





# **The characteristics of a missional church as part of the Missio Dei**

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Christiaan de Beer

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12299685

Supervisor: Prof. S.J. van der Merwe

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## **A word of appreciation**

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## **Abstract**

The GKSA seems to be in a weak condition concerning the Missio Dei. There is a drastic decline in membership, a weak impact on society and a crisis in following our calling. This study aims to explore the relationship between the Missio Dei and the missional church. The Biblical principles for aligning a church with the Missio Dei will be analysed. Eventually, I will propose a preliminary paradigm for transforming an ingrown church into a missional church. The question addressed in this study is what principles should a church follow to be a part of the Missio Dei and therefore become a missional church?

## **Key-words**

Church; Missio Dei; missional church; ingrown church; abasement; reform; growth.

## **Opsomming**

Dit wil voorkom of die Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid Afrika in `n swak toestand verval het. Die drastiese afname in getalle, dat daar weinig invloed op die samelewing uitgeoefen word en die gebrek aan roepingsvervulling bevestig hierdie toestand. Hierdie studie ondersoek die verhouding tussen die Missio Dei en die missionale kerk. Die Bybelse beginsels om `n kerk te belyn met die Missio Dei gaan geanaliseer word enten einde gaan `n preliminêre paradigma voorgestel word om `n ingroei kerk te transformeer in `n missionale kerk. Die vraag waaraan hierdie studie aandag gee, is watter beginsels deur `n gemeente gevolg moet word om aan die Missio Dei deel te neem en sodoende in `n missionale kerk te verander.

## **Trefwoorde**

Kerk; Missio Dei; missionale kerk; na-binne-gerigte kerk; verootmoediging; reformeer; groei.



# Contents

A word of appreciation .....	iii
Abstract.....	v
Key-words .....	v
Opsomming.....	v
Trefwoorde .....	v
Contents.....	vii
Chapter 1 Introduction .....	1
1.1 Background to formulating the problem .....	1
1.1.1 Church decline .....	1
1.1.2 Impact on society.....	2
1.1.3 Calling.....	3
1.1.4 Missio Dei, God as missionary and missional church .....	5
1.2 Problem statement .....	6
1.3 Preliminary literature study .....	6
1.4 Research problem, aim and objective.....	6
1.4.1 Central research question.....	6
1.4.2 Aim and objectives.....	6
1.5 Central theoretical argument.....	7
1.6 Methodology .....	7
1.7 Study limitation .....	7
Chapter 2 The condition of the GKSA concerning the Missio Dei .....	9
2.1 Background.....	9
2.2 Immeasurable factors: thought patterns.....	9
2.2.1 Western culture and individualism.....	9
2.2.2 Secularism .....	12
2.2.3 Pluralism.....	13
2.3 Measurable factors .....	13
2.3.1 Depopulation and urbanisation .....	13
2.2.2 Economics, political and social factors .....	15

2.3.3	Technology and family .....	15
2.3.4	Ecclesiastical factors .....	16
2.4	The challenges the GKSA face .....	19
2.5	Conclusion .....	22
Chapter 3	The relation between Missio Dei and missional church.....	24
3.1	Introduction.....	24
3.2	Mission in the Old Testament .....	25
3.2.1	Creation and fall.....	25
3.2.2	The call .....	27
3.2.3	The rescue .....	28
3.2.4	The exile .....	30
3.2.5	The psalms .....	31
3.2.6	The prophets.....	32
3.2.7	Conclusion.....	33
3.3	Mission in the New Testament .....	34
3.3.1	Mission in the gospels and Acts.....	34
3.3.2	Mission in Paul's writings.....	41
3.3.3	Conclusion.....	44
3.4	Mission in history .....	46
3.5	The God of mission.....	47
3.6	The mission of God.....	48
3.6.1	Goal and motivation for mission .....	48
3.6.2	Essence of God's mission .....	50
3.7	The people of mission .....	51
3.8	Theological considerations regarding mission.....	54
3.8.1	Trinitarian foundation.....	55
3.8.2	Christological foundation.....	56
3.8.3	Pneumatological foundation .....	57
3.8.4	Eschatological foundation.....	58
3.9	Conclusion .....	59
Chapter 4	Biblical principles for aligning a church with the Missio Dei .....	61
4.1	Introduction.....	61

