and the extent of Paul's ministry underscore its pivotal role in defining the contours of a faith that transcends ethnic and cultural boundaries. By affirming the inclusivity of the gospel, the Jerusalem Council set precedents that enabled Christianity's global expansion, bridging diverse cultures while upholding a unifying message of salvation in Christ. This pivotal moment

provided theological and organisational foundations for faith communities that would eventually span the globe, inviting all people into God's unfolding mission.

5 A New Perspective on Paul: Reframing his Relationship with Gentile and Jewish Christians

To fully appreciate Paul's mission and message, it is imperative to understand his relationship with both Gentile and Jewish Christians. Historically, Pauline theology has been interpreted through a Reformation lens, mainly influenced by 16th-century Lutheran interpretations (Dunn, 1983:99). These interpretations depicted Judaism as a works-based system in opposition to Paul's doctrine of salvation by faith. Influential scholars such as Rudolf Bultmann and Ernst Käsemann emphasized a stark dichotomy between faith and works, simplifying and distorting the Jewish context of Paul's writings (Dunn, 1983:89).

E.P. Sanders introduced a transformative critique of this perspective, advocating that Paul's views on Judaism should be understood within the first-century context of 'covenantal nomism' (Dunn, 1983:99). According to Sanders, first-century Judaism did not focus on earning salvation through legalistic works; rather, obedience to the law was a means of maintaining the covenantal relationship established by God with Israel. In this view, Jewish law represented covenant faithfulness rather than a burdensome set of rituals for achieving righteousness. Sanders's perspective, known as the 'New Perspective on Paul,' challenges the Lutheran-based view by asserting that Paul's critique of 'works of the law' should be seen not as a blanket condemnation of Jewish practices but as a reorientation of covenantal identity around Christ (Dunn, 1983:102).

James D.G. Dunn further elaborates on Sanders's work by arguing that Paul's writings on justification do not criticize Jewish law itself but rather its exclusivity (Dunn, 1983:115). For instance, in Galatians 2:16, Paul redefines covenantal membership through faith in Christ instead of adherence to traditional Jewish markers. According to Dunn, the 'works of the law' were cultural and ethnic distinctions that separated Jews from Gentiles rather than indicators of personal merit. Paul's concern was not with Jewish law per se but with its exclusivist role, which hindered the inclusive vision of the gospel. Therefore, his doctrine of justification by faith was a theological and missional reconfiguration uniting Jewish and Gentile believers under a single covenantal identity rooted in Christ.

By positioning covenant identity within Christ, Paul reframed the boundaries of God's covenant to include all believers, regardless of ethnic heritage or adherence to specific cultural practices. This shift did not reject Judaism's covenantal foundation but expanded it to encompass a universal family of believers. Thus, Paul's writings are better understood not as a renunciation of Judaism

but as a challenge to any ideology that limits God's covenant to one ethnic group. His focus was on faith transcending ethnic distinctions and ritual observances, paving the way for an inclusive global church.

This reinterpretation calls for a renewed appreciation of Paul's mission as a bridge between Jewish and Gentile believers. Paul did not negate Jewish law; instead, he critiqued the idea that one's place in God's family could be defined solely by ethnic identity. For Paul, faith in Christ served as the new marker of covenantal belonging, replacing ethnic and ritual boundaries with an accessible faith for all. This new understanding allowed early Christianity to transcend Jewish nationalism and embrace an inclusive vision that resisted ethnic exclusivity and ritualistic nationalism (Dunn, 1983:115).

In reframing Paul within his historical and cultural context, Sanders and Dunn's work invites us to view Paul's mission as a theological revolution that redefines covenant identity. Paul's advocacy for justification by faith was not anti-Jewish; instead, it called for an inclusive vision of God's people. This reorientation established the foundation for a Christian identity that unifies diverse communities beyond the markers of Jewish identity, creating a community where faith in Christ is paramount. This perspective clarifies Paul's theological complexities and emphasises early Christianity's transformation from an ethnically defined community to a universal faith.

Consequently, Paul's writings address contemporary identity, inclusion, and unity issues within faith communities. His vision for a global church that transcends ethnicity, and nationalism resonates with the mission of modern Christianity as an inclusive movement. Paul's approach offers a model of fundamentally inclusive faith, rejecting racial nationalism and ritual exclusivism in favour of a community grounded in faith in Christ. This faith extends beyond cultural barriers to unite people across cultures and nations.

6 Unity and Diversity in the Primitive Church: Was True Unity Achieved?

Examining the early church's unity as portrayed in Acts reveals a striking tension between theological ideals and historical complexities, with considerable ambiguity surrounding whether true unity was ever fully achieved. Two pivotal events - the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 and the Antioch incident described in Galatians 2 - serve as focal points for exploring these issues. Central to this analysis is a lingering question that transcends mere historical reconstruction: Do these accounts describe the same event, or do they reflect two distinct moments of discord that expose deeper, unresolved rifts within the early church?

The relationship between Galatians 2 and Acts 15 has spurred intense scholarly debate, with researchers divided on whether these passages reference the same incident or different episodes of conflict between Jewish and Gentile Christians. Bennema (2013:753) argues that Galatians 2 and Acts 15 likely align chronologically, viewing the Antioch crisis as following the Jerusalem Council and intensifying existing tensions. Achtemeier (1986:23), however, suggests an alternative, noting a consensus among some scholars that the events described in Galatians may have triggered the Jerusalem Council itself. This perspective sees the council as a response to the unresolved tensions that surfaced in Antioch, emphasising the ongoing struggle to define Gentile inclusion within the church. The lack of scholarly consensus on this issue mirrors the confusion surrounding whether genuine unity was eventually achieved.

The unfolding events in Antioch underscore the challenges faced by the early church as it expanded into Gentile territories. Antioch was the epicentre of Gentile missions, and the rapid growth left little time for coordinated leadership across scattered communities. When men from Jerusalem visited Antioch (Gal 2), the delicate balance between Jewish traditions and Gentile practices quickly broke down, leading to conflict. Acts 15 describes how the council ultimately decided to secure unity, allowing Paul to continue his mission to the Gentiles. Suppose Luke's account in Acts is accurate. In that case, it implies that the council's ruling temporarily resolved the issue and restored relationships between Paul and other church leaders, supporting unity.

However, an alternative interpretation suggests that the council's decree may have contributed to further division rather than resolving it. This view implies that the Antioch conflict could have been exacerbated by the decree, as church leaders like Peter and Barnabas may have felt compelled to distance themselves from Gentile practices to preserve their standing among Jewish Christians (Achtemeier, 1986:24). This divergence may explain why Paul eventually parted ways with Barnabas, choosing to pursue his mission independently. The fact that the church in Antioch appeared to support Peter and Barnabas over Paul indicates a deep-seated rift, suggesting that early unity was at best tenuous.

The ongoing tension becomes especially apparent in Paul's later letters, where he references a collection for the Jerusalem church (2 Cor 8). Paul's fundraising effort was likely intended as a goodwill gesture, serving as a bridge to reconcile Jewish and Gentile factions. However, its absence from the book of Acts raises questions about its significance and outcome. Some scholars suggest that its omission indicates either rejection or a failure to restore unity, symbolizing Paul's increasingly isolated position. Achtemeier interprets Paul's final visit to Jerusalem, ostensibly to deliver this offering, as evidence that true unity remained elusive (1986:25). Despite his efforts, Paul ended his ministry as a marginalised figure, with his vision of a united church unfulfilled (Acts 28:30).

This historical ambiguity suggests that Luke's depiction of unity in Acts may have been more idealistic than factual. Achtemeier (1986:26) characterizes this unity as a "dream," cherished by Peter, pursued by Paul, guarded by James, but perhaps unachievable. This illusory unity reveals unresolved conflicts within the early church and an enduring tension between theological aspirations and historical realities. As Luke presents it, the church appears to be united. Yet, Paul's writings and later events suggest a more complicated and fractured reality - a reality where unity remains an ideal rather than a tangible achievement.

Thus, the question of whether true unity was achieved within the early church remains unresolved. The early church's struggle to integrate diverse ethnic, cultural, and theological perspectives resonates today, challenging contemporary faith communities to confront similar issues of identity, inclusion, and unity. Paul's vision of a church that transcended ethnic and cultural divides was revolutionary, but it faced resistance and was only partially realised.

This investigation highlights the complexity of early Christian identity and the challenges of achieving true unity amid profound theological and cultural differences. Although historically elusive, the aspiration for unity in the early church remains a powerful theological imperative, emphasising the enduring call for inclusivity and reconciliation within today's global Christian community. The unresolved tensions of the early church remind us that unity is not an inherent condition but a continuous process requiring humility, compromise, and a shared commitment to transcend boundaries in the pursuit of faith.

7 Paul's Letter to the Ephesians: The Unity and Mission of the Global Church

One of Paul's final recorded epistles, the letter to the Ephesians, originates from a period of profound reflection during his imprisonment in Rome. Here, as a prisoner of Jesus Christ rather than of the Roman Empire, Paul had the opportunity to contemplate his entire ministry, from witnessing Stephen's martyrdom to his final days. Often referred to as the church letter, Paul's epistle to the Ephesians represents a culmination of his insights, particularly regarding the church's role in God's eternal plan and mission focused on humanity. The letter to the Ephesians can be seen as the summative conclusions at the end of Paul's ministry for the Christian Church, which was destined to extend beyond the Hellenistic context it faced in the early centuries.

Throughout his ministry, Paul identified himself as a servant of Christ, committed to revealing a divine '*mystery*' that had remained concealed for ages but was now uniquely disclosed through him. Although this mystery had previously been revealed to the prophets and apostles, the way Paul was used by God to 'unveil' it was notably groundbreaking (Eph 3:5). Central to this

'groundbreaking' revelation was the cross-cultural diffusion of the Christian faith, which transcended ethnic and cultural barriers while challenging established religious orders.

Paul was not merely a proponent of salvation; he pioneered a gospel advocating for the inclusion of Gentiles within what had been an ethnically Jewish faith community. This unprecedented initiative exposed him to opposition from his people - a stance he had vehemently championed until his transformation by Jesus Christ. By God's grace, Paul was 'turned around' and entrusted with unveiling this mystery, which is fundamental to the church's identity and humanity's participation in God's redemptive plan.

Paul's theological focus in Ephesians extends beyond individual salvation or even the welfare of the church; it encompasses God's overarching purpose for humanity, reaching back into eternity (Eph 1) and ultimately finding realization in human history. In an era when questions lingered about Christians' 'true' identity and unity as members of Christ's body (Eph 2), Paul's reflections offered an essential corporate vision (Eph 2). He presented the Christian life not as an isolated spiritual journey but as a shared experience within the collective body of Christ. Believers are not merely individuals but participants in a larger, divinely orchestrated community (Lemmer, 1998:469), incorporated into the unity of both 'intensive' functional and extensive missional relevance in the world (Eph 4) within the growing body of Jesus Christ. The incorporation of Gentile Christians was already known; the way of incorporation was now revealed (Lemmer, 1998:489).

The primary purpose of this letter is Paul's exploration of the mystery of Christ, a profound concept related to God's divine plan or economy. By divine privilege, Paul played an essential role in revealing this mystery (Lemmer, 1998:489). Contrary to a concealed secret, this mystery represents an open invitation to comprehend God's redemptive intentions in uniting Jews and Gentiles into a single body. This act fulfils His will for universal reconciliation and illustrates that the body of Christ encompasses both celestial and terrestrial dimensions (Lemmer, 1998:478). Paul acknowledged the practical implications of this unity, viewing the inclusion of diverse believers not merely as symbolic diversity but as tangible, gospel-centred reconciliation. This reconciliation's '*sacred secret*' was central to his mission, epitomising God's purpose to unite through Christ's cross what history and culture had divided within human society.

In Ephesians, Paul reveals the church as an inseparable extension of Christ Himself. Due to their intimate relationship, one must understand Christ to understand the church. Paul communicates that what happened to Christ also happened to the church; His resurrection is its resurrection, and His suffering is its suffering (Lemmer, 1998:462). This shared identity between Christ and the church is essential for unlocking Ephesians' communicative power, where the church is not merely

an institution but manifests Christ's body on earth (Lemmer, 1998:459). Jesus Christ is the beginning, the growth, and the goal toward which development occurs – until fullness is reached (Lemmer, 1998:492).

In his final years, Paul urged the church to rise above cultural and ethnic divisions, fostering a unity that reflected God's mission. His letter to the Ephesians reminds us that the church's purpose surpasses tribal or territorial interests. Instead, the church represents a heavenly, Christ-centred community that bears witness to God's transformative love for humanity. Paul reveals the mystery that in Christ's body, all are reconciled, united in purpose, and called to participate in God's global mission to redeem and restore.

Paul discusses the full implications of God's transformational engagement with His chosen people, as reflected in the second phase of the *missio Dei* and revealed in the New Testament in his letter to the Ephesians.

8 The Cross-Cultural Expansion of Christianity: From Jewish Roots to Global Mission

The cross-cultural diffusion of Christianity, rooted in the New Testament and later articulated by scholars such as Andrew Walls, provides a profound framework for the contemporary mission of the Christian Church. This diffusion reflects the gospel's journey beyond its initial Jewish context into diverse cultural settings, embodying the '*missio Dei*' (mission of God) in its mandate to make disciples of all nations (Mat 28:19). By transcending cultural and national boundaries, Christianity not only spreads geographically but also transform societies, calling individuals from various backgrounds to follow Christ while respecting their cultural identities.

The New Testament offers foundational moments for this diffusion. Jesus, Peter, and Paul exemplified the gospel's inclusivity by breaking down ethnic and social barriers. A pivotal moment occurred at the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15), where the early Church affirmed that Gentile believers were not required to adopt Jewish customs to follow Christ. This decision underscored that cultural distinctiveness could coexist within the Christian faith, establishing a missional precedent for future generations to embrace diversity while remaining united in Christ.

Walls's missiological principles - the 'Indigenising Principle' (Walls, 1996:7-8) and the 'Pilgrim Principle' (Walls, 1996:8-9) - provide valuable insights into how this diffusion occurs. The Indigenising Principle reflects Christianity's capacity to root itself in local cultures, allowing followers to embrace the gospel within their cultural context. Early Gentile believers exemplified this by integrating their cultural identities without adopting Jewish practices, creating a faith experience that resonated locally while honouring the universal message of Christ. Conversely,

the Pilgrim Principle reminds Christians that while they are embedded in their cultures, they are also called to align with kingdom values, which can be countercultural. This balance enables early believers to affirm certain cultural elements while transforming others incompatible with the gospel's message.

Paul's letters reflect these principles. His missionary work contextualized the gospel to address diverse cultural audiences directly, yet he urged believers to reject practices that contradicted their new identity in Christ. This approach created a Christian community that was unified yet diverse, a 'new humanity' (Eph 2:15), transcending ethnic and cultural divisions. Paul's declaration in Galatians 3:28 - that there is 'neither Jew nor Greek... for you are all one in Christ Jesus' - illustrates this inclusive unity, demonstrating how Christianity could affirm cultural identity and inspire transformation.

For today's Church, cross-cultural diffusion remains a guiding missional framework. As Christianity shifts from a Western-centric to a global movement, the principles of indigenisation and pilgrimage are still essential. Walls's insights encourage the Church to foster a vibrant faith that respects cultural uniqueness while upholding core gospel truths. Actual participation in *missio Dei* involves inviting all cultures into a shared faith that balances cultural relevance with prophetic witness, reflecting the gospel's transformative power.

In conclusion, the cross-cultural diffusion of Christianity involves not only geographical spread but also the creation of a unified, culturally rich faith community. By understanding this diffusion's historical and theological foundations, the Church can better align with the *missio Dei*, nurturing a global body of Christ that celebrates unity in diversity as it bears witness to God's kingdom in an interconnected world.