4.2	Biblical considerations to call a church back to the Missio Dei .....	61
4.2.1	God's honour and the church (Eph. 1:3-14) .....	62
4.2.2	God's care and the church (Joh. 17:11-24; Eph. 4:7, 12-16; ..... Joh. 13:34-35; HC, 21:55).....	62
4.2.3	God's mission and the church (Mt. 28:18-20) .....	62
4.2.4	God's co- workers, the church (Ro. 10:14-15).....	62
4.2.5	God's Kingdom and the church (Col. 3:1-4).....	63
4.3	The Holy Spirit's work in calling the church to the Missio Dei.....	64
4.3.1	The work of the Holy Spirit in the Missio Dei .....	64
4.3.2	Times of ebb and flow in the work of the Spirit .....	66
4.4	The process of abasement, reformation and growth in the Missio Dei.....	69
4.4.1	Abasement .....	69
4.4.2	Reformation .....	73
4.4.3	Growth .....	75
Chapter 5	Preliminary paradigm for changing an ingrown congregation into ..... a missional church.....	80
5.1	Introduction.....	80
5.2	Character traits of a church taking part in the Missio Dei .....	80
5.2.1	Leitourgia (Worship) .....	81
5.2.2	Koinonia (Community) .....	82
5.2.3	Kerugma (Proclaiming).....	85
5.2.4	Diakonia (Serving) .....	86
5.3	Values and habits of a church taking part in the missio Dei.....	88
5.3.1	Values.....	88
5.3.2	Habits .....	92
5.4	Conclusion .....	103
	Bibliography .....	105



# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Background to formulating the problem

To gain perspective on the condition in which the Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika (GKSA) currently find them, we have to investigate certain trends in the churches and the society in which they function.

#### 1.1.1 Church decline

Since the 1980's, there have been signs of church decline in the traditional Afrikaans-speaking reformed churches. In the 1990's, it was acknowledged that this tendency was unmistakable in South Africa (Hendriks, 1993:545). In a presentation on church revitalisation, Buys (2011) states the following:

“Many authors have raised concerns about the lack of growth and clear signs of decline and an ingrown mentality of the Reformed Churches in South Africa. The merging of neighbouring churches leading to the dissolution and closing down of congregations is becoming a regular phenomenon.”

This tendency was also acknowledged by the synods of the Reformed Churches in South Africa during the period of 1994 to 2000. Statistically there was a drastic decline in the number of members in congregations. Reports are published from all over South Africa about the significant decline of membership numbers of local churches, as well as of new ministry combinations that have been formed between declining congregations to ensure a form of continued ordained pastoral ministry; often one minister has to serve two or three congregations. The statistics of the GKSA show that 55 congregations have disbanded since 1982 and another 22 have merged with other congregations. That makes 77 congregations that have closed their doors in about 30 years, with probably more than double the number of congregations to follow suit in the next 20 years.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> These statistics are published in the *Almanak* van the Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika (GKSA, 2012a?:28-31).

In 2012, the synod (GKSA, 2012b:509-511) once again acknowledged the problem by considering alarming statistics. In 1971, the GKSA had 104 000 Afrikaans-speaking members, of whom 38% were baptised members, who still had to confess their faith. In 2012, the denomination has 63 000 Afrikaans-speaking members of which 16% are baptised members, who still have to confess their faith. This is a decline of about 40%. When we compare this with statistics of 1997 (300 congregations with 78 946 confessing members) we see that the rate of decline is actually increasing.

In their report to the synods of 2000 (GKSA, 2000) and 2012 (GKSA, 2012b), the deputies found that the following aspects had a large influence on this decline:<sup>2</sup>

- a Young couples are having fewer children.
- b Members who have confessed their faith are renouncing community with the denomination.
- c Members leave without attestation.
- d There seems to be a crisis of local churches not understanding their calling and identity. This is recognised in a lack of spiritual formation and zeal in members' lives.

In their article about the reasons for church decline, De Klerk and Van Helden (2011) points out that this tendency is the result of a confluence of historical and present-day measurable and immeasurable factors. These factors can be distinguished from one another, but because of their nature, they cannot be separated.

### **1.1.2 Impact on society**

In his book, *Christian Attitude in the South African Liberal Democracy*, Vorster (2007:249) states:

“However, after 1994 the effectiveness of institutionalism faded away and, in particular, the established mainline churches experience a loss of both membership and influence in the new society...Hendriks and Erasmus find that this includes the following traditions Reformed, Methodist, Congregational, Presbyterian, Baptist, Lutheran and Roman Catholic.”

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<sup>2</sup>For a more detailed description, see the report on “Die bewaring en vermeerdering van die kerk” to the synod of 2000 (GKSA, 2000:502-518).

Buys (2011) acknowledges that concerns are expressed that churches have a very weak impact on communities.

Another sign of congregations not succeeding to infiltrate and to have an impact on their society is the lack of multicultural ministries in most of the GKSA churches. The rate of urbanisation in South Africa has created a multicultural environment in almost all the urban areas.<sup>3</sup>Few white Afrikaans-speaking churches have come to grips with the demographics of the post-apartheid South Africa, and the vast majority of these churches are competing for the same small pool of white, middle-class people. Multicultural ministry is non-existent in most of these congregations.

### 1.1.3 Calling

In their report to the synod (GKSA, 2000:510-511), the deputies of the synods from 1994 to 2000 also found that many of the congregations in the GKSA had an unbiblical and sinful understanding on what it meant to be church – an understanding that boils down to a maintenance and consumer approach. This understanding came to the fore especially in their lack of commitment and zeal for their calling as the church to reach out to the world (cf. Mt. 28:18-20).

Not only is the local church struggling with her calling, numbers and a lack of zeal, but it seems that she has also become ingrown to the point of not knowing how to engage the culture and context around her. In their report<sup>4</sup> to the synod regarding the decline of membership in the GKSA, the deputies made the following alarming statement (GKSA, 1997:875): “Van evangelisering kom daar nie veel tereg in die Gereformeerde kerke nie. Dit kan tereg gesê word dat die Gereformeerde kerke nog nooit juis evangeliserende kerke was nie.”

Statistics confirm the statement above. According to the *Almanak* of 2011 (GKSA, 2011?:51) there were 390 congregations in the GKSA. Of these congregations,

- 183 congregations added no new members (46.9% of denomination churches),

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<sup>3</sup>The South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR) estimates that the white people in our nation will decrease by about 8% (355 000 people). The Institute estimates that the country will have about 4 087 350 white people, 1 219 112 Indian, 5 109 549 coloured and 45 839 896 black people in the year 2025.

<sup>4</sup> For the full report on the decline of membership, see the acts of the synod of 1997 (GKSA, 1997:871-882).

- 76 congregations added 1 to 3 members, and
- 19 congregations added 4 new members during the past year.

This means that 278 congregations (71%) added less than 5 members per year.

When one looks at the statistics from an evangelisation point of view, the reality really is striking. In total, 331 (84.8%) congregations added no people through evangelism. In the whole denomination of 390 congregations, only 240 people were added after evangelisation efforts. That is less than one person per congregation per year.

Vorster (2007:249) acknowledges the following:

“It seems that the struggle of the past and the development into a new social dispensation bred churches that are either caught up in the extreme of institutionalism or in the ultimate form of spiritualism.”

He continues,

“Institutionalism portrays a form of church-life where the elected leadership is the sole face and voice of the church...Little activity on the level of the local church is noticeable...In this model clericalism tends to reduce the laity into a condition of passivity and to make their apostolate a mere appendage of the apostolate hierarchy.”