9 Conclusion

In conclusion, the early church's transformation following Jesus' resurrection and ascension was neither seamless nor purely natural; instead, it was a divine and tumultuous process characterised by conflict, growth, and eventual separation from the Second Temple Judaism. This period was critical, as God actively shaped His people's mission, preserving it from cultural confinement and compromise. The divergent expectations regarding the Messiah, the role of Mosaic Law, and the inclusion of Gentiles illustrate the intense internal and external pressures faced by early Christianity. The Jerusalem Council epitomized this tension, striving to resolve disputes threatening the church's unity - a unity that history reveals remained challenging to sustain. This era served as a foundational example as the church navigated exclusion from synagogues,

persecution, and theological rifts, ultimately pivoting to a universal mission rooted in Christ and inclusive of all nations.

Paul's warnings in Acts and his letters to the Ephesians underscore the dangers of internal 'wolves' (Eph 20:29) and cultural compromise, emphasising that God continually redeems His mission from forces threatening its integrity. The New Testament provides timeless guidance for the church as it faces recurring challenges in an ever-changing world. History attests to repeated shifts in the church's 'centre of gravity,' yet the foundational principles revealed in Scripture remain constant, calling the church to a mission that transcends cultural boundaries. As Migliore (2014) aptly reminds us, theology - and thus mission - is a journey that must 'begin again and again at the beginning,' permanently anchored in God's transformative purpose for His people and creation.

Western Christianity has evolved within Christendom and is now transitioning towards Global Christianity. During this transformative period, it is crucial to return to the Bible and explore what transpired when God altered His relationship with His chosen people for His global mission.

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11 Complementary to Chapter 5: Theological Foundations, Contextual Dynamics, and Methodological Rationale: Positioning the Cross-Cultural Expansion of God's People

11.1 Theological and Exegetical Engagement

This article explores the cross-cultural expansion of God's people as a central theme in the biblical narrative, focusing on the transition from Jewish roots to a global faith community. Theologically, the study engages with the doctrine of election, the inclusion of the Gentiles, and the unfolding of the *missio Dei* through the expanding boundaries of God's covenant community. It examines this trajectory as a historical development and a divine initiative grounded in Scripture and fulfilled through Christ.

The exegetical foundation of this article is rooted in key biblical texts such as Genesis 12:1-3, Isaiah 49:6, Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 15, and Ephesians 2-3. These passages are interpreted through a missional hermeneutic that emphasises God's intentional movement outward - toward the nations, the margins, and inclusion. The Acts 15 Council receives particular attention as a theological turning point where the early Church recognises and affirms the inclusion of Gentiles without adherence to Jewish law. Paul's articulation of the 'mystery' in Ephesians 3:6 is central, revealing God's intention to unite Jews and Gentiles in one body through Christ.

Theologically, the article engages with alternative interpretations of these events, including 'supersessionist' readings that depict the Church as replacing Israel, and Zionist perspectives that assert a future ethnic centrality for Israel in God's redemptive plan. It critiques these views by reaffirming the continuity and expansion of God's covenant rather than suggesting replacement or regression. The inclusion of the Gentiles is not an abandonment of Israel but a fulfilment of its vocation to be a light to the nations.

This approach highlights the gospel's cross-cultural and inclusive nature, resisting ethno-nationalistic restrictions on God's people. The theological focus is on unity in diversity, not uniformity, and on a Spirit-led community that transcends socio-cultural boundaries without erasing them.

11.2 Missiological and Contextual Implications

The missiological implications of this cross-cultural expansion are particularly significant for the African Church. Historically shaped by Western missionary movements and colonial frameworks, many African Christian traditions continue to grapple with inherited theological models that

emphasise Western cultural norms. This article asserts that the *missio Dei* is inherently decolonial, inviting the Church to embody a contextualised, polycentric, and intercultural expression of faith.

By recovering the biblical trajectory from the temple to the nations, the African Church is invited to reimagine its theological identity not as a derivative of Western Christendom but as a co-participant in God's global mission. The affirmation of Gentile inclusion in Acts 15 serves as a scriptural mandate for welcoming diverse expressions of faithfulness within the one body of Christ. This has practical implications for theological education, ecclesial formation, and intercultural dialogue in African contexts.

Furthermore, the article warns against reintroducing neo-Christendom ideologies through prosperity theology, religious nationalism, or Western dependency. These tendencies reflect the Judaising impulse to universalise culturally bound expressions of faith. Therefore, the African Church's mission is to affirm the gospel's translatability without compromising its theological core. This requires a mission that is both rooted and adaptive, faithful and contextual.

11.3 Conceptual and Theoretical Coherence

Conceptually, this article advances the study's broader argument by demonstrating that expanding God's people is not a human innovation, but a divine act grounded in Scripture. It explores the theological logic of inclusion and the spiritual dynamics of cross-cultural mission as essential features of the Church's vocation. Emphasising the Acts 15 Council and Paul's "*mystery*" theology reinforces the continuity between the biblical narrative and contemporary missional realities.

The article also engages with counter-perspectives suggesting that the Church should preserve doctrinal or cultural purity at the expense of inclusivity. In contrast, the study argues that doctrinal fidelity and cultural diversity are not opposites but interdependent dimensions of a Spirit-led Church. Theologically, the article builds on the Nicene vision of a "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church," interpreted here not as institutional uniformity but as spiritual unity across diverse cultures and contexts.

This theological and conceptual coherence ensures that the article does not merely repeat previous themes but extends them into ecclesiology, identity, and intercultural mission.

11.4 Methodological Clarification

This article utilises the qualitative theological method established in the study's first article, employing content analysis to examine biblical texts, theological frameworks, and historical developments. Content analysis allows the article to trace theological patterns and interpret scriptural movements within a broader missional and ecclesiological context.

Unlike empirical methods that rely on data collection and analysis, content analysis promotes deep theological reflection that connects biblical insights with contextual realities. This method is vital for comprehending how the early Church navigated the transition from a Jewish sect to a global community and how this transition shapes the Church's identity today.

The article's focus on cross-cultural expansion and covenantal inclusion ensures a unique contribution to the broader study. While other articles investigate theological distortions (e.g., Christendom, Barabbas ideologies, temple-centred religion), this article centres on divine intention and ecclesial transformation. It emphasises not what the Church must reject but what it is called to become.

In conclusion, this article provides a biblically grounded, theologically rich, and contextually relevant reflection on God's people's expansion from temple to nation. Combining missional hermeneutics, African contextual engagement, and a coherent theological methodology affirms the Church's calling to be a cross-cultural body shaped by the inclusive love of God revealed in Christ. This contribution strengthens the overall coherence of the study while offering fresh insights for missional theology in a post-Christendom world.

CHAPTER 6: (ARTICLE 5)

Original title:

‘Reviving Missional Purpose in a Civilizational Crisis. The Dechristianization of the West and the Rise of Global Christianity as Divine Reorientation.’

Reworked and resubmitted with new title:

This article was submitted to the International Bulletin of Mission Research (IBR). The addendum provides more information.

Summary of Changes

In response to the editorial feedback, the manuscript has been significantly revised to transition from descriptive historical analysis to a constructive missiological proposal. A new section has been included to articulate a concrete framework for the theological reorientation of Western Christianity, grounded in lessons from Global Christianity and structured around enduring missiological principles, particularly the six constants of mission identified by Bevans and Schroeder. Historical and theological background material has been condensed to sharpen the focus on forward-looking strategies, including reforms in theological education, institutional posture, and ecclesiological imagination. The article now offers a substantive contribution to the current mission studies discourse by proposing a practical, contextually grounded framework for post-Christendom renewal.

‘From Christendom to Global Mission: Proposing a Theological Framework for Post-Western Christianity’.

1. Abstract

The decline of Western Christendom and the simultaneous rise of Global Christianity present a significant civilizational and missional crisis for the Church. While secularization in the North Atlantic and the expansion of Christianity in the Global South are well-documented phenomena, there remains an urgent need for a constructive missional framework for the Western Church. This article addresses this necessity by proposing a theological reorientation based on insights from Global Christianity and enduring missiological principles.

Drawing on historical, theological, and socio-political analyses, the article outlines key strategies for renewal: re-centring identity in the *missio Dei*, learning from marginalized communities, recovering apostolic ecclesiology, and reforming theological education. This study moves beyond mere diagnosis toward renewal by providing a concrete framework for post-Christendom mission. It contributes to contemporary discussions on Christian witness in a global and post-secular context.

2. Introduction

Modern culture and the Christian mission find themselves at a critical juncture within Western Christianity, as Hall (1997: vii) explains. This transitional moment has prompted calls for discernment among Christians, with Goudswaard (2001:13) urging believers to engage critically with the spirit(s) of the age, particularly during pivotal historical intersections. The declining influence of Christianity in Western societies, especially in Europe and the USA, contrasts with notable growth and transformation across the Global South. These developments hold historical significance comparable to the epochal changes brought about by the Copernican Revolution and the European discovery of America (Poon, 2011:184). They underscore an urgent need for scholarly engagement to understand and respond to this new and evolving missiological landscape.

Historically universal in its outreach and scope, Christianity is now entering a phase of true global universality. The long-standing perception of Christianity as a Western religion has transitioned towards a broader understanding: Christianity is fundamentally non-Western and distinctively global, representing the only genuinely worldwide religion (Bediako, 2011:243). This reorientation necessitates a reassessment of Christian history, mission, and identity, providing a framework for the future that avoids potential misinterpretations (Bediako, 2011:244). Furthermore, it cautions against assuming that Christianity's spread is merely an extension of Western-driven globalization. Such an assumption risks reducing Christianity to a cultural construct refined in the West, overshadowing its richer, more diverse global expressions (Bediako, 2011:245). By re-examining Christianity's historical trajectory while considering its expanding international reach, scholars are better positioned to navigate its evolving role within an increasingly interconnected world.

This paper situates itself within this crucial moment, analysing Christianity's transformational engagement across socio-political realities and cultural shifts from a missiological perspective.

Through a comprehensive study¹ Religious vulnerability, political ideology, and cross-cultural diffusion explore the theological and socio-political foundations that have shaped Christianity's progression from the first century to the modern era. These inquiries draw from extensive research and decades of ministry experience to address the current epistemological crisis (Kirk & Van Hoozer, 1999) within Western Christianity and offer new insights into the Church's global mission and identity.

To understand the depth of the current civilizational and missional crisis, it is necessary first to examine the historical trajectories that have shaped the Western Church's present existential crisis.

3. Diagnosing the Crisis: The Decline of Christendom and the Rise of Global Christianity

Initially rooted in Christian theology, Western academia gradually secularized under Enlightenment influences. Early universities once saw theology as the queen of the sciences (Muggeridge, 1980: ix; Walls, 2002:222), but by the twentieth century, this tradition had largely disappeared, replaced by a 'disinterested search for truth' divorced from Christian foundations (Walls, 2002:222). The Enlightenment's elevation of human reason and the autonomous self-isolated theology from public life and fragmenting Christian witness (Wells, 1993:95). As Wells (1993:97) observes, this shift represented a turn from Theocentrism to anthropocentrism, leaving the Church culturally captive and theologically impoverished. In its struggle to survive, the Western Church focused mainly on self-preservation and institutional maintenance (Laing, 2009:22).

Theological faculties increasingly merged with Religious Studies, treating all religions as human constructs and marginalizing Christian claims to truth (Wells, 1993:122). As Western society grew more sceptical of religious authority, theology retreated into private belief, resulting in what Wells calls the 'collapse of the Western mind' (1993:118). Public theology became reduced to social relief efforts, reflecting a broader epistemological crisis (Poon, 2011:185).

Western Christianity's accommodation to Enlightenment ideals produced a 'Christianized Enlightenment' (Walls, 2002:223), where the gospel was privatized and the Church mirrored cultural values rather than challenging them. As Hauerwas and Willimon (2014: xvi) argue, a

¹ This article forms part of a PhD study.

Church overly aligned with culture domesticates the gospel. Horton (2008:16) similarly warns that cultural assimilation silences Christian witness. It can be concluded that during the 19th century, theological reflection within academic institutions became increasingly abstract and decontextualized, focusing on ecclesiology while neglecting real-world contexts (Laing, 2009:12). It became an ecclesiology without missiology.²

Today's Western ecclesiology often reduces mission to meeting human needs rather than proclaiming the transformative power of Christ (Guder, 2009:69-70). This theological drift has rendered much of Western Christianity intellectually marginalized and missiologically stagnant.

3.1 The 'Death' of Christendom?

Despite clear signs of decline, many Western theologians have yet to fully grasp the significance of the global shift in Christianity (Poon, 2011:184). As Sanneh (2003:3) notes, Western Christianity struggles to comprehend the vitality of emerging Christian expressions beyond the West. Institutional inertia, vested interests, and a desire to preserve Christendom's structures often obstruct genuine engagement with this reality (Hall, 1997:4, 1997:35).

Hall (1999:70) warns that complacency and self-deception threaten the Church's relevance. As Christians, we experience the pain of the Enlightenment's 'death throes' (Wright, 1999:3) and subsequently the 'death' of Christendom. Acknowledging Christendom's 'decline' and even 'end' without thoroughly considering its theological implications risks continued irrelevance. Genuine engagement demands reimagining the Church's mission and purpose for a post-Christendom era.

Globalization and the rise of World Christianity intensify this urgency. As Ott and Netland (2006:15) observe, these shifts profoundly challenge inherited theological frameworks. Guder (n.d.: 2) emphasizes that theology must now prioritize mission over institutional maintenance. Escobar (2003:22) calls the Church to penitence, humility, and renewed global engagement.

3.2 Take Note of... or Learn From?

The shift of Christianity's centre of gravity away from the West is not merely disorienting but also providential. Hall (1999:41, 75) interprets the marginalization of Christianity as divine intervention, urging the Church to recover its identity from the peripheries rather than from positions of power.

² During this time, the theological curriculum for ministerial formation was also canonized (Laing, 2009:11). A mission-less church saw no reason for including missiology in the theological curriculum.

The end of Christianity's privileged status signifies a turning point in salvation history (Hall, 1997:51).

Walls (1996:6-8) affirms that God's purposes transcend human events, shaping faith throughout history. The loss of political authority in Western Christianity may represent a divine invitation to rediscover its missional vocation. As Bediako (2011:244) argues, this moment calls the Church to realign with its historical essence, serving God's global mission rather than preserving institutional status.

This transition is not a defeat but a summons to renewal: just as God historically worked through marginalized communities, the Western Church's move to the cultural periphery offers an opportunity to recover its transformative, outward-focused identity. However, it must be remembered that the challenges facing the Western Church are not merely historical or sociological; they reveal deeper theological misalignments that have profoundly distorted its missional identity.

3.3 Theological Misalignments: From Missional Ecclesiology to Institutional Survival

The West's historical journey reflects a profound theological misalignment: a movement from a vibrant missional identity as revealed in New Testament times to the domesticated structures of Christendom, culminating in a secularized survival mode.

Originally called to embody God's redemptive mission, the Church gradually institutionalized its role, aligning itself with political power and cultural dominance. The rise of Christendom blurred the line between the Church's spiritual vocation and its temporal aspirations. Over time, the Enlightenment's emphasis on human autonomy and rationalism further eroded theological conviction, reducing the Church's public witness to private piety and social accommodation (Wells, 1993:95; Walls, 2002:223).

This missional distortion finds a striking biblical parallel in Jesus's final engagement with the Jerusalem Temple and the people's choice of Barabbas at His trial. Jesus's confrontation with the Temple's economic and political corruption (Hamilton, 1964:370; Casey, 1997:309) signalled divine judgment against Israel's leaders, whose self-interest had perverted God's intended mission. His symbolic departure from the Temple represented a transition from a nationalistic religious system toward a universal mission aligned with the *missio Dei*.

Simultaneously, the crowd's preference for Barabbas - a revolutionary figure advocating violent liberation - over Jesus reveals a fundamental theological error: the prioritization of political salvation over spiritual redemption (Hart, 2019:294; Wright, 2002:4). This *'Barabbas delusion'*

encapsulates a recurring temptation throughout religious history: sacrificing divine vocation on the altar of political expediency.

In the West, similar dynamics unfolded. The Church, like Israel, conflated its mission with cultural survival and political influence. As Hauerwas and Willimon (2014: xvi) warn, when the Church mirrors the values of the surrounding culture, it domesticates and tames the gospel. Horton (2008:16) further cautions that cultural assimilation silences the prophetic voice of the Church, trading martyrdom for acceptance.