The crisis of following a sense of calling in the reformed churches is not only a South African concern. Reformed scholars, pastors and missionaries globally express the view that the ingrown attitude of church leaders and churches result in declining and dying churches. Jack Miller (1999:17) writes from a Calvinistic paradigm about this phenomenon and shows how ingrown churches have crashed spiritually. The evidence is found in their lack of zeal for outreach. Some have even come to suspect zeal for witness as evidence of fanaticism – or at least a sign of immaturity.

In his article, “Theological Education in Missionary Perspective”, Bosch (1982:17) makes the following statement concerning the crisis in the mission of the church:

“Another factor responsible for the present embarrassment in the field of mission is that the modern missionary enterprise was born and bred outside the church. The church – especially the Protestants – did not regard itself as called to mission. The Reformation definitions of the church were concerned with what happened inside the church: on preaching, the Sacraments

and discipline. The church was a place where something was being done (passive voice), and not a people who did something.”

Largely, this seems to be one of the main problems in the GKSA today. G. E. Dames (2007:1) correctly states:

“The crisis of today’s church can be defined as a crisis of vocation, the calling to God’s mission, of being, doing and witnessing in faithfulness to Jesus Christ, the Lord. The missional challenge is a crisis of faith and spirit, and can only be answered through conversion, the continuing conversion of the church.”

#### **1.1.4 Missio Dei, God as missionary and missional church**

During the past half century, scholars have become to understand mission as God’s mission. The phrase *Missio Dei* is Latin for “the sending of God”. Karl Barth was one of the first theologians to articulate mission as an activity of God himself. In his article, “New frontiers for mission in a post-modern era,” Dames (2007:41) writes that Karl Barth’s influence was critical for missionary theology. Barth shifted the theological basis for mission to the doctrine of the Trinity. Bosch (2009:390) explains that since the Willingen Conference of the IMC (1952) mission has been understood as being derived from the very nature of God:

“The classical doctrine on the *missio Dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit was expanded to include yet another ‘movement’: Father, Son and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world.”

The *Missio Dei* constitutes the church (Bosch, 2009:519). It has become clear that mission is something God does. He is the great *missionary*. The church comes into her own by becoming part of God’s mission (*Missio Dei*). The church can only be authentic in her mission when she is obedient to and taking part in the *Missio Dei*. This means a missional church is a church that is shaped by participating in God’s mission, which is to set things right in a broken, sinful world, to redeem it to what God has always intended. Such a church is referred to as *a missional church* in this research.

## **1.2 Problem statement**

In the light of what has been said, this study is an attempt at a missiological analysis of the reasons for the condition of the GKSA, and of the way in which the Missio Dei and Biblical principles concerning abasement, reformation and growth could help to transform an ingrown congregation into a missional church.

The main question that this study raises is the following: What are the principles for a church to be a part of the Missio Dei and therefore to be a missional church?

## **1.3 Preliminary literature study**

In a Nexus search, it was found that no such topic was registered.

## **1.4 Research problem, aim and objective**

### **1.4.1 Central research question**

The central research question of this study is the following: What are the Biblical principles for a church to be a part of the Missio Dei, and therefore to understand and to live according to her calling to be God's missionary people in the world?

The questions arising from the above problem are the following:

- 1 What is the condition of the GKSA with regard to the Missio Dei?
- 2 In what way does a sound understanding of the Missio Dei make an impact on a sound Biblical understanding of a missional church?
- 3 What are the Biblical principles for aligning a church with the Missio Dei?
- 4 What would be a preliminary paradigm to transform an ingrown congregation into a church who understands and lives according to the calling to be God's missionary people?

### **1.4.2 Aim and objectives**

The main aim of this study is to analyse the Biblical principles for aligning a church with the Missio Dei and identify a preliminary paradigm that would help an ingrown congregation in the GKSA to transform into a missional church.

In an attempt to reach the above aim, the following objectives are formulated:

- 1 To study the reasons why the GKSA is in a weak condition regarding its calling to be part of the Missio Dei.
- 2 To study and analyse the relational aspects of the Missio Dei and the missional church.
- 3 To study the Biblical principles for aligning a church with the Missio Dei.
- 4 To identify a missiological paradigm that would help to facilitate the transformation of an ingrown congregation into a missional church.