Today, Western Christianity often operates within a secularized framework, where theology is marginalized, and mission is reduced to humanitarian activism rather than the transformative proclamation of Christ's Kingdom (Guder, 2009:69-70). As a result, the Church struggles to maintain relevance, caught between a privatized faith and an institutional identity increasingly detached from its apostolic calling.

Therefore, theological renewal requires more than institutional reform; it calls for a radical return to the missional identity rooted in God's global redemptive purposes. The Temple's lessons and Barabbas's trial serve as lasting warnings and invitations to realign the Church's witness with the cruciform path of Christ rather than the alluring promises of political power.

In contrast to the struggles of the Western Church, the vitality of Christianity in the Global South offers critical insights and alternative trajectories for missional renewal, grounded in diverse socio-political and theological contexts.

4. Lessons from the Global South: Reviving the Spirit-Led Mission

4.1 A Continuation of the Acts Paradigm

The vitality of Global South Christianity is not a new phenomenon but a continuation of the Spirit-led cross-cultural mission initiated in the Book of Acts. From Pentecost to the Jerusalem Council, the early Church broke ethnic and cultural barriers, embodying a gospel not tied to political power but propelled by the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8; Acts 15). Christianity's missional identity was never intended to be bound to empire or political dominance; rather, it was meant to be a Spirit-driven, inclusive, and cross-cultural movement. Despite its real-world challenges, the enduring vitality and growth of Global South Christianity reflect a faithful continuation of this biblical pattern.

This biblical foundation of mission shows that missional vitality thrives when the Church stays faithful to the Spirit's leading and is separate from worldly power structures. The Book of Acts acts

as a theological prototype, affirming that God's mission transcends cultural boundaries and invites the Church into a living, dynamic engagement with all peoples.

4.2 Concrete Expressions of Missional Vitality and the Flourishing of Faith Without Political Power

4.2.1 Introduction

An important theme in contemporary global Christianity is that authentic missional vitality often arises independently of Christendom's structures and political authority. In regions such as Africa, Latin America, and Asia, grassroots movements, indigenous churches, Spirit-led revivals, and locally rooted institutions illustrate that the Gospel's transformative power does not require state sanction or ecclesiastical dominance. This section examines key case studies: African Initiated Churches (AICs), Base Ecclesial Communities (CEBs) in Latin America, Pentecostal and Charismatic movements in Asia and Africa, and missional theological institutions like Daystar University (Kenya) and SETECA (Guatemala).

4.2.2 Concrete Expressions of Missional Vitality

In various contexts, tangible expressions of missional vitality have consistently emerged beyond traditional Christendom structures. African Initiated Churches (AICs) exemplify this by reclaiming African spirituality and resisting colonial religious imperialism. They have localized Christian faith as a liberative force addressing healing, justice, and survival (Masuku, 2021; Akrong, 1998; Chishanu, 2024). Similarly, Base Ecclesial Communities (CEBs) in Latin America embody grassroots faith intertwined with liberation theology. These small Christian communities pursue justice, solidarity, and social transformation from the ground up (Wisdomlib.org, 2024).

Pentecostal and Charismatic movements have demonstrated significant missional dynamism in Asia and Africa. By emphasizing healing, deliverance, and Spirit empowerment, these movements have rapidly grown by addressing immediate spiritual and material needs through direct experiential engagement (Anderson, 2001; OxfordRE, 2020). Institutions like Daystar University in Kenya and SETECA in Guatemala illustrate strategic development in missional theological education rooted in local realities. These institutions equip leaders for holistic transformation beyond Western institutional models (Daystar.ac.ke, 2024; SETECA.edu, 2024).

Across these diverse movements, mission is defined by institutional expansion, incarnational presence, contextual relevance, and community-centred transformation.

4.2.3 The Missional Lesson: Faith Flourishes Without Political Power

A compelling missiological lesson from these movements is that authentic Christian vitality does not depend on political power or state endorsement. The AICs, born as a spiritual protest against Western ecclesiastical and colonial domination, thrived precisely because they separated mission from empire, rooting faith in African cosmology and communal resilience (Masuku, 2021; Akrong, 1998; Chishanu, 2024). Base Ecclesial Communities in Latin America similarly revealed that marginalized faith communities, independent of hierarchical church or state structures, could become dynamic agents of justice and liberation through small-scale, participatory activism (Wisdomlib.org, 2024). Pentecostal and Charismatic movements, both in Asia and Africa, further confirmed that decentralized, Spirit-led expressions of faith - often arising in economically and politically marginalized settings - can flourish with extraordinary vitality apart from the frameworks of Christendom (HPRweb, 2017; OxfordRE, 2020). Even educational institutions like Daystar and SETECA demonstrate that deeply contextualized theological formation can advance transformative mission without relying on state power or colonial infrastructures (Daystar.ac.ke, 2024; SETECA.edu, 2024). Thus, these diverse movements reaffirm the New Testament principle: the Gospel's power is made perfect not through political dominance but through Spirit-empowered community witness, incarnational relevance, and grassroots solidarity.

4.2.4 Conclusion

The convergence of these global missional movements highlights an urgent truth for contemporary ecclesiology: missional vitality thrives where faith is deeply contextualized, community-centred, Spirit-led, and free from political entanglements. Whether in the African rejection of colonial religious structures, the Latin American struggle for liberation, or the Pentecostal emphasis on immediate spiritual empowerment, these expressions of Christianity remind the global Church that its future may depend less on institutional strength and more on its fidelity to incarnational mission among the marginalized. Institutions like Daystar and SETECA demonstrate that missional theological education can be a key strategic investment for sustaining such contextual witness. Together, they offer a blueprint for a vibrant, post-Christendom global Christianity.

Drawing on lessons from Global Christianity and informed by enduring missiological principles, this article proposes a concrete framework for the theological reorientation of the Western Church beyond Christendom.

5. Framework for Theological Reorientation: Mission Beyond Christendom

The decline of Christendom and the rise of Global Christianity necessitate lamentation and bold reimagination. The future vitality of Western Christianity depends on rediscovering its missional identity, free from the structures and assumptions of its Constantinian past. By learning from vibrant Christian movements in the Global South and adhering to enduring missiological principles outlined by Bevans and Schroeder (2004), we can propose a theological framework for renewal beyond Christendom.

Bevans and Schroeder identify six constants of mission: rooted in the Triune God, centred on Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, oriented toward the Kingdom of God, contextualized within culture, and aimed at holistic transformation. These constants provide a valuable theological lens for envisioning a faithful mission in a post-Christendom era. They anchor the strategic shifts necessary for the Western Church's reorientation toward God's ongoing global mission.

5.1 Key Principles for Missional Renewal

5.1.1 Re-centring Mission in the Triune God

The renewal of the Church's mission must begin with a fundamental re-centring in the life of the Triune God. As Bevans and Schroeder (2004:29) emphasize, mission originates not in the Church but in the dynamic sending of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Reaffirming this first missiological constant, the Church must reclaim its apostolic identity as a community sent by the Father, embodying the reconciling work of the Son, and empowered by the Spirit. Christology thus stands at the heart of authentic missional identity. The Church's mission flows not from institutional survival but from the incarnational mission of Jesus Christ, who calls his followers to participate in God's redemptive purposes for the world (John 20:21).

5.1.2 Embracing Contextualization and Learning from the Margins

Vital missional renewal also requires a deep embrace of contextualization. In line with Bevans and Schroeder's second constant (2004:47), authentic mission always takes cultural context seriously, recognizing that the gospel must be translated and embodied within the unique cultural narratives of each people. Faithful Christian witness today must learn from the churches of the Global South, where Christianity thrives in contexts marked by suffering, resilience, and hope. As Walls (1996) observed, the gospel often takes its most vibrant and transformative forms at the

margins, away from the centres of privilege. Thus, culture is not a secondary consideration but is intrinsic to the missional task.

5.1.3 Recovering Apostolic Ecclesiology and Holistic Mission

Post-Christendom mission necessitates a rediscovery of a prophetic and servant-hearted ecclesiology. The Church must not replicate societal power structures but embody Christ's self-giving love, serving as a sign, foretaste, and instrument of the Kingdom of God. This aligns with Bevans and Schroeder's third constant (2004:62), advocating for a holistic mission proclaiming the gospel while promoting justice, peace, and reconciliation. Hence, ecclesiology and eschatology are interconnected. The Church anticipates and engages in the future reign of God by living distinctively in the present.

5.2 Strategic Shifts Toward Missional Reorientation

5.2.1 Reimagining Theological Education as Missional Formation

Strategic renewal in theological education requires a significant transformation. It must shift from maintaining institutional Christendom to developing missional disciples grounded in Christocentrism and empowered by the Holy Spirit, as identified by Bevans and Schroeder (2004:37-42). This necessitates a curriculum centred on Christ's redemptive mission and fostering reliance on the Holy Spirit's empowering presence. Practically, this involves incorporating Global South theologies, emphasizing lived mission over theoretical doctrinal study, and creating formative experiences that immerse students in diverse cultural contexts where the gospel's transformative power is evident (Conn, 1984).

5.2.2 Transforming Institutional Posture: From Fortress to Embassy

The Church must transition from a defensive stance to acting as an active representative of the Kingdom. According to Bevans and Schroeder's fifth constant (2004:54), the Church should not focus on defending historical privileges but serve as a provisional and anticipatory sign of God's imminent reign. This eschatological perspective requires the Church to embrace vulnerability, hospitality, and collaboration across cultural and denominational lines. Rather than striving for cultural restoration, Western Christianity should bear witness to the crucified and risen Christ in an increasingly secular and pluralistic society.

5.2.3 Rekindling Ecclesiological Imagination for Holistic Witness

Missional reorientation requires a renewed ecclesiological vision. The Church should perceive itself through biblical metaphors such as exile, pilgrimage, and apostleship, rather than political privilege or cultural dominance. According to Bevans and Schroeder's sixth constant (2004:62), mission demands the Church's ongoing conversion.

This missional anthropology acknowledges the dynamic and unfinished nature of human societies and Christian communities. Consequently, ecclesial structures must prioritize discipleship over maintenance, servant leadership over bureaucracy, and the formation of gospel-centred communities that embody love, justice, and reconciliation across all divisions (Migliore, 2014:275).

6. A Vision for the Western Church Beyond Christendom

Adopting these theological principles and strategic shifts can free Western Christianity from its nostalgic constraints and realign it with God's global mission. The six constants outlined by Bevans and Schroeder (2004:29-62) - mission rooted in the Triune God, culturally contextualized, committed to holistic transformation, centred in Christ and Spirit-empowered, oriented to the Kingdom, and marked by continual conversion - offer a comprehensive missional framework for a Church seeking renewal beyond Christendom.

In an era of societal upheaval, the Church's future hinges not on reclaiming lost privileges but on rediscovering its identity as a Christ-centred, Spirit-empowered, culturally engaged, and mission-driven community grounded in hope for the coming Kingdom of God.

6.1 Theological Education as a Strategic Missional Priority

6.1.1 The Crisis of Christendom-Based Theological Education

Theological education in the West remains significantly influenced by structures originating from Christendom and Enlightenment paradigms (Banks, 1999:10; Wells, 1993:31-32). Historically, theological training aimed to safeguard institutional authority, uphold ecclesiastical systems, and preserve cultural Christendom, rather than preparing the Church for dynamic, cross-cultural missions. Walls (2002:220) warns that theological education loses its purpose and vitality when it neglects its missional focus.

With Christendom's decline and the rise of Global Christianity, such ecclesiocentric models are inadequate. Instead of forming agents for God's global mission, they often produce caretakers of

declining institutions. Wells (1993:5-6) contends that theology must serve the people of God and their witness in the world, rather than primarily serving academic guilds or maintaining denominational structures.

6.1.2 Recovering the Missional Nature of Theological Formation

Revitalizing the missional purpose of theological education necessitates a profound transformation. Theological institutions should focus on developing missional agents rather than preserving ecclesiastical systems. Hall (1997:51) and Bediako (2011:248) highlight that Christendom's decline is not a catastrophe but an opportunity to reconceptualize the Church's mission worldwide. Guder (2009:65) cautions against reducing theology to mere ecclesial maintenance and advocates for active engagement in the *missio Dei*. Theological reflection must be understood as secondary to mission. Mission drives theology, not vice versa (Bediako, 2011:248; Conn, 1984:210). In a pluralistic, post-Christendom context, theological education must equip culturally astute, missionary-oriented leaders and spiritually resilient leaders.

7. New Pedagogical Models for Missional Theological Education

Three essential pedagogical shifts are necessary:

7.1 Contextual Theology Learning:

Theology should emerge from and engage with real-world contexts, particularly those of marginalized and suffering populations, following Christ's incarnational model (Van Gelder, 2013:46). This approach challenges traditional abstract systematics and grounds theological reflection in actual mission experiences. It involves returning to the Bible to understand how God's revelation addresses context.

7.2 Field-Based Theological Education:

Theological education must increasingly occur in the field rather than be confined to classrooms. Following Conn's (1984) emphasis on theology's dialogue with anthropology and mission, students should learn theology in situ, discerning God's work within local cultures instead of from a detached perspective. This involves returning to the local church where theology is made.

7.3 Triune God-Centred Curriculum:

Theological curricula must refocus on the mission of the Triune God as the organizing principle rather than focusing on institutional survival (Van Gelder, 2014:53). Shifting from a Christendom-

centric approach to Trinitarian missional theology will enable theological education to serve God's dynamic, global purposes (Ott & Netland, 2006:27; Walls, 1996:8). This involves going back to the *missio Dei*, which is situated in the Triune God.

8. Conclusion: Toward a Missional Future

The future vitality of Christian witness hinges not on maintaining outdated educational structures but on nurturing a new generation of missional theologians, pastors, and leaders. As the Global South exemplifies new expressions of contextual, Spirit-driven Christianity, the Western Church must radically reform its theological education. It needs to develop agents of God's mission - individuals capable of crossing boundaries, transcending political entanglements, and proclaiming a gospel that renews all creation. Only through such transformation can theology reclaim its vocation as a living testimony to the ongoing work of the Triune God in the world.

9. Final Reflections: A Call to Missional Reformation

The historical development of God's mission—from the calling of Israel and Jesus's departure from the Temple to the Spirit-led expansion of the Church in Acts - illustrates that God continually reshapes His people to fulfil His purposes across cultures and generations. In light of the decline of Christendom and the rise of Global Christianity, the Western Church faces a critical decision: it can either lament the loss of cultural privilege or embrace Spirit-empowered reformation. To reclaim its missional vocation, the Church must abandon outdated structures, transcend political entanglements, and cultivate leaders shaped by cross-cultural, Spirit-led theological formation. This reformation should commence with a renewed theological education that forms missionary agents rather than institutional custodians. Faithfulness to God's mission requires a Church that embodies the gospel's transformative power with humility, hope, and boldness - becoming, once again, a living witness to the unfolding mystery of God's love for the world.

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11. Complementary to Chapter 6: Theological Discernment, Global Reorientation, and Methodological Depth: Positioning the Rise of Global Christianity as Divine Redirection

11.1 Theological and Exegetical Engagement

Article 5 represents a pivotal shift in the PhD study, transitioning from historical analysis to constructive theological reorientation. Previous articles critically examined theological distortions such as the Barabbas delusion, the institutional captivity of Christendom, and ideological subversions in Christian Zionism, Apartheid Theology, and Black Theology. This article seeks to retrieve theological resources for renewal. Engaging with biblical prototypes like Acts 1–15 and constants such as the *missio Dei* proposes a Christocentric and Spirit-led alternative to ecclesial decline. It emphasizes a return to core New Testament patterns of cross-cultural mission, urging the Church to embody its original apostolic identity rather than lament its historical decline.

11.2 Missiological and Contextual Implications

Aligning with the thesis's broader argument, Article 5 highlights the missional vitality of Global South Christianity as a critique of Western theological captivity and a model for contextual praxis. Utilizing Bevans and Schroeder's six missional constants, it reimagines Western mission as participatory, incarnational, and rooted in contextual humility. Concrete case studies from AICs,

Latin American base communities, and institutions like Daystar and SETECA illustrate post-Christendom mission. This reinforces the PhD's core claim: God's global mission advances through Spirit-led, marginalized, and culturally embedded communities rather than institutional preservation or political alignment.