### **1.5 Central theoretical argument**

The central theoretical argument of this study is that if the ingrown church aligns herself with the Missio Dei and applies the preliminary paradigm she will transform into a missional church.

### **1.6 Methodology**

This missiological study is to proceed from the reformational theological tradition. Research will be carried out by historical grammatical exegesis, a comparative literature overview and statistical research. The comparative literature overview will form the primary method through which this research intends to achieve its objectives and will comprise the following:

- 1.6.1 Study of relevant literature and information gathered on the condition of the GKSA.
- 1.6.2 Analysis, comparison and evaluation of scholarly works on the relational aspect of the Missio Dei and missional church.
- 1.6.3 Analysis of relevant theological literature to help this study gain the contemporary Biblical view with regard to the principles for aligning a church with the Missio Dei.
- 1.6.4 To identify and propose a missiologically based paradigm that will help facilitate the transformation of an ingrown congregation into a missional church.

### **1.7 Study limitation**

There are numerous interrelated issues that this type of study cannot address and that call for further research. The context of this study is limited to the GKSA. There are a number of efforts towards church reformation and growth going on at the time of writing and it will be

difficult to address everything in this study. However, the study sets an informed basis for future study, taking into consideration the period during which the study conducted. It will be possible to offer help on the set of issues that lies at the heart of the challenges faced by ingrown congregations in the GKSA.

## Chapter 2

### The condition of the GKSA concerning the Missio Dei

#### 2.1 Background

It is obvious that the GKSA is in bad shape spiritually and numerically. It seems that even the traditional strength of the GKSA – to be Biblically sound – is fading in the everyday life of the church. In their article about the reasons for the decline in the traditional Afrikaans-speaking churches, De Klerk and Van Helden (2011) state:

“Die sterk punt van die gereformeerde stroom, naamlik suiwer Skrif navolging, vertoon binne die krimpende kerke die teendeel. Die sterk punt is deur `n ongebalanseerde denkraamwerk onbetwisbaar gewysig om as die swak punt van die tradisioneel Afrikaanssprekende gereformeerdes na vore te kom.”

The situation is evidently reaching a crisis point. De Klerk and Van Helden (2011:3) show that the decline of the traditional mainline churches in the 21st century is due to a complex mixture of immeasurable and measurable factors. Living in a post-modern world the GKSA also fall prey to these factors. I will now focus on some of these factors.

#### 2.2 Immeasurable factors: thought patterns

##### 2.2.1 Western culture and individualism

Post-modernism created an individualistic culture in the West, and it has had a far-reaching influence on Western churches. When writing about mission in the wake of the Enlightenment, Bosch (2009:262-276) shows that one of the results of the post-modern paradigm is overemphasis on relativism, which in turn creates individualism.

Dames (2007:40) explains how Western civilisation created the current global crisis we are facing – the culture of modernity. This has permeated the context that the churches in the West are facing. In his book, *The Forgotten Ways*, Hirsch (2006:16) acknowledges the dilemma the church in the West is encountering. He shows that the twenty-first century is turning out to be a highly complex context. This means the church is facing very significant

adaptive challenges, and leaders feel it is getting harder to manage such situations. All of these factors have resulted in a massive long-term decline of the church in the West.

Western individualism has its roots in self-centredness, which has been man's biggest problem since the beginning (cf. Ge. 3) of time. It is the reason for the fall into sin, and it is still haunting us in our Western culture. In his commentary on the book Ephesians, Hughes (1990:52) reflects on the great need of the church. He comments that the focus of the world is on self-knowledge, with too many Christians sharing that focus. Because they are so occupied with knowledge of the self, instead of seeking knowledge of Christ, they experience stagnation in their spiritual growth.

Some consequences of Western individualism are materialism and consumerism. Western individualism created a consumer culture that has beguiled some churches and believers to fall into its trap. Boren (2010:57) rightly shows that our Western culture teaches us we would have been happier if we could have more material possessions. However, what we actually need is to submit ourselves to God and confess that we probably have bought into the idolatry of materialism. People feel they are only responsible for and to themselves and that only their own needs matter.

Hirsch (2006:105-106) argues convincingly how Western individualism has developed into a deadly consumer culture, where everything is concerned with the individual's needs. He concludes that other religions are not the major challenge to the viability of Christianity, but that consumerism rather poses a threat. The culture (paradigm) of consumerism has infiltrated many of our congregations. An example is that some people behave as if the church should be a one-stop spiritual mall. In such congregations, a self-centred focus on the individual's need instead of a Christocentric focus prevails. Hirsch (2006) indicates how some churches have been caught up in a consumer culture in order to draw more members. Unfortunately, these churches start to compete with other ideologies in the marketplace, using dynamics that mirror the marketplace instead of listening to the Word of God.

The culture of individualism and consumerism has had a large effect on the church, especially with regard to the West and the Third World. There is a large gap in terms of the rich Western and poor Third World countries. Bosch (2009:3-4) describes the anomaly:

“More than ever before we are today aware of the fact that the world is divided – apparently irreversibly – between the rich and the poor and that, by and large, the rich are those who consider themselves (or are considered by the poor) to be Christian. In addition, and according to most indicators, the rich are still getting richer and the poor poorer. The circumstances create on the one hand, anger and frustration among the poor and, on the other hand, reluctance among affluent Christians to share their faith.”

The church should be practicing solidarity with the poor, but contradictory to this ideal our culture has become an obstacle to many.

The culture of materialism even had an impact on the message some churches proclaim. In his book, *Let the Nations be Glad*, John Piper (2010:19) offers a Biblical defence of God’s supremacy in all things. Analysing the new shape of world Christianity, he warns against the dangers and influence that the prosperity gospel is exerting on the world. His definition of the *prosperity gospel* is “a teaching that emphasizes God’s aim to make believers healthy and wealthy in this life, while it overlooks or minimizes the dangers of wealth, the Biblical call to a wartime mind-set, and the necessity and purposes of suffering.”

The prosperity gospel feeds on this culture of individual wealth and in turn creates Christians who have their hearts set on prosperity. Piper (2010:20) is of the opinion that both the wealthy Westerners and the poor global South are guilty of its excesses. He writes, “The difference is that the poor don’t have wealth and want it, while the rich have it, expect to keep it, and get angry if God takes it.” The reason why this insight is important is that the way we think about money and possessions has a profound influence on the way we are being church, conduct mission and make disciples of converts.

It seems that the culture of Western individualism has infiltrated the Western church to a great extent. The focus in many congregations has shifted from Christ and his Kingdom to a self-centred approach. The foregrounding of the ego creates a lack of zeal for outreach and evangelism, because in the congregants’ eyes the church is about *me*. However, the Bible teaches you cannot build a church with spiritual consumers; you can only build a church with disciples of Christ. The product of the individualism, which is creeping into the Western church, is not the church of Christ, but a club for the spiritual elite.

### 2.2.2 Secularism

When writing about transforming mission and the contemporary crisis the church faces, Bosch (2009:3) states:

“The crisis we are referring to is, naturally, not only a crisis with regard to mission. It affects the entire church, indeed the entire world...”

1. The advance of science and technology and, with them, the worldwide process of secularization seem to have made faith in God redundant; why turn to religion if we ourselves have ways and means of dealing with the exigencies of modern life?”

De Klerk and Van Helden (2011) support this view when discussing the changes that have occurred since the Enlightenment. In an article about people who are leaving the institutional church, Niemandt (2012:10) explains that secularism could be one of the biggest contributors to church decline. Jackson (2012:8) refers to the *Win-Galup International Religiosity and Atheism Index*, which shows that the percentage of people in South Africa that claim to be religious have dropped from 83% to 64% in the last 7 years. The 19% drop confirms the suspicion of the growing secularisation in our country.