11.3 Conceptual and Theoretical Coherence

Article 5 supports the thesis that Western Christianity's decline is a providential recalibration within God's mission. Building on discussions of the Barabbas delusion and Christendom's death, it offers a redemptive framework for theological reorientation. The six constants serve as both diagnostic tools and bridges between critique and renewal. Conceptually, this article unifies themes of historical regression, theological distortion, ideological delusion, and contextual emergence into a proposal for a post-Christendom ecclesiology that is missionary, Spirit-empowered, and cross-culturally responsive.

11.4 Methodological Clarification and Unique Contribution

The methodology in Article 5 enriches the PhD's narrative by integrating historical theology, biblical exegesis, missiological theory, and contextual case analysis into a constructive model. Transitioning from socio-historical critique to normative theology informed by lived missional realities clarifies the dissertation's cumulative method: moving from decolonial diagnosis to theological renewal grounded in global mission.

The unique contribution of Article 5 lies in synthesizing Western theological critique with Global South ecclesial creativity. While much scholarship critiques Christendom's decline or celebrates Global Christianity's growth, this article further integrates Global South theological imagination into a biblically grounded proposal for renewing Western theological identity. It concludes the PhD's theological arc by offering a forward-looking missional blueprint to inform curriculum, ecclesiology, and mission strategy in a globalized post-Christendom era.

CHAPTER 7: (ARTICLE 6)

From Barabbas to Christ: Theological Delusion, the Death of Christendom and Decolonial Missiology in the Age of BRICS

1. Abstract

This article examines the theological and missiological implications of the '*Barabbas delusion*,' which involves replacing Jesus Christ with politically convenient saviours. It posits that this delusion has re-emerged in Western Christianity and contributes to its regression into Christendom. By reinterpreting the Barabbas episode and Jesus Christ's final visit to the Temple, culminating in His trial, the paper identifies recurring patterns of religious-political distortion in contemporary Christendom.

Christian Zionism, Apartheid Theology, and Black Liberation Theology illustrate the Church's entanglement with power structures, ethnonationalism agendas, and revisionist eschatologies. These theological distortions must be contextualized within global shifts, including the crisis of Western civilization, the emergence of decolonial thought, and the rise of a BRICS-centred world order. This article advocates for a biblically grounded missiology that re-centres God's transformative engagement with His people for His global mission. As Christendom declines, the Church's mission in the age of global Christianity requires a profound theological reorientation.

2. Introduction: Christ, Barabbas, and the Missiological Blind Spot

In a significant moment documented in the Gospels, Pontius Pilate presented the crowd with a choice: Jesus Christ or Jesus Barabbas (Mat 27:17). The deliberate decision to release the insurrectionist and crucify the Messiah was not merely a historical error; it highlights a recurring theological crisis within God's covenant people. Throughout history, the Church has repeatedly encountered critical junctures where cultural desperation and political fear overshadowed fidelity to God's redemptive plan, leading to the adoption of politically expedient alternatives.

This recurring phenomenon, named the '*Barabbas delusion*' (Ferreira, 2025:4), arises not from overt rebellion but from sincere yet misguided expectations often skewed by imperial power, nationalistic desires, and religious hopes misaligned with the suffering Servant. Recognizing this cyclical dynamic provides a new perspective on Church history: one marked by an oscillation between cruciform faithfulness and political messianism.

This article explores the theological roots and historical manifestations of the 'Barabbas delusion'. It emphasizes that understanding this persistent temptation is vital for discerning contemporary crises facing global Christianity and reorienting the Church toward its true missional vocation in the post-Christendom era.

3. Theological Collapse of Christendom

The decline of Western Christianity cannot be understood merely as a sociological phenomenon or demographic trend. This decline represents a theological collapse long in the making. Initially a marginal, Spirit-empowered community of witnesses, the early Church embraced suffering and cultural marginalization as the natural cost of discipleship (Guder, 2009:65; Bediako, 2011:248). However, with the Constantinian synthesis of the fourth century, the Church transitioned from being a persecuted minority to an imperial majority. Christianity became the ideological scaffolding of the empire, and faith in the crucified Christ subtly gave way to allegiance to the cross-bearing empire.

As Douglas John Hall (1997:19) observes, this historical shift marked a fundamental theological distortion. Once a scandal and a sign of divine solidarity with the suffering, the cross transformed into a banner of conquest. Mission was not merely the Spirit-driven witness to the nations but increasingly became the civilizing arm of empire. This fusion of faith and political dominance gave rise to Christendom, a religious project grounded more in maintaining cultural hegemony than in participating in God's redemptive mission.

The Enlightenment further exposed Christendom's theological vulnerability. As human reason ascended to supremacy, revelation was relegated to the private sphere. Once the queen of the sciences, theology became sidelined, and the universities that had once been founded to explore divine truth evolved into secular institutions (Walls, 2002:222). David Wells (1993:95) describes this development as an epistemological crisis (Kirk, 1999, 2011): a loss of confidence in the revelatory basis of Christian identity, replaced by a faith in human autonomy and empirical rationality.

Christendom thus hollowed itself out from within. It retained the outward forms of Christian faith - church buildings, theological language, and ecclesiastical structures. However, it lost its animating centre. The Church in the West increasingly resembled the barren fig tree of Jesus' parable (Luke 13:6-9), which He noticed and condemned during His last visit to the Temple in Jerusalem. The tree was leafy but fruitless, outwardly impressive yet spiritually empty. Therefore, Christendom's death is not merely a sociological event but an apocalyptic unveiling - a divine

judgment that exposes idolatry at the heart of a once-vibrant faith, compromised by centuries of worldly accommodation.

As the theological foundations of Christendom weakened due to cultural accommodation and secularisation, the Church became increasingly susceptible to old temptations. Faced with declining influence and existential insecurity, many Christians sought to regain a sense of purpose and identity not through renewed fidelity to the crucified Christ but through political, nationalistic, and ideological allegiances. This theological void revived the ancient temptation of the '*Barabbas delusion*'. Salvation is pursued through power rather than the redemptive weakness of the cross. To comprehend contemporary manifestations of this phenomenon, it is crucial to revisit its biblical and missiological foundations.

4. The Barabbas Delusion: Biblical and Missiological Foundations

The trial of Jesus before Pilate, documented in all four Gospels (Mrk 15:6-15; Mat 27:15-26; Luke 23:13-25; Jhn 18:38-40), highlights a recurring theological crisis: the temptation to prefer a saviour shaped by political and cultural aspirations over the Messiah sent by God. The Jewish crowd chose Barabbas when faced with a choice between Jesus Christ, the suffering Servant, and Jesus Barabbas, the revolutionary insurrectionist. This deliberate decision, influenced by religious expectation, political desperation, and nationalistic longing, reveals a more profound spiritual pattern.

Barabbas symbolizes liberation through violence and coercion, while Jesus offers triumph through love, suffering, and faithful obedience unto death. N.T. Wright (1996:482) asserts that first-century Jewish hopes had grown increasingly nationalistic, obscuring recognition of Jesus's true deliverance. Barabbas serves not merely as a historical figure but as an enduring archetype, reflecting humanity's preference for power over the scandal of the cross.

Stanley Hauerwas (2006:239) observes that this choice reveals a persistent temptation among God's people to seek a Messiah who validates their ambitions rather than transforms their hearts. Under the pressure of imperial domination, salvation was redefined through political and cultural expediency, leading to a willingness to sanctify violence for divine purposes.

Missiologically, the '*Barabbas delusion*' recurs whenever the Church, facing cultural anxiety or political threat, aligns with worldly power instead of remaining faithful to Christ's cruciform path. It represents a theological error and a tragic missional failure stemming from sincere but misguided attempts to ensure survival or achieve hope through un-redemptive means. The historical

entanglements of Christian identity with empire, race, and ideology reveal this recurring spiritual blindness, particularly during times of socio-political upheaval.

Identifying the '*Barabbas delusion*' as a recurring missiological crisis requires repentance and renewed theological clarity. We will examine three prominent contemporary expressions: Christian Zionism, Apartheid, and Black Liberation Theology. Each emerged from contexts of genuine suffering and political turmoil but succumbed to the temptation of political messianism instead of adhering to Jesus Christ's cruciform mission.

4.1 Introduction: Motivation for Focusing on Three Specific Manifestations

This section critically examines contemporary manifestations of the Barabbas delusion by identifying and contextualising three major theological movements: Christian Zionism, Apartheid Theology, and Liberation Theology (including its evolution into Black Theology). These movements serve as crucial case studies for a broader missiological analysis. Each represents a distinct manner in which the Church's entanglement with political power and cultural identity has influenced both local and global expressions of Christianity.

Christian Zionism is analysed for its significant and ongoing impact on the current global projection of Christendom, particularly within contemporary geopolitical and eschatological frameworks. Apartheid Theology is examined as it emerged within a unique context where Western Christianity, through permanent European settlement in Southern Africa, was compelled to engage with a non-Western, Third World reality. In response to the challenge posed by Western theological paradigms through complex cultural and racial dynamics, unlike other colonial ventures characterized by extraction and departure, apartheid theology emerged as a solution. Liberation Theology, and its subsequent articulation in Black Theology, is considered a theological response to colonial mission, systemic economic exploitation, and racial injustice across Latin America, the United States, and South Africa.

This research posits that these movements, though stemming from genuine suffering and legitimate grievances, each reveal the recurring temptation to conflate divine redemption with political liberation and cultural self-assertion. By situating Christian Zionism, Apartheid Theology, and Liberation Theology within their respective historical contexts, this study aims to provide a missiological diagnosis of the '*Barabbas delusion*'s' contemporary expressions and advocate for a recovery of a missiology centred not on political triumph but on the cruciform mission of Jesus Christ.

4.1.1 Christian Zionism: A Theology of Geopolitical Convenience

Christian Zionism represents a striking contemporary manifestation of the Barabbas delusion: the substitution of political messianism for a cruciform mission. Emerging from nineteenth-century dispensationalist theology and popularised through the Scofield Reference Bible, Christian Zionism fused eschatological hope with nationalist restorationism, particularly within Anglo-American evangelicalism (Ó Cathail, 2015; Deik, 2020:76).

At its core, Christian Zionism envisions modern Israel not merely as a nation-state but as a prophetic fulfilment - a geopolitical entity integral to the unfolding of eschatological events. As Rabkin (2012:80-81) notes, this theological construction often instrumentalizes Jewish identity, reducing it to a symbolic trigger within the Christian apocalyptic imagination rather than embracing it within a covenantal reconciliation framework.

Historically, Christian Zionism drew from the Protestant Reformation's emphases on literal scriptural interpretation and millennial expectations. Restorationist hopes, reinforced by European colonial expansion and romantic nationalism, embedded the notion that divine purposes would unfold through imperial and ethnic ascendancy (Ariel, 2000:75; Rood & Rood, 2011:48). These roots reveal an early drift: the blending of eschatology with colonial geopolitics, representing a theological migration from cross-bearing witness to empire-aligned expectation.

Contemporary Christian Zionism, particularly American evangelicalism, continues this trajectory. As Sizer (2004:143) critiques, it merges theological expectations with political nationalism, cloaking secular geopolitical agendas in sacred language. It is, in essence, a theology of convenience - sanctifying territorial expansion, military aggression, and ethnonationalism as inevitable fulfillments of God's promise.

From a missiological perspective, the distortion is profound. Christian Zionism replaces the scandal of the cross with the spectacle of conquest. It reconfigures the Church's vocation from a reconciling witness among all peoples to partisan support for a single nation-state's political ambitions. Justice, mercy, and peace-making - central to Christ's cruciform mission - are subordinated to ideological loyalty.

Moreover, Christian Zionism often overlooks the New Testament's redefinition of covenantal identity in Christ. In Christ, the dividing walls of hostility are torn down (Eph. 2:14-16); the Church embodies a new humanity not defined by ethnic, territorial, or political boundaries. Yet Christian Zionism resurrects old partitions, reinforcing exclusionary narratives under the guise of biblical fidelity.

Missiologically, the Barabbas delusion arises from the Church's temptation to seek geopolitical significance and cultural preservation through alliances with state power rather than through suffering and sacrificial love. It trades the patience of cruciform hope for the immediacy of political triumph.

Thus, Christian Zionism must be recognized not merely as an eschatological curiosity or a misguided interpretation but as a significant missional distortion. It is a cautionary example of how sincere theological hopes, divorced from the cross, can be diverted into the service of empire rather than the kingdom of God.

4.1.2 Apartheid Theology: Christendom's 'Colonial Legacy' in South Africa

The emergence of Apartheid Theology in South Africa must be contextualized within the broader trajectory of Christendom's colonial expansion. When European settlers arrived at the Cape in 1652, they brought a form of Christianity that was already intertwined with imperial ambition and cultural supremacy (Loubser, 2021:323). This encounter between Christian witness and African contexts became another chapter in the historic fusion of faith and empire.

Despite substantial missionary efforts in South Africa's early development, mission work occurred within a volatile and dynamic environment. Western Christianity, particularly among the Afrikaner population, focused on negotiating religious and cultural identity amid a racially diverse and politically unstable backdrop. Unlike other colonial ventures characterised by extraction followed by departure, Afrikaner settlers remained in South Africa. They embedded their theological perspectives within a permanent and contested landscape. This enduring presence, influenced by existential threats and cultural anxieties, significantly shaped the development of contextualised theology. This process ultimately led to the formation of Apartheid Theology (Loubser, 2021:323).

Afrikaner identity, shaped by colonial struggles and Reformed theological traditions from the Netherlands and Germany, increasingly sanctified notions of racial and national distinctiveness. By the late nineteenth century, particularly with the return of Afrikaner theologians trained in Europe, a racialised ecclesiology began to emerge. This 'volkskerk' vision portrayed the Afrikaner people as a divinely elected nation, mandated to preserve cultural and racial purity under God's providence (Van Wyngaard, 2020:126; Loubser, 2021:323).

Apartheid Theology evolved into a systematic theological construction. Drawing selectively on covenant theology, the doctrines of divine election were racialised, grace was nationalised, and ecclesial identity was fused with ethnic survival (Vorster, 2017:144-151). Gerber (2022:448) notes

that this project secularized Christian metaphysics, placing whiteness as the implicit centre of divine favour.

From a missiological perspective, Apartheid Theology represents a profound manifestation of the 'Barabbas delusion'. Confronted with political vulnerability and cultural anxiety, influential members in the Afrikaner Church developed a theological project prioritizing national security and ethnic preservation over reconciliation in Christ. Like the crowd's choice of Barabbas, the desire for immediate communal survival eclipsed the call to cruciform love, justice, and the breaking down of dividing walls.

This theological deviation was structural. By sanctifying racial separation as divine ordinance, the Church in South Africa abandoned its mission to embody reconciled humanity in Christ. Vosloo (2015:215) highlights how biblical hermeneutics were weaponized to justify systemic injustice, severing the Church's life from the liberating truth of the Gospel. Although missionary work continued, it became marginal to the Church's central focus on cultural and political survival.

Despite recognizing the sincere efforts and challenging historical conditions faced by the Afrikaner Church, it is crucial to critically assess how these dynamics shaped its theological trajectory. In prioritizing communal preservation in the face of existential threats, the Church's theological imagination displaced Christ's cruciform mission - characterized by redemptive suffering, self-giving love, and eschatological reconciliation - with a theology that sanctified cultural identity and legitimized structural injustice.

The fall of political Apartheid in 1994 did not immediately dismantle its supporting theological frameworks. Van Wyk (1995:241-268) observes that many predominantly white churches in South Africa remain culturally and theologically insulated, reflecting an unresolved captivity to Christendom's racialized imagination. Ecclesial structures, liturgies, and missional paradigms continue to bear the residue of this theological distortion.

At its core, Apartheid Theology reveals how profoundly the Church can lose its way when cultural identity is confused with covenant identity. The Church is not a 'volkstaat' but a cruciform community drawn from every tribe, language, people, and nation (Rev 5:9-10). Whenever the Church prioritizes political survival or cultural homogeneity over fidelity to the cross's demands, it falls into the '*Barabbas delusion*'.

For South Africa and the global Church, the lessons of Apartheid Theology are urgent. A genuine missional reawakening requires political repentance and theological reformation: returning to a

Gospel that dismantles racial ideologies, embraces reconciliatory justice, and recovers a vision of unified humanity under Jesus Christ's lordship.

4.1.3 Liberation (Black) Theology: Contextual Prophecy and the Risk of Ideological Christology

The emergence of Liberation and Black Theology in the mid-20th century marked a significant theological awakening. Following periods of colonial domination, economic exploitation, and racial oppression, Christian communities in Latin America, the United States, and South Africa began to develop a theology centred on the lived experiences of the poor and marginalised (Castrillón, 2000:15; Alphonse, 1984:17; Berryman, 1987:11).

In Latin America, Liberation Theology, notably through Gustavo Gutiérrez, reoriented theological reflection around the praxis of historical liberation. It interpreted the Exodus narrative and Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom as mandates for transformative political action (Boff & Boff, 1987). In the United States, James H. Cone's Black Theology situated the Gospel within the African American struggle against white supremacy, asserting that "Jesus is black" - a theological affirmation of divine solidarity with the oppressed (Cone, 1970:23).

Allan Boesak adapted these currents in South Africa into a contextual theological resistance against Apartheid. Recognizing that structures of racial domination had domesticated Reformed theology, Boesak reframed Christology through the lens of Black suffering. He insisted that God's preferential option for the poor demanded political and ecclesial confrontation (Boesak, 1976:169). These movements reclaimed vital biblical themes: God's concern for justice, liberation from oppression, and solidarity with the marginalized. They reintroduced the Church to the kenotic dimension of Christ's incarnation - a Christ who suffers with and for the downtrodden (Ferrarotti, 2000:443).

However, from a missiological perspective, a critical tension emerges. When contextual suffering becomes the sole hermeneutical key, Christ risks being reconstructed primarily as a liberator of political circumstances rather than as the crucified and risen Redeemer inaugurating a new creation. Patrick Alphonse (1984:72-85) warns against a functional Christology that reduces Jesus to a historical change catalyst. Castrillón (2000:7) cautions that when divine sovereignty is supplanted by human praxis, theological reflection becomes subordinate to ideological imperatives. Kwame Nkrumah's secular dictum - 'Seek ye first the political kingdom, and all else shall be added unto you' (Nkrumah, 2012) - captures this drift where political emancipation supplants eschatological hope.

Missiologically, while Liberation and Black Theology rightly exposed Christendom's complicity in injustice, they often struggled to sustain a fully cruciform witness. Linden (2005:16) observes that the Church is persistently tempted to exchange its prophetic vocation for partisan alignments or utopian ideologies. This temptation mirrors the 'Barabbas delusion' in new forms. Thus, while Liberation and Black Theology remain vital interlocutors for contemporary missiology, they also warn that justice detached from the cross risks becoming triumphalism. True liberation comes not merely through political revolution but through participation in the death and resurrection of Christ.

Today's global Church must learn from both the power and perils of these movements. It must embody a cruciform liberation that resists ideological captivity, bearing prophetic witness to God who liberates not through domination but through love, justice, and sacrificial reconciliation.

5. Decolonial Missiology and the Global Shaking of Christendom

As traditional structures of Western Christendom disintegrate and new global powers rise, the Church must re-evaluate its missional identity. It should reject political messianisms and embody the cruciform witness of God's unshakable Kingdom.

The emergence of BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) and the shift of global power towards the Global South signify more than just geopolitical changes; they represent a Kairos moment in God's global mission. As Christendom collapses in the West, a multipolar world emerges where Christianity is increasingly influenced by voices from Africa, Asia, and Latin America rather than Europe and North America (Jenkins, 2006:3-7). Theologically, this shift is intelligible as providential rather than accidental. The decline of Christendom can be seen as divine pruning (John 15:2), exposing the idols of racial, nationalistic, and imperial Christianity that once dominated Western civilization. Hebrews 12:27 reminds us that God is shaking the created order so that what cannot be shaken - His Kingdom - may remain.

The BRICS alliance epitomizes this transition, challenging the unipolar Euro-American hegemony underpinning centuries of colonial mission models. However, the Church must discern carefully: new power blocs do not automatically align with the Kingdom of God. Just as the Church in the Constantinian era mistook imperial favour for divine blessing, contemporary churches might mistake geopolitical realignment for eschatological fulfilment.

Decolonial missiology must avoid two dangers: nostalgia for Christendom's lost influence and naive celebration of emerging empires. Both temptations risk replacing the cruciform logic of the Gospel with new forms of triumphalism. Instead, the mission must recover its identity in the suffering Servant - a vocation shaped not by power, but by the redemptive weakness of the cross.

Contemporary theologians offer critical guidance for this reorientation. Masiwa Gunda (2024) critiques how prevailing mission frameworks perpetuate 'epistemicide' - the silencing of Indigenous voices beneath ecclesial universality. Jason Coker (2024) similarly interprets widespread disaffiliation from institutional Christianity as moral protest against systemic injustice, not mere secular apathy. Chammah Kaunda and Roderick Hewitt (2016) call for an epistemic decolonial turn, envisioning mission as participation in God's redemptive presence among the marginalized. Complementing this, Pitshou Moleka (2024) proposes a 'Mode 4' praxis: a transdisciplinary, co-creative approach to missional knowledge that resists conquest.

Together, these voices call the Church to reject imperial nostalgia and ideological seduction and to re-centre its mission in the crucified Christ, bearing faithful witness to a Kingdom founded not on domination but suffering love. This theological reorientation requires the Church to move beyond survival strategies and dominance assertions. It must embrace a vulnerable, Spirit-empowered witness that resists all forms of political messianism. The global Church must learn to inhabit the margins, recognizing that God's power is perfected in weakness (2 Cor. 12:9).

Eschatologically, the rise of Global Christianity is not the final triumph but a foretaste of the coming Kingdom. It calls for cruciform anticipation: living as signs of new creation amid old world collapse. The Church must refuse every Barabbas - Western Christendom or emerging nationalisms - and cling to the Lamb who reigns through love's wounds.

Only a Church formed by the scandal of the cross can faithfully participate in God's mission amidst shifting empires. The future belongs neither to revived Christendom nor to BRICS enthroned, but to a cruciform community bearing witness to the crucified and risen Christ among nations.

6. Choosing Christ in a World of Shifting Empires

As the structures of Western Christendom disintegrate and new global powers emerge, the Church faces a pivotal missional juncture. The persistent temptation is to seek survival through political messianism, either by clinging to declining Western empires or aligning with rising blocs. However, the Gospel calls the Church to embrace the scandal of the cross rather than seize power.

The Barabbas delusion persists whenever the Church prioritizes political triumph or ideological salvation over the crucified Messiah. History's outcome depends not on the Church's strength, strategy, or success. The *missio Dei* - God's unstoppable mission - will be fulfilled as Jesus declared: 'This gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all

nations, and then the end will come' (Mt 24:14). God's work will be accomplished not because of the Church's achievements but often despite its failures and compromises.

In a world desperate for control, may the Church find the courage not to enthrone Barabbas again but to follow the Crucified One. Give us Jesus, the Christ, not Barabbas.

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8. Complementary to Chapter 7: Situating Article 6 within the Broader Study

8.1. Theological and Exegetical Engagement

This article deepens the PhD's theological exploration by re-examining Barabbas's Gospel narrative as a recurring theo-political archetype. It critically analyses the Church's recurring temptation to replace the crucified Christ with ideologically convenient alternatives. Sustained biblical engagement, particularly with the Passion narratives, reinforces the PhD's hermeneutic of cruciform fidelity and sharpens the theological critique of Christendom's distortions.

8.2 Missiological and Contextual Implications

Building on the dissertation's argument that the decline of Christendom signifies a providential shift in *missio Dei*, this article expands the missiological analysis by highlighting contemporary manifestations of political messianism. It contextualizes Christian Zionism, Apartheid Theology, and Black Liberation Theology as symptoms of the Barabbas delusion, demonstrating how theology is repeatedly co-opted by power. Additionally, it responds to examiners' calls by

integrating African voices and engaging with the rise of BRICS as a theological moment in global missiology.

8.3 Conceptual and Theoretical Coherence

Article 6 provides a conceptual synthesis by applying the central metaphor of the Barabbas delusion across various ideological theologies. It maintains theoretical consistency with earlier chapters by critiquing institutional survivalism and cultural-religious nationalism, illustrating how these phenomena subvert the cruciform mission. Thus, it advances the study's core proposition: Christendom's demise is not an end but an unveiling of its theological misalignment.

8.4 Methodological Clarification and Unique Contribution

The article offers a multidisciplinary and decolonial missiological perspective, drawing from biblical theology, contextual analysis, and political critique. It exemplifies the study's methodology by combining theological typology with contextual engagement while amplifying the voices of African and Global South scholars. Its unique contribution lies in demonstrating that the future of mission resides not in geopolitical alignments but in cruciform witness - a key theme throughout the PhD.

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ADDENDUM A

- Info on Article 1

Title of Article: 'Unravelling the Regression of Western Christianity into Christendom: Theological, Cultural, and Political Intersections in a Divinely Shaped Historical Shift'

Author: Dr IW Ferreira #10322086

Ethics number: N W U - 0 0 8 6 7 - 2 4 - A 6

Institution Risk Category: Low Risk

1. Submitted to: *Missionalia* (Southern African Journal of Missiology) on 2024-09-30
2. Letter received from Editor on 30 April 2025



30 April 2025

Dear Dr. I W Ferreira

As required by the University of Northwest, I hereby grant you permission to include in your thesis the manuscript entitled: *"Unravelling the Regression of Western Christianity into Christendom: Theological, Cultural, and Political Intersections in a Divinely Shaped Historical Shift"* submitted to *Missionalia*.

The said manuscript has already gone through a double-blind peer review process, and it will be published in *Missionalia* Vol 53 (2025).

Sincerely,



Prof L Mangayi
Editor

MISSIONALIA: Southern African Journal of Missiology:
Co-ordinating Editor: Prof L Mangayi
PO Box 35705, Menlo Park, 0102, SOUTH AFRICA
Tel: +27-0116921235
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2024-09-27

ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER

On 2024-09-27, the Theology Research Ethics Committee (TREC) **approved** your research as indicated below. This implies that the North-West University Senate Committee for Research Ethics (NWU-SCRE) grants its permission that, provided the special conditions specified below are met and pending any other authorisation that may be necessary, the research may be initiated, using the ethics number below.

Application Type: Article	
Title of Article: Unravelling the Regression of Western Christianity into Christendom: Theological, Cultural, and Political Intersections in a Divinely Shaped Historical Shift	
Author: Dr IW Ferreira #10322086	
Ethics number:	N W U - 0 0 8 6 7 - 2 4 - A 6
	Study Number Year Status
	<small>Status: S = Submission; R = Re-Submission; P = Provisional Authorisation; A = Authorisation</small>
Commencement date: 2024/09/27	Risk Category: Low Risk
Expiry date: 2025/09/27	
<small>Approval of the research is initially provided for a year, after which continuation of the study is dependent on receipt and review of the annual (or as otherwise stipulated) monitoring report and the concomitant issuing of a letter of continuation.</small>	

Special in process conditions of the research for approval (if applicable): None

<p>General conditions: While this ethics approval is subject to all declarations, undertakings and agreements incorporated and signed in the application form, the following general terms and conditions will apply:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The study leader/supervisor (principal investigator)/researcher must report in the prescribed format to the TREC: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> annually (or as otherwise requested) on the monitoring of the study, whereby a letter of continuation will be provided, and upon completion of the research; and without any delay in case of any adverse event or incident (or any matter that interrupts sound ethical principles) during the course of the research. The approval applies strictly to the article as stipulated in the application form. In the interest of ethical responsibility, the NWU-SCRE and TREC reserves the right to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> request access to any information or data at any time during the research or after completion of the article; to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modification or monitor the conduct of your research or the informed consent process; withdraw or postpone approval if: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> any unethical principles or practices of the research are revealed or suspected; it becomes apparent that any relevant information was withheld from the TREC or that information has been false or misrepresented; submission of the annual (or otherwise stipulated) monitoring report, the required amendments, or reporting of adverse events or incidents was not done in a timely manner and accurately; and / or new institutional rules, national legislation or international conventions deem it necessary. TREC can be contacted for further information or any report templates via Rudy.Denton@nwu.ac.za.

The TREC would like to remain at your service as scientist and researcher, and wishes you well with your research. Please do not hesitate to contact the TREC or the NWU-SCRE for any further enquiries or requests for assistance.

Yours sincerely

Prof. FP Kruger
(pp) Chairperson NWU Theology Research Ethics Committee (TREC)

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4. A cover page and a statement confirming that the article is not being submitted or has not been submitted simultaneously to another journal must accompany the article.
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6. Articles longer than 10 000 words are not normally accepted, but a submission of this length (or longer) may be published if, in the views of the referees, it makes an important contribution to missiology in Africa.
7. Inclusive language should be used to designate individuals and groups.
8. The article will be sent to two independent referees for double blind peer review. Upon receiving the reports from the referees, authors will be notified of the decision of the editorial panel, which may include a statement indicating changes or improvements that are required before publication.
9. Should the article be accepted for publication, the author of printed articles will be expected to submit an electronic version of the article (by e-mail or online), including the following:
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 2. Between 3 and 10 keywords that express the key theological concepts used in the article.
 3. Brief biographical details of the author indicating, among others, the institutional affiliation and e-mail address.
10. Article Processing Charges will be ZAR 500 per A5 output page in the printed version.
11. Contributors will be informed if their article is not accepted for publication.

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4. Graphics should not be included in the body of the article. Number graphics consecutively, save each in a separate file and indicate clearly in the text where each should be placed.
5. Footnotes should be reserved for content notes only. Bibliographical information is cited in the text according to the Harvard method (see 2 above). Full citations should appear in the References at the end of the article (see below).
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ISSN: 2312-878X

- **Info on Article 2**

Title of Article: 'Divine Departure: Unravelling the Significance of Jesus Christ's Final Exit from the Temple and its Missiological Implications for Modern Christendom'

Author: Dr IW Ferreira #10322086

Ethics number: N W U - 0 0 9 0 7 - 2 4 - A 6

Risk Category: Low Risk

1. **Submitted to In Luce Verbi / In die Skriflig:**
2. **Submission guidelines:**
https://indieskriflig.org.za/index.php/skriflig/pages/view/submission-guidelines#part_1
3. **Already published.**
4. **Letter received from Editor.**



IN DIE SKRIFLIG

2025-04-23

Dear Dr Naas Ferreira

As editor in chief, I hereby grant permission for you to include your article, **Ferreira, I. (2024), The missiological implications of Jesus's final departure from the Temple for Western Christendom. In die Skriflig/In Luce Verbi, 58(1), 10 pages. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v58i1.3084>**, in your thesis, provided that you acknowledge its original publication in *In Luce Verbi*.

Additionally, please ensure that you comply with the conditions for the document in which the re-publication occurs.

Wishing you success with your work!

Cordially,

Prof Francois Viljoen (Editor-in-Chief)



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Senate Committee for Research Ethics
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2024-04-04

ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER

On 2024-04-04, the Theology Research Ethics Committee (TREC) **approved** your research as indicated below. This implies that the North-West University Senate Committee for Research Ethics (NWU-SCRE) grants its permission that, provided the special conditions specified below are met and pending any other authorisation that may be necessary, the research may be initiated, using the ethics number below.