The secularisation of society has also infiltrated the church. Today we find the phenomenon that many people claim to be Christians, but they separate themselves from the institutional church. They like Jesus, but they do not like the church. De Klerk and Van Helden (2011:3) explain it is unfortunate that the traditional churches have failed to give attention to the post-modern spirituality of believers (especially younger believers). The negligence resulted in members going to other places where their spiritual needs are met, or in other cases, members are just becoming churchless. There is also a shortage of Christians that lead Spirit-filled lives.<sup>5</sup> People confess they believe in Christ, but their lives reflect society around them. This does not of course apply to the whole church, but the sad outcome is that the rest of the world looks at the church and only sees hypocrites.

These are just some of the reasons why we find an increase in the numbers of “de-churched” people.

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<sup>5</sup> The report of the deputies for “Die bewaring en vermeerdering van die kerk” to the synod of 2000 (GKSA, 2000:502-518) gives a more detailed description of these trends.

### 2.2.3 Pluralism

The rate of globalisation has created a pluralistic environment in most urban areas. This has a far-reaching effect on traditional Christian countries. Bosch (2009:3) puts forward that the West is being dechristianised:

“Partly because of the above, the world can no longer be divided into ‘Christian’ and ‘non-Christian’ territories separated by oceans. Because of dechristianization of the West and the multiple migrations of people of many faiths we now live in a religiously pluralist world, in which Christians, Muslims, Buddhist, and adherents of many traditional religions rub shoulders daily.”

The mission field has shifted to our doorstep, but many congregations seem unable to adapt to this new context. Niemandt (2010:7) points out that today’s runaway and globalised world is asking the church to think creatively about how she should engage this new culture. What does it imply to be an inclusive church in a new era of creativity and connectivity, in an informed and empowered society?

The crisis in a pluralist society revolves on the claim to objective truth. Every big religion makes this claim in some form or another. The problem is that congregations seem to lack the knowledge and insight to engage in a fruitful dialogue with people from other religions. Sadly, the church discovers that her credibility has been seriously damaged when she now claims that Jesus Christ is the only Lord and Saviour of humankind. The effects are devastating and some church members even declare they do not know if an objective truth exists.<sup>6</sup> The uncertainty has contributed to creating an ingrown attitude amongst Christians in traditional denominations like the GKSA.

## 2.3 Measurable factors

### 2.3.1 Depopulation and urbanisation

Urbanisation denotes a world in motion. The rate of globalisation and urbanisation in the 21st century is astounding. John Miller (1999:16-19) explains how the frontier of missions has shifted. A hundred years ago, missionaries were sent to nations and cities of other

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<sup>6</sup> Compare the research of George Barna (2001:33-84) in his book *Growing True Disciples*.

countries. Today, churches in the cities have to act as primary missionary agents. The era of urban missions is upon us and it seems as if churches in these contexts are not prepared for this task. De Klerk and Van Helden (2011:4) state that depopulation of rural parts, as well as urbanisation, has aggravated church decline in South Africa.

Urbanisation also promoted a multicultural environment. In every urban context, different races and cultures are rubbing shoulders. The post-apartheid era brought about dramatic changes in the current demographics of our cities. One of the largest obstacles to the GKSA is that they have focused exclusively on the white middle-class Afrikaner for almost 150 years. In the wake of the exclusivity, it seems that many congregations in urban areas are unable to gear themselves up to adopt a multicultural ministry; instead, they opt for a monastic approach. They retreat to the exclusivity of their churches and refuse to engage the multicultural environment. This attitude is in stark contrast to the Lord's words that we are called to be in the world, but not from the world. If we cannot engage and connect to this environment, our congregations will be irrelevant and die. The truth of the gospel is relevant to all cultures, but we have to be able to communicate it, otherwise we will fail in our mission to reach the world. The message (John 3:16) is of such a nature that it transcends culture – *it is meant for all people*.

At the International Lausanne Conference on World Evangelism in Cape Town in 2010, Dr Tim Keller (2010:5) from the Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York convincingly argued that most evangelical churches are not effective, vibrant, growing and making an impact in cities, because they exhibit a middle-class corporate culture.<sup>7</sup> People value privacy, safety, homogeneity, sentimentality, blind loyalty to traditions, space, order and control. In contrast, the city is filled with ironic, edgy, diversity-loving people who have a much higher tolerance for ambiguity and disorder. A church minister who is unable to function in an urban culture and who instead creates a kind of non-urban “missionary compound” context in it, will discover he or she cannot reach out, convert or incorporate many of the people in their neighbourhoods. Eventually, the church in the city will decline and might have to close her doors.