Application Type: Article																
Title of Article: Divine Departure: Unravelling the Significance of Jesus Christ's Final Exit from the Temple and its Missiological Implications for Modern Christendom																
Author: Dr IW Ferreira #10322086																
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N	W	U	-	0	0	9	0	7	-	2	4	-	A	6		
<small>Study Number Year Status <i>South African</i></small>																
<small>Status: S = Submission; R = Re-Submission; P = Provisional Authorisation; A = Authorisation</small>																
Commencement date: 2024/04/04	Risk Category: <table border="1"><tr><td>Low Risk</td></tr></table>	Low Risk														
Low Risk																
Expiry date: 2025/04/03																
<small>Approval of the research is initially provided for a year, after which continuation of the study is dependent on receipt and review of the annual (or as otherwise stipulated) monitoring report and the concomitant issuing of a letter of continuation.</small>																

Special in process conditions of the research for approval (if applicable): None

<p>General conditions: While this ethics approval is subject to all declarations, undertakings and agreements incorporated and signed in the application form, the following general terms and conditions will apply:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The study leader/supervisor (principal investigator)/researcher must report in the prescribed format to the TREC:<ul style="list-style-type: none">- annually (or as otherwise requested) on the monitoring of the study, whereby a letter of continuation will be provided, and upon completion of the research; and- without any delay in case of any adverse event or incident (or any matter that interrupts sound ethical principles) during the course of the research.• The approval applies strictly to the article as stipulated in the application form.• In the interest of ethical responsibility, the NWU-SCRE and TREC reserves the right to:<ul style="list-style-type: none">- request access to any information or data at any time during the research or after completion of the article;- to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modification or monitor the conduct of your research or the informed consent process;- withdraw or postpone approval if:<ul style="list-style-type: none">- any unethical principles or practices of the research are revealed or suspected;- it becomes apparent that any relevant information was withheld from the TREC or that information has been false or misrepresented;- submission of the annual (or otherwise stipulated) monitoring report, the required amendments, or reporting of adverse events or incidents was not done in a timely manner and accurately; and / or- new institutional rules, national legislation or international conventions deem it necessary.• TREC can be contacted for further information or any report templates via Rudy.Denton@nwu.ac.za.
--

The TREC would like to remain at your service as scientist and researcher and wishes you well with your research. Please do not hesitate to contact the TREC or the NWU-SCRE for any further enquiries or requests for assistance.

Yours sincerely

Dr Rudy Denton
Chairperson NWU Theology Research Ethics Committee (TREC)

IN DIE SKRIFLIG / IN LUCE VERBI

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- **Method:** *How did you go about solving or making progress on the problem?* State how the study was performed and which statistical tests were used. (What did you actually do to get the results?) Clearly express the basic design of the study; name or briefly describe the basic methodology used without going into excessive detail. Be sure to indicate the key techniques used.
- **Results:** *What is the answer?* Present the main findings (that is, as a result of completing the procedure or study, state what you have learnt, invented or created). Identify trends, relative changes or differences in answers to questions.
- **Conclusion:** *What are the implications of your answer?* Briefly summarise any potential implications. (What are the larger implications of your findings, especially for the problem or gap identified in your motivation?)
- **Contribution:** *What practical, scientific or theoretical gap did your research fill? How do these insights link to the focus and scope of the journal?* It should be a concise statement of the primary contribution of the manuscript; and how it fits within the scope of the journal.

Do not cite references and do not use abbreviations excessively in the abstract.

Introduction: The introduction must contain your argument for the social and scientific value of the study, as well as the aim and objectives:

- **Social value:** The first part of the introduction should make a clear and logical argument for the importance or relevance of the study. Your argument should be supported by the use of evidence from the literature.
- **Scientific value:** The second part of the introduction should make a clear and logical argument for the originality of the study. This should include a summary of what is already known about the research question or specific topic and should clarify the knowledge gap that this study will address. Your argument should be supported by the use of evidence from the literature.
- **Conceptual framework:** In some research articles, it will also be important to describe the underlying theoretical basis for the research and how these theories are linked together in a conceptual framework. The theoretical evidence used to construct the conceptual framework should be referenced from the literature.
- **Aim and objectives:** The introduction should conclude with a clear summary of the aim and objectives of this study.

Research methods and design: This must address the following:

- **Study design:** An outline of the type of study design.
- **Setting:** A description of the setting for the study; for example, the type of community from which the participants came or the nature of the health system and services in which the study is conducted.
- **Study population and sampling strategy:** Describe the study population and any inclusion or exclusion criteria. Describe the intended sample size and your sample size calculation or justification. Describe the sampling strategy used. Describe in practical terms how this was implemented.
- **Intervention (if appropriate):** If there were intervention and comparison groups, describe the intervention in detail and what happened to the comparison groups.
- **Data collection:** Define the data collection tools that were used and their validity. Describe in practical terms how data were collected and any key issues involved, e.g. language barriers.

- Data analysis: Describe how data were captured, checked and cleaned. Describe the analysis process, for example, the statistical tests used or steps followed in qualitative data analysis.
- Ethical considerations: Approval must have been obtained for all studies from the author's institution or other relevant ethics committee and the institution's name and permit numbers should be stated here.

Results: Present the results of your study in a logical sequence that addresses the aim and objectives of your study. Use tables and figures as required to present your findings. Use quotations as required to establish your interpretation of qualitative data. All units should conform to the [SI convention](#) and be abbreviated accordingly. Metric units and their international symbols are used throughout, as is the decimal point (not the decimal comma).

Discussion: The discussion section should address the following four elements:

- Key findings: Summarise the key findings without reiterating details of the results.
- Discussion of key findings: Explain how the key findings relate to previous research or to existing knowledge, practice or policy.
- Strengths and limitations: Describe the strengths and limitations of your methods and what the reader should take into account when interpreting your results.
- Implications or recommendations: State the implications of your study or recommendations for future research (questions that remain unanswered), policy or practice. Make sure that the recommendations flow directly from your findings.

Conclusion: Provide a brief conclusion that summarises the results and their meaning or significance in relation to each objective of the study.

Acknowledgements: Those who contributed to the work but do not meet our authorship criteria should be listed in the Acknowledgments with a description of the contribution. Authors are responsible for ensuring that anyone named in the Acknowledgments agrees to be named. Refer to the acknowledgement structure guide on our *Formatting Requirements* page.

Also provide the following, each under their own heading:

- Competing interests: This section should list specific competing interests associated with any of the authors. If authors declare that no competing interests exist, the article will include a statement to this effect: *The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationship(s) that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.* Read our [policy on competing interests](#).
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- Funding: Provide information on funding if relevant
- Data availability: All research articles are encouraged to have a data availability statement.
- Disclaimer: A statement that the views expressed in the submitted article are his or her own and not an official position of the institution or funder.

References: Authors should provide direct references to original research sources whenever possible. References should not be used by authors, editors, or peer reviewers to promote self-interests. Refer to the journal referencing style downloadable on our *Formatting Requirements* page.

Review Article full structure

Title: The article's full title should contain a maximum of 95 characters (including spaces).

Abstract: The abstract should be no longer than 250 words and must be written in the past tense. The abstract should give a concise account of the objectives, methods, results and significance of the matter. The abstract can be unstructured and should consist of six paragraphs unlabelled Background, Aim, Method, Results and Conclusion.

- Background: Why is the topic important to us? State the context of the review.

- **Aim:** What is the purpose of your review? Describe the aim or purpose of your review.
- **Method:** How did you go about performing the review? Describe the methods used for searching, selecting and appraising your evidence.
- **Results:** What are the findings? What are the main findings of your literature review?
- **Conclusion:** What are the implications of your answer? Briefly summarise any potential implications.
- **Contribution:** What key insights into the research results and its future function are revealed? How do these insights link to the focus and scope of the journal? It should be a concise statement of the primary contribution of the manuscript; and how it fits within the scope of the journal.

Introduction: Present an argument for the social and scientific value of your review that is itself supported by the literature. Present the aim and objectives of your literature review.

Methods: Although this is not a systematic review (see instructions on original research for this type of article) it is still necessary to outline how you searched for, selected and appraised the literature that you used. Discuss any methodological limitations.

Review findings: Present your review of the literature and make use of appropriate sub-headings. Your review should be a critical synthesis of the literature.

Implications and recommendations: Discuss the findings of your review in terms of the implications for policy makers and clinicians or recommendations for future research.

Conclusion: This should clearly state the main conclusions of the review in terms of addressing the original aim and objectives.

Acknowledgements: Those who contributed to the work but do not meet our authorship criteria should be listed in the Acknowledgments with a description of the contribution. Authors are responsible for ensuring that anyone named in the Acknowledgments agrees to be named. Refer to the acknowledgement structure guide on our *Formatting Requirements* page.

Also provide the following, each under their own heading:

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References: Authors should provide direct references to original research sources whenever possible. References should not be used by authors, editors, or peer reviewers to promote self-interests. Refer to the journal referencing style downloadable on our *Formatting Requirements* page.

- Info on Article 3

Title of Article: 'Missional Perspectives on Socio-Political Realities, Religious Vulnerability, and Political Ideology: Decoding the Choice of Barabbas'

Author: Dr IW Ferreira #10322086

Ethics number: N W U - 0 0 8 6 8 - 2 4 - A 6

Institution Risk Category: Low Risk

1. **Submitted to HTS (Hervormde Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies)**
2. **Submission guidelines:**
https://hts.org.za/index.php/hts/pages/view/submission-guidelines#part_1
3. **Already published**
4. **Letter received from the Editor**

Dear Doctor Ferreira,

I hope that you are well today.

We have received your letter, and I respond to you on behalf of Professor Baron (in cc here) to your request to (re-)use an article published in HTS.

Please find attached a permission to (re-)use works published in HTS. The contents of the letter also applies to the article authored by I. Ferreira with the title 'Missional insights on socio-political realities, religious vulnerability, and the choice of Barabbas' published in volume 81, issue 1 of *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* (2025) at available at <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v81i1.10261>.

For any questions, please feel welcome to let me know.

Have a great day, Doctor Ferreira!

All my best,

Neill van Graan (he/him/his)

Dip, BA, BA (Hons), BA (Hons)

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Sincerely,

Professor Eugene Baron

Editor-in-Chief

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Submission guidelines

Overview

The author guidelines include information about the types of articles received for publication and preparing a manuscript for submission. Other relevant information about the journal's policies and the reviewing process can be found under the about section. The **compulsory cover letter** forms part of a submission and must be submitted together with all the required [forms](#). All forms need to be completed in English.

Editorial

Editorials are by invitation only and are intended to provide expert comment on relevant topics within the focus and scope of the journal.

Submission status	by invitation only
Word limit	800 words (excluding the tables, figures, graphs, and references)
Abstract	none
Main text	structural headings are not always appropriate, but the editorial should have clear subheadings to provide order to the manuscript
References	10 or less, adhere to the Harvard referencing style
Tables, figures and graphs	1 or less, adhere to the Illustrations requirements found in the AOSIS House style guide
Formatting requirements	apply the guidelines located on the Formatting requirements page and the AOSIS house style guide
Compulsory supplementary file(s)	the Authorship, disclosure statements, copyright, and license agreement form and any other relevant form applicable to your submission

Original Research Article

An original article provides an overview of innovative research in a particular field within or related to the focus and scope of the journal, presented according to a clear and well-structured format.

Submission status	open
Word limit	5000-7000 words (<u>excluding</u> the abstract, tables, figures, graphs, and references)
Abstract	maximum: 300 words requires structural heading: Contribution
Main text	requires structural headings, refer to the full structure 'Ethical considerations' is a sub-section in the manuscript and must include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Name of the ethical review committee• Study approval number• Manner of consent (written, oral) for human participants• Description of measures taken to maintain the confidentiality of data• If the study was not human or animal research or the study was determined to be non-human subjects research or exempt, the authors must provide a statement with those details in this section.
References	60 or less, adhere to the Harvard referencing style
Tables, figures and graphs	7 or less, adhere to the Illustrations requirements found in the AOSIS House style guide

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Special consideration	<i>All Original Research articles, not part of a special collection, may appear as Original Research: HTS Historical Thought and Source Interpretation or Original Research: Scholarly Voices.</i>

Review Article

Review articles provide a comprehensive summary of research on a certain topic, and a perspective on the state of the field and where it is heading. These articles are often meta-analyses comparing and combining findings of previously published studies. [See the full structure of the review articles below.](#)

Submission status	open
Word limit	2500-4500 words (<u>excluding</u> the abstract, tables, figures, graphs, and references)
Abstract	maximum: 300 words requires structural heading: Contribution
Main text	requires structural headings, refer to the full structure
References	40 or less, adhere to the Harvard referencing style
Tables, figures and graphs	4 or less, adhere to the Illustrations requirements found in the AOSIS House style guide
Formatting requirements	apply the guidelines located on the Formatting requirements page and the AOSIS house style guide
Compulsory supplementary file(s)	the Authorship, disclosure statements, copyright, and license agreement form , and any other relevant form applicable to your submission

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Short communication generally takes one of the following forms: either a substantial re-analysis of a previously published article in the journal (or another journal) or an article that may not cover 'standard research' but is of general interest to the broad readership of the journal. Short communications may be subject to peer review at the editors' discretion. Short communications are not short reports or scientific letters, as these articles must be submitted as 'original research' and will be peer-reviewed.

Submission status	open
Word limit	2500-4500 words (<u>excluding</u> the abstract, tables, figures, graphs, and references)
Abstract	maximum: 300 words requires structural heading: Contribution
Main text	requires structural headings, refer to the full structure
References	40 or less, adhere to the Harvard referencing style
Tables, figures and graphs	4 or less, adhere to the Illustrations requirements found in the AOSIS House style guide
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Corrections

A correction provides the platform to communicate important, scientifically relevant errors or missing information in a published article. Any changes after publication that affect the scientific interpretation (e.g., changes to a misleading portion of an otherwise reliable publication, an error in a figure, error in data that does not affect conclusions or addition of missing details about a method) are announced using a Correction. Read our submission procedure for [corrections](#) and [publishing policies](#).

Compulsory title	The title of the submission should have the following format: 'Corrigendum: Title of original article'.
Submission File	completed Correction Submission Form (required)
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Title: The article's full title should contain a maximum of 95 characters (including spaces).

Abstract: The abstract, written in English, should be no longer than 250 words and must be written in the past tense. The abstract should give a succinct account of the objectives, methods, results and significance of the matter. The unstructured abstract for an Original Research article should consist of six paragraphs unlabelled Background, Aim, Setting, Methods, Results, Conclusion and Contributions. The latter, is the only labelled heading within the abstract.

- Background: Summarise the social value (importance, relevance) and scientific value (knowledge gap) that your study addresses.
- Aim: State the overall aim of the study.
- Setting: State the setting for the study.
- Methods: Clearly express the basic design of the study, and name or briefly describe the methods used without going into excessive detail.
- Results: State the main findings.
- Conclusion: State your conclusion and any key implications or recommendations.
- **Contribution:** *What key insights into the research results and its future function are revealed? How do these insights link to the focus and scope of the journal?* It should be a concise statement of the primary contribution of the manuscript; and how it fits within the scope of the journal.

Do not cite references and do not use abbreviations excessively in the abstract.

Introduction: The introduction must contain your argument for the social and scientific value of the study, as well as the aim and objectives:

- Social value: The first part of the introduction should make a clear and logical argument for the importance or relevance of the study. Your argument should be supported by use of evidence from the literature.
- Scientific value: The second part of the introduction should make a clear and logical argument for the originality of the study. This should include a summary of what is already known about

the research question or specific topic, and should clarify the knowledge gap that this study will address. Your argument should be supported by use of evidence from the literature.

- **Conceptual framework:** In some research articles it will also be important to describe the underlying theoretical basis for the research and how these theories are linked together in a conceptual framework. The theoretical evidence used to construct the conceptual framework should be referenced from the literature.
- **Aim and objectives:** The introduction should conclude with a clear summary of the aim and objectives of this study.

Research methods and design: This must address the following:

- **Study design:** An outline of the type of study design.
- **Setting:** A description of the setting for the study; for example, the type of community from which the participants came or the nature of the health system and services in which the study is conducted.
- **Study population and sampling strategy:** Describe the study population and any inclusion or exclusion criteria. Describe the intended sample size and your sample size calculation or justification. Describe the sampling strategy used. Describe in practical terms how this was implemented.
- **Intervention (if appropriate):** If there were intervention and comparison groups, describe the intervention in detail and what happened to the comparison groups.
- **Data collection:** Define the data collection tools that were used and their validity. Describe in practical terms how data were collected and any key issues involved, e.g. language barriers.
- **Data analysis:** Describe how data were captured, checked and cleaned. Describe the analysis process, for example, the statistical tests used or steps followed in qualitative data analysis.
- **Ethical considerations:** Approval must have been obtained for all studies from the author's institution or other relevant ethics committee and the institution's name and permit numbers should be stated here.

Results: Present the results of your study in a logical sequence that addresses the aim and objectives of your study. Use tables and figures as required to present your findings. Use quotations as required to establish your interpretation of qualitative data. All units should conform to the [SI convention](#) and be abbreviated accordingly. Metric units and their international symbols are used throughout, as is the decimal point (not the decimal comma).

Discussion: The discussion section should address the following four elements:

- **Key findings:** Summarise the key findings without reiterating details of the results.
- **Discussion of key findings:** Explain how the key findings relate to previous research or to existing knowledge, practice or policy.
- **Strengths and limitations:** Describe the strengths and limitations of your methods and what the reader should take into account when interpreting your results.
- **Implications or recommendations:** State the implications of your study or recommendations for future research (questions that remain unanswered), policy or practice. Make sure that the recommendations flow directly from your findings.

Conclusion: Provide a brief conclusion that summarises the results and their meaning or significance in relation to each objective of the study.

Acknowledgements: Those who contributed to the work but do not meet our authorship criteria should be listed in the Acknowledgments with a description of the contribution. Authors are responsible for ensuring that anyone named in the Acknowledgments agrees to be named. Refer to the acknowledgement structure guide on our *Formatting Requirements* page.

Also provide the following, each under their own heading:

- **Competing interests:** This section should list specific competing interests associated with any of the authors. If authors declare that no competing interests exist, the article will include a statement to this effect: *The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationship(s) that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.* Read our [policy on competing interests](#).
- **Author contributions:** All authors must meet the criteria for authorship as outlined in the [authorship](#) policy and [author contribution](#) statement policies.
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- **Data availability:** All research articles are encouraged to have a data availability statement.
- **Disclaimer:** A statement that the views expressed in the submitted article are his or her own and not an official position of the institution or funder.

References: Authors should provide direct references to original research sources whenever possible. References should not be used by authors, editors, or peer reviewers to promote self-interests. Refer to the journal referencing style downloadable on our *Formatting Requirements* page.

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- **Background:** Why is the topic important to us? State the context of the review
- **Aim:** What is the purpose of your review ? Describe the aim or purpose of your review.
- **Method:** How did you go about performing the review? Describe the methods used for searching, selecting and appraising your evidence.
- **Results:** What are the findings? What are the main findings of your literature review.
- **Conclusion:** What are the implications of your answer? Briefly summarise any potential implications.
- **Contribution:** *What key insights into the research results and its future function are revealed? How do these insights link to the focus and scope of the journal?* It should be a concise statement of the primary contribution of the manuscript; and how it fits within the scope of the journal.

Introduction: Present an argument for the social and scientific value of your review that is itself supported by the literature. Present the aim and objectives of your literature review.

Methods: Although this is not a systematic review (see instructions on original research for this type of article) it is still necessary to outline how you searched for, selected and appraised the literature that you used. Discuss any methodological limitations.

Review findings: Present your review of the literature and make use of appropriate sub-headings. Your review should be a critical synthesis of the literature.

Implications and recommendations: Discuss the findings of your review in terms of the implications for policy makers and clinicians or recommendations for future research.

Conclusion: This should clearly state the main conclusions of the review in terms of addressing the original aim and objectives.

Acknowledgements: Those who contributed to the work but do not meet our authorship criteria should be listed in the Acknowledgments with a description of the contribution. Authors are

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- **Competing interests:** This section should list specific competing interests associated with any of the authors. If authors declare that no competing interests exist, the article will include a statement to this effect: *The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationship(s) that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.* Read our [policy on competing interests](#).
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References: Authors should provide direct references to original research sources whenever possible. References should not be used by authors, editors, or peer reviewers to promote self-interests. Refer to the journal referencing style downloadable on our *Formatting Requirements* page.

- Info on Article 4

Title of Article: *'From Temple to Nations: The Missio Dei and the Cross-Cultural Expansion of God's People from Jewish Roots to a Global Faith.'*

Author: Ferreira, IW, Dr

Ethics number: N W U - 0 1 3 1 1 - 2 5 - A 6

Risk Category: Low risk



1. **Submitted to Missiology on 30-Jan-2025**
2. **Submission guidelines:** <https://journals.sagepub.com/author-instructions/MIS>
3. **Feedback (email) received on 30-Jan-2025**

Dear Dr. Ferreira:

Your manuscript entitled "'From Temple to Nations: The Missio Dei and the Cross-Cultural Expansion of God's People from Jewish Roots to a Global Faith.'" has been successfully submitted online and is presently being given full consideration for publication in Missiology.

Your manuscript ID is MIS-25-0005.

You have listed the following individuals as authors of this manuscript:

Ferreira, Ignatius

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4. Feedback (email) received on 06-Feb-25

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5. Article still within review process



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Senate Committee for Research Ethics
Tel: 018 299-4849
Email: rsdethics@nwu.ac.za

03 February 2025

ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER

The Theology Research Ethics Committee (T-REC) approved your research on the 3rd of February 2025, as indicated below. This implies that the North-West University Senate Committee for Research Ethics (NWU-SCRE) grants its permission that, provided the special conditions specified below are met and pending any other authorisation that may be necessary, the research may be initiated, using the ethics number below.

Application Type: Article																													
Title of Article: From Temple to Nations: The Missio Dei and the Cross-Cultural Expansion of God's People from Jewish Roots to a Global Faith																													
Author: Ferreira, IW, Dr																													
Ethics number:	<table border="1"><tr><td>N</td><td>W</td><td>U</td><td>-</td><td>0</td><td>1</td><td>3</td><td>1</td><td>1</td><td>-</td><td>2</td><td>5</td><td>-</td><td>A</td><td>6</td></tr><tr><td colspan="3"></td><td colspan="3">Study Number</td><td colspan="2">Year</td><td colspan="5">Status</td></tr></table>	N	W	U	-	0	1	3	1	1	-	2	5	-	A	6				Study Number			Year		Status				
N	W	U	-	0	1	3	1	1	-	2	5	-	A	6															
			Study Number			Year		Status																					
<i>Status:</i> S = Submission; R = Re-Submission; P = Provisional Authorisation; A = Authorisation																													
Commencement date: 2025-02-03	Risk Category: <table border="1"><tr><td>Low risk</td></tr></table>	Low risk																											
Low risk																													
Expiry date: 2026-02-03																													
Approval of the research is initially provided for a year, after which continuation of the study is dependent on receipt and review of the annual (or as otherwise stipulated) monitoring report and the concomitant issuing of a letter of continuation.																													

Special in process conditions of the research for approval (if applicable): None

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The T-REC would like to remain at your service as scientist and researcher and wishes you well with your research. Please do not hesitate to contact the T-REC or the NWU-SCRE for any further enquiries or requests for assistance.

Yours sincerely

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Denton

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- Info on Article 5

Title of Article: *Reviving Missional Purpose in a Civilizational Crisis. The Dechristianization of the West and the Rise of Global Christianity as Divine Reorientation.'*

Author: Ferreira, IW, Dr

Ethics number: N W U - 0 1 3 1 2 - 2 5 - A 6

Risk Category: Low risk

1. **Submitted to International Bulletin of Mission Research (IBR) on 05-Feb-2025**
2. **Submission guidelines:** <https://journals.sagepub.com/author-instructions/IBM>
3. **Feedback (email) received on 06-Feb-2025 – Article not published.**

Dear Dr. Ferreira:

I write you in regards to manuscript# IBM-25-0008 entitled "'Reviving Missional Purpose in a Civilizational Crisis. The Dechristianization of the West and the Rise of Global Christianity as Divine Reorientation.'" which you submitted to International Bulletin of Mission Research (IBMR).

After review by our editorial staff, we regret to inform you that your manuscript has been denied publication in IBMR.

Your essay is well written and thoroughly cited, but it presents nothing new in terms of research or argument within existing discourses of mission studies and world Christianity. The secularization of the north Atlantic and the fading of Christendom, the rise of the church in the Global South, and the shifts in our theological and missional awareness as a result are all very important realities, but your paper reads as more of a literature review than a new study. It is something that sets the stage for a larger work like a dissertation but is insufficient on its own. You present an interesting question at the end regarding how these changes should shape theological education, but offers a preliminary answer based more on piety than grounded realities.

I did receive a copy of your request for proof of submission per your school's guidelines from our editorial assistant. Given your paper has been declined publication, I do not know if you still require additional documentation regarding your submission. Hopefully this email will suffice as proof of your submission even if we are unable to proceed.

Thank you for considering International Bulletin of Mission Research for the publication of your research. I hope the outcome of this specific submission will not discourage you from the submission of future manuscripts.

Sincerely,

Dr. Easten Law

International Bulletin of Mission Research

03 February 2025

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The Theology Research Ethics Committee (T-REC) approved your research on the 3rd of February 2025, as indicated below. This implies that the North-West University Senate Committee for Research Ethics (NWU-SCRE) grants its permission that, provided the special conditions specified below are met and pending any other authorisation that may be necessary, the research may be initiated, using the ethics number below.

Application Type: Article	
Title of Article: Reviving Missional Purpose in a Civilizational Crisis. The Dechristianization of the West and the Rise of Global Christianity as Divine Reorientation'	
Author: Ferreira, IW, Dr	
Ethics number:	N W U - 0 1 3 1 2 - 2 5 - A 6 Study Number Year Status
Status: S = Submission; R = Re-Submission; P = Provisional Authorisation; A = Authorisation	
Commencement date: 2025-02-03	Risk Category: Low risk
Expiry date: 2026-02-03	
Approval of the research is initially provided for a year, after which continuation of the study is dependent on receipt and review of the annual (or as otherwise stipulated) monitoring report and the concomitant issuing of a letter of continuation.	

Special in process conditions of the research for approval (if applicable): None

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The T-REC would like to remain at your service as scientist and researcher and wishes you well with your research. Please do not hesitate to contact the T-REC or the NWU-SCRE for any further enquiries or requests for assistance.

Yours sincerely

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Prof RA Denton
Chairperson NWU Theology Research Ethics Committee (T-REC)

4. Article reworked according to Editor's feedback received and resubmitted to IBR

5. Letter written to the Editor on 2025/05/07:

Dear Dr. Law and the Editorial Team,

Thank you for your thoughtful and constructive feedback regarding my manuscript, '*Reviving Missional Purpose in a Civilizational Crisis*.' I greatly appreciate the time and care you invested in reviewing my submission, and I have worked carefully to address the concerns raised.

New Title: '*From Christendom to Global Mission: Proposing a Theological Framework for Post-Western Christianity*.'

In response to your observations, I have substantially restructured and expanded the manuscript in the following ways:

- New Contribution Developed: I have advanced beyond descriptive historical analysis and propose a clear and original framework for the missional reorientation of Western Christianity. This framework integrates insights from Global Christianity, contemporary missiological thought, and empirical developments within non-Western contexts.
- Grounded Missional Strategy: The article now presents specific strategic shifts in theological education, institutional posture, and ecclesiological imagination, transitioning from a general call for renewal to a grounded, actionable missional vision.
- Integration of Theoretical Foundations: I have woven key missiological principles, such as Bevens and Schroeder's six constants of mission, into the proposed framework to ensure theological robustness and academic coherence.
- Streamlined Structure: The historical and theological background sections have been significantly condensed to enhance focus on the forward-looking proposals, ensuring that the article serves not as a literature review but as a constructive missiological contribution.

I am resubmitting the revised article in the hope that it may now more fully align with the International Bulletin of Mission Research's mission and scholarly expectations. Thank you again for the opportunity to refine this work and for your continued commitment to fostering rigorous missiological scholarship.

I look forward to your consideration and remain grateful for your engagement.

Sincerely,

Dr. Naas Ferreira

(PhD Candidate, North-West University)

2025-05-07

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The Theology Research Ethics Committee (T-REC) approved your research on 2025-05-07, as indicated below. This implies that the North-West University Senate Committee for Research Ethics (NWU-SCRE) grants its permission that, provided the special conditions specified below are met and pending any other authorisation that may be necessary, the research may be initiated, using the ethics number below.

Application Type: Article	
Title of Article: From Christendom to Global Mission: Proposing a Theological Framework for Post-Western Christianity	
Author: Dr IW Ferreira #10322086	
Ethics number:	N W U - 0 1 3 3 0 - 2 5 - A 6
	Study Number Year Status Institution
<i>Status:</i> S = Submission; R = Re-Submission; P = Provisional Authorisation; A = Authorisation	
Commencement date: 2025/04/25	Risk Category: Low risk
Expiry date: 2026/04/25	
<i>Approval of the research is initially provided for a year, after which continuation of the study is dependent on receipt and review of the annual (or as otherwise stipulated) monitoring report and the concomitant issuing of a letter of continuation.</i>	

Special in process conditions of the research for approval (if applicable): None

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The T-REC would like to remain at your service as a scientist and researcher and wishes you well with your research. Please do not hesitate to contact the T-REC or the NWU-SCRE for any further enquiries or requests for assistance.

Yours sincerely



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Prof Rudy Denton
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6. Email received from IBR on 2025/05/07

07-May-2025

Dear Dr. Ferreira:

Your manuscript entitled "From Christendom to Global Mission: Proposing a Theological Framework for Post-Western Christianity" has been successfully submitted online and is presently being given full consideration for publication in International Bulletin of Mission Research.

Your manuscript ID is IBM-25-0044.

You have listed the following individuals as authors of this manuscript:

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Please include any participant consent information under this heading and state whether informed consent to participate was written or verbal. If the requirement for informed consent to participate has been waived by the relevant Ethics Committee or Institutional Review Board (i.e. where it has been deemed that consent would be impossible or impracticable to obtain), please state this. If this is not applicable to your manuscript, please state 'Not applicable' in this section. More information and example statements can be found on our [Publication ethics and research integrity policies page](#).

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Submissions containing any data from an individual person (including individual details, images or videos) must include a statement confirming that informed consent for publication was provided by the participant(s) or a legally authorized representative. Non-essential identifying details should be omitted. Please do not submit the participant's actual written informed consent with your article, as this in itself breaches the patient's confidentiality. The Journal requests that you confirm to us, in writing, that you have obtained written informed consent to publish but the written consent itself should be held by the authors/investigators themselves, for example in a patient's hospital record. The confirmatory letter may be uploaded with your submission as a separate file in addition to the statement confirming that consent to publish was obtained within the manuscript text. If this is not applicable to your manuscript, please state 'Not applicable' in this section.

Declaration of conflicting interest

The journal requires a declaration of conflicting interests from all authors so that a statement can be included in your article. For guidance on conflict of interest statements, see our [policy on conflicting interest declarations](#) and the [ICMJE recommendations](#).

If no conflict exists, your statement should read: 'The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article'.

Funding statement

All articles need to include a funding statement, under a separate heading, **even if you did not receive funding**. You'll find guidance and examples on our [Funding](#) page.

Data availability

The Journal is committed to facilitating openness, transparency and reproducibility of research, and has the following research data sharing policy. For more information, including FAQs please [visit the Sage Research Data policy pages](#).

Subject to appropriate ethical and legal considerations, authors are encouraged to:

- Share your research data in a relevant public data repository
- Include a data availability statement linking to your data. If it is not possible to share your data, use the statement to confirm why it cannot be shared.
- Cite this data in your research

Reference style and citations

The journal follows the Sage Harvard reference style. View the [Sage Harvard guidelines](#) to ensure your manuscript conforms.

Every in-text citation must have a corresponding citation in the reference list and vice versa. Corresponding citations must have identical spelling and year.

Authors should update any references to preprints when a peer reviewed version is made available, to cite the published research. Citations to preprints are otherwise discouraged.

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If you use [EndNote](#) to manage references, you can download the [Sage Harvard EndNote output file](#).

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https://journals.sagepub.com/author-instructions/mis?_gl=1*_qejv8o*_gcl_au*MTlwODQwNDgzNi4xNzQ0ODgyMTM1*_ga*MTQ4ODE3NDczOC4xNzM4MjlyNjE1*_ga_60R758KFDG*MTc0NDg4MjA0Ny43LjEuMTc0NDg4MjEzNi4zNC4wLjA.

- Info on Article 6

Title of Article: From Barabbas to Christ: Theological Delusion, the Death of Christendom and Decolonial Missiology in the Age of BRICS

Author: Dr IW Ferreira #10322086

Ethics number: N W U - 0 1 3 2 9 - 2 5 - A 6

Risk Category: Low risk

- 1. Article submitted to BRIL Mission Studies**
- 2. Email confirming submission received on 2025/05/07**

Subject: MIST: Confirmation of Receipt

Ref.: Your manuscript for Mission Studies

Dear Dr Ferreira,

Thank you for submitting your manuscript entitled "Dr Ignatius Wilhelm Ferreira" to Mission Studies. Your submission has been received in good order and will soon be checked by our editorial office. Should we have any questions relating to your submission, we will of course be in touch. If your submission is in order, it will be assigned to the editor for further processing and you will automatically receive an email with the manuscript number.

You will be able to check on the progress of your paper via the 'Submissions Being Processed' link in your Author Main Menu. You can enter your main menu by logging on to: <https://www.editorialmanager.com/mist/>.

Your username is: iferreira

Click this link to create your own password:
<https://www.editorialmanager.com/mist/l.asp?i=78663&I=N5YZDRJV>

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Kind regards,

Editorial Office

Mission Studies

2025-04-25

ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER

The Theology Research Ethics Committee (T-REC) approved your research on 2025-04-25, as indicated below. This implies that the North-West University Senate Committee for Research Ethics (NWU-SCRE) grants its permission that, provided the special conditions specified below are met and pending any other authorisation that may be necessary, the research may be initiated, using the ethics number below.

Application Type: Article	
Title of Article: From Barabbas to Christ: Theological Delusion, the Death of Christendom and Decolonial Missiology in the Age of BRICS	
Author: Dr IW Ferreira #10322086	
Ethics number:	N W U - 0 1 3 2 9 - 2 5 - A 6
	Study Number Year Status Institution
	Status: S = Submission; R = Re-Submission; P = Provisional Authorisation; A = Authorisation
Commencement date: 2025/04/25	Risk Category: Low risk
Expiry date: 2026/04/25	
Approval of the research is initially provided for a year, after which continuation of the study is dependent on receipt and review of the annual (or as otherwise stipulated) monitoring report and the concomitant issuing of a letter of continuation.	

Special in process conditions of the research for approval (if applicable): None

<p>General conditions: While this ethics approval is subject to all declarations, undertakings and agreements incorporated and signed in the application form, the following general terms and conditions will apply:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The study leader/supervisor (principle investigator)/researcher must report in the prescribed format to the T-REC: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> annually (or as otherwise requested) on the monitoring of the study, whereby a letter of continuation will be provided, and upon completion of the research; and without any delay in case of any adverse event or incident (or any matter that interrupts sound ethical principles) during the course of the research. The approval applies strictly to the article as stipulated in the application form. In the interest of ethical responsibility, the NWU-SCRE and T-REC reserves the right to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> request access to any information or data at any time during the research or after completion of the article; to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modification or monitor the conduct of your research or the informed consent process; withdraw or postpone approval if: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> any unethical principles or practices of the research are revealed or suspected; it becomes apparent that any relevant information was withheld from the T-REC or that information has been false or misrepresented; submission of the annual (or otherwise stipulated) monitoring report, the required amendments, or reporting of adverse events or incidents was not done in a timely manner and accurately; and / or new institutional rules, national legislation or international conventions deem it necessary. T-REC can be contacted for further information or any report templates via Rudy.Denton@nwu.ac.za.

The T-REC would like to remain at your service as a scientist and researcher and wishes you well with your research. Please do not hesitate to contact the T-REC or the NWU-SCRE for any further enquiries or requests for assistance.

Yours sincerely



Digitally signed by
Prof RA Denton
Date: 2025.04.25
13:26:54 +02'00'

Prof Rudy Denton
Chairperson NWU Theology Research Ethics Committee (T-REC)

Mission Studies brill.com/mist *Instructions for Authors*

Last revised on 19 December 2024 Page 2 of 6

Manuscripts become the property of *Mission Studies* and may be edited as necessary. Unaccepted manuscripts will not be returned.



Language

Manuscripts should be submitted in English. Spelling should be consistent throughout.

English spelling follows the latest edition of Webster's *New Collegiate Dictionary*. Inclusive language should be used.

Authors should avoid using personal pronouns for God wherever possible. If it is unavoidable use lower case for personal pronouns of divine persons other than at the beginning of sentences: he, she, her's.

Capitalization

Capitalization of words should be done sparingly. Do NOT capitalize "church," "gospel," "mission." DO capitalize "Gospel of Mark," "Catholic Church," "Lutheranism."

Foreign Words

Foreign words – except proper names and places – in respective languages should be *italicized* (e.g. in English, *Sitz im Leben*; in all languages, *missio Dei*).

Length

A typical article for this journal should be around 6,000 words in length, typed in Times New Roman and spaced 1.5.

We allow some reasonable leeway on this but not more than approximately 10% (so, an absolute maximum of 6,600 words); this limit does not include Tables and Figures; it does include Abstract, Footnotes, Figure captions, Bibliography and any Acknowledgements.

Book reviews are from 300 to 600 words, including the bibliographical information at the beginning of the review.

Manuscript Structure

Abstract and Keywords

After the author affiliation, email address and (if available) ORCID, there should be a one-paragraph abstract (150 to 200 words) followed by up to eight keywords. Keywords are used by potential readers to search for and find your work - so the simpler and more summative they are, the more likely your article is to be found.

For most articles the abstract should comprise these five issues, which should not need more than one or two sentences each;

- a. the question you are investigating
- b. why this question is important in mission studies and/or what impact you intend the study to have
- c. the method you employed for your investigation

- d. what you discovered
- e. what conclusions you have come to, with attention to the frame of mission studies

Abstracts are normally not more than a single paragraph, utilise the third person and *do not* contain bibliographical references.

Biographical Note

A brief biographical statement (max. 200 words) with an institutional affiliation is also required.

Headings

Headings should be used to break up the text.

1 Introduction

2 The First Level Heading is Flush Left and Looks Like This

2.1 The Second Level Heading

Please note that each article should start with an Introduction and end with a Conclusion

Footnotes

Use footnotes, not endnotes. Lengthy notes are to be avoided.

Bible Citations

Bible citations are placed in the text – e.g. (Gal 3:10).

References Cited

Mission Studies follows the internationally recognized “Anthropological Style”. References are placed in the text in parentheses, with author's family name, year and page number(s) – e.g. (Author 2021:22-35)

Text Citations

References are placed in the text in parentheses, with author's last name, year and page number(s) – e.g. (White 1973:1-42).

Reference List

At the end of the text, references will be listed alphabetically according to the last name of the first author. If there is more than one citation, then the oldest should be placed first, according to the following examples:

Author, Alice (1995). *The Title of the Book*. City: Publisher.

Author, Alice (2022). *The Title of the More Recent Book*. City: Publisher.

Book

Author, Alice (2017). *The Title of the Book*. Location: Publisher.

Author, Alice, and Bert Author (2017). *The Title of the Book*. 6th ed. Location: Publisher, 1–10.

Author, Alice (2017). *The Title of the Book*. [online]. Edition (if not first). Location: Publisher. [Date Viewed 24 May 2021]. Available from: DOI or URL.

Book in Translation

Weber, Max (1963). *The Sociology of Religion*. Translated by Ephraim Fischhoff. Boston: Beacon Press.

Edited Book

Schreier, Robert J., ed. (1991). *Faces of Jesus in Africa*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

Book Written or Edited by Several Authors/Editors

Pope-Levison, Priscilla, and John R. Levison (1992). *Jesus in Global Contexts*. Louisville, KY: Westminster / John Knox Press.

Scherer, James A., and Stephen B. Bevans, eds. (1992). *New Directions in Mission and Evangelization 1: Basic Statements 1974-1991*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

Book Chapter

Burrows, William R. (1996). "A Seventh Paradigm? Catholics and Radical Inculturation." In Willem Saayman and Klippes Kritzing, eds., *Mission in Bold Humility*. David Bosch's Work Considered. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 121-138.

Journal Article

Peacock, James (1996). "Anthropology and Missionaries: A Commentary." *Missiology: An International Review* 24 (2):163 -165.

For journal articles, if a doi number is available, please insert it. E.g.

Author, Alice (2015). "Title of the Article." *Journal Title* [online]. 12 (1): 163 -165. DOI /10.1163/15733831-12341986.

If there are four or more authors, please list up to ten authors in the bibliography; in a note, only list the first author, followed by *et al.* ("and others").

Other

For matters not covered and for further information, see the latest edition of *The Chicago Manual of Style* (chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html; Chicago: University of Chicago Press), or consult with the editor of *Mission Studies*.

Quotations

The original spelling should be retained in quotations. Quotes in other languages than English should be translated into English.

ADDENDUM B:

- **University A-Rules on Article format:**

A-Rules-approved-by-Council-16-Nov-2023 PDF www.nwu.ac.za

5.4. Requirements for the research component of a doctoral degree

5.4.1. Subject to the exceptions provided for in Rule 5.4.2 and Rule 5.4.3, the requirements for the research component of a doctoral degree are the successful submission and examination of a written thesis or mini-thesis.

5.4.2. Faculty rules may provide that full or partial compliance with the research component of a doctoral degree may take the form of one or more publishable or published research articles in a specified field, taking into account the requirements of Rule 5.11 and Rule 5.12, and identifying the minimum number of research articles required instead of a thesis, mini thesis or the research component of a professional doctoral degree.

5.11. Submission of the research product for a doctoral degree for examination

5.11.1. A candidate registered for a doctoral degree must, with the written consent of the promoter concerned, submit the thesis, mini thesis, or other research product contemplated in Rule 5.4 for examination on or before the date determined for submission in the annual University calendar to qualify for graduation at the appointed graduation ceremony.

5.11.2. Where the promoter withholds permission for the submission of a research product for examination, the academic director or deputy dean concerned may, after consultation with the promoter and the candidate, recommend to the executive dean on the readiness of the research product for submission for examination.

5.11.3. A thesis, mini thesis or other research product of a doctoral study must comply with the technical requirements provided for in the Manual for Higher Degree Studies.

5.12. Research articles submitted as research product

5.12.1. Where faculty rules require that a research article must be submitted to an accredited scholarly journal as part of the requirements for the degree, the candidate must provide evidence of such submission.

5.12.1. Where a candidate is allowed to submit the research product in the form of research articles, such research product must be presented for examination purposes as an integrated unit, supplemented with a problem statement, an introduction and a synoptic conclusion and the manuscript submission guidelines, or the url link to the manuscript guidelines of the journal or journals concerned.

- Faculty of Theology on Article format

FACULTY OF THEOLOGY

MASTER'S AND DOCTORAL DEGREES

GUIDELINES FOR RESEARCH PRODUCTS IN THE FORM OF RESEARCH ARTICLES

1. Background

The General Academic Rules (GAR) of the North-West University (NWU) make provision for the research product required for Master's and Doctoral degrees to be submitted in the form of research articles and regulate the prerequisites for such a submission (GAR 4.10.5 and 5.10.5).

Historically, such format of submission on doctoral level had as its context that of an academic member of staff at a tertiary institution, who over the course of his/her career had already published in acknowledged scholarly journals a substantial corpus of research in a specific field, without completing a doctorate. Working from the premise that such an academic had already fulfilled the basic requirement for being awarded a doctoral degree, namely doing independent research that contributes to the field of study, this option gives such an academic the opportunity to receive a doctoral degree based on research done.

This possibility was later broadened to include awarding a Master's degree more specifically in the field of natural sciences where collaborative research projects carried out by students under supervision may result in the publication of an article in an acknowledged scholarly journal. In this manner, such (a) student(s) also met the minimum requirements set for a Master's degree.

2. Situation in the Faculty of Theology

Research in the field of Theology requires a substantial amount of reading by a scholar in a specific field in order for him/her to become acquainted with the field and eventually to be viewed a master of the particular field. Therefore, research in this faculty rarely, if ever, provides the same possibilities of collaborative research that may lead to a publication and in the process the possibility for a Master's student of being awarded such a degree. On this basis, it seems not in the interest of quality enhancement that a student in the Faculty of Theology, where such a vast amount of prior reading is necessary in order to master a topic, be allowed to submit a limited quantity of (published) research to obtain a Master's degree.

As regards a doctoral degree, the scenario alluded to above whereby over a period of time an academic staff member has build up a substantial corpus of research in a specific field, but not completed a doctoral thesis, would seem more appropriate. This may be the case where a person is appointed in an academic position in the faculty at a later stage in his/her life after serving in the ministry, or, where a person switches his/her research scope to focus more specifically on a theological topic. In such and similar cases, where a candidate had already proven his/her ability to do independent research and in that way contributed to the knowledge base in a specific field, the option of submitting such research outputs in the form of research articles, in accordance with the prescriptions the GAR (5.10.5) lay down in this regard, could be considered as an alternative to writing a thesis.

3. Recommendation

3.1 In the faculty of Theology only doctoral candidates fitting the profile described in 2. be allowed to pursue the research article option for obtaining a PhD.

3.2 Any cases that warrant special merit and fall outside the guidelines provided, should be substantially motivated to the Committee for Advanced Degrees and, if found adequate, serve at RIHD for recommendation to the Faculty Board for approval.

- **Personal motivation letter**

To whom it may concern,

Upon reviewing Northwest University's pertinent documents, particularly those tailored to the Faculty of Theology, specific observations have become evident.

An alternative approach may be considered when an academic staff member transitions into academia following extensive ministerial experience and subsequently demonstrates the ability to conduct independent research, making significant contributions to their field's knowledge base without completing a traditional thesis. In such cases, submitting research outputs in academic articles, as stipulated by GAR (5.10.5), may be deemed an appropriate substitute for the conventional thesis.

Since 2014, I have served as an academic staff member after 26 years in ministry, with my research focusing on Missiology. I entered the academy with a Doctor of Ministry (DMin in Urban Mission) degree from Westminster Theological Seminary (Philadelphia, USA). Over the past decade, I have published extensively in accredited academic journals, concentrating on the epistemological crisis within Western Christianity from a missiological perspective. The study I now present as independent research culminates this work and comprises a Research Proposal and five research articles at various stages of peer-reviewed submission. Entitled 'God's Transformational Engagement with His Chosen People for the Sake of His Global Mission', my study integrates these articles into a cohesive examination that diagnoses current challenges facing Western Christianity and proposes a missiological path forward.

I am confident that my research contributions align with the university's doctoral requirements and will significantly enhance the field of Missiology. This research journey has been both intellectually rigorous and personally fulfilling. I am assured that my submission meets all necessary criteria to be considered a viable alternative to a traditional thesis.

IW (Naas) Ferreira

2024/10/21

ANNEXURE

- TURNITIN REPORT (SUMMARY)

The TURNITIN report shows a 21% similarity index, primarily due to references to previously published articles. This level of similarity is expected and acceptable, as the thesis includes content from the candidate's peer-reviewed publications.

IW Ferreira 10322086.docx			
ORIGINALITY REPORT			
21%	19%	5%	2%
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS
PRIMARY SOURCES			
1	indieskriflig.org.za Internet Source	15%	
2	hts.org.za Internet Source	1%	
3	Submitted to North West University Student Paper	<1%	
4	uwersenkranz.net Internet Source	<1%	
5	Han, Gwang Hun. "The Concept of Movement in Missional Hermeneutics: An Analysis of Motus Dei as a Theological Framework for Understanding God's Mission in All Nations.", Regent University, 2024 Publication	<1%	
6	repository.nwu.ac.za Internet Source	<1%	
7	www.ocms.ac.uk Internet Source	<1%	
8	careersdocbox.com		

- **Language Editing**

"This is to certify that Susan Lourens was responsible for the language editing of my thesis."