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<sup>7</sup> See the video at: <http://www.lausanne.org/en/multimedia/videos/ct2010-session-videos.html>

### **2.2.2 Economics, political and social factors**

Economic and political factors like affirmative action and emigration has left a scar on the traditional churches in South Africa. After 1994, affirmative action was put into place. This had an enormous influence on the white Afrikaner community. People are losing their jobs to other racial groups and are struggling to find new ones. Unemployment is creating poverty, frustration and anger amongst many people in the traditional churches. It also fuelled the fire of racism in some cases and posed an obstacle to traditional churches to become a community of reconciliation (cf. 2 Co. 5:19).

Moreover, feelings of hatred and despair have aroused amongst our younger generation. They feel that they had nothing to do with apartheid but they are still being punished for it, which leads to many people emigrating to other countries. They just do not see a future for themselves in South Africa. De Klerk and Van Helden (2011:4) explain how these emigrations contribute directly to church decline in the traditional church.

Other social factors have also resulted in the church becoming more and more ingrown as time passed. One of the consequences of the apartheid era is an acute sense of guilt felt by the traditional churches. The trustworthiness of the traditional churches has taken a beating, which adds to the identity crisis the traditional churches in South Africa face. Bosch (2009:3) comments:

“Because of its complicity in the subjugation and exploitation of peoples of colour, the West – and also Western Christians – tends to suffer from an acute sense of guilt. This circumstance often leads to an inability or unwillingness among Western Christians to ‘give an account of the hope that they have’ (cf. 1 Pe. 3:15) to people of other persuasions.”

### **2.3.3 Technology and family**

We live in an era where technology is the order of the day. Technology continues to develop and the way the whole world functions is changing. The pace of change is almost unbearable to older generations, while the younger generation thrives on it. The traditional church is struggling to relate to this fast changing context (De Klerk and Van Helden, 2011:5). Change actually appears to be a constant in this new context. Joubert (2012) shows there are about 900 million Facebookers, more than 500 million Twitterati and 2,3 milliard

Internet users. The church will have to reckon with the fact that we are living in a global, fast changing and digital culture.

This changing context has influenced our family culture radically. In order to gain more material possessions parents are increasingly absent from their homes. Technology and other forms of entertainment are replacing God's Word and a healthy family life.

### **2.3.4 Ecclesiastical factors**

Probably one of the biggest challenges the traditional church faces is the crisis of following her calling. G.E. Dames (2007:1) correctly comments that the crisis the church faces is one of vocation.

When believers decide to ignore our covenant relationship with God, they become like Israel of old who continually throughout the Old Testament decided to move away from God's grace and protection. The inevitable result of a decision of this nature is always spiritual decline. Björk (2006:321) shows that even though secularism plays a significant role in church decline, the real problem is the fading covenant relationship of the individual.

#### **2.3.4.1 *Ingrown character***

In their report to the synod (GKSA, 2000: 510-511), the deputies on church growth gives a list of views that they found to be present in the local congregations of the GKSA. Here are a few of them:

- View of the church as a sociological phenomenon
- Negligence of the covenant (marriage, family and the church as a community of faith)
- Lack of prayer and ministers
- Lack of missionary calling (not giving attention to the great commission – Mt. 28:19-20)
- Secularisation of church members

The presence of these views and that they were given to church councils and members to evaluate themselves are additional evidence of the ingrown character that has become the norm in the GKSA. The sad part is that this situation has not changed fundamentally in the local churches. These views are just as real today as they were twelve years ago.

John Miller (1999:17) describes seven characteristics of declining ingrown churches:

- Tunnel vision
- Group superiority
- Extreme sensitivity to criticism
- Niceness in tone
- Christian soap opera
- Confused leadership roles
- A misdirected purpose

When looking at the statistical data<sup>8</sup> and the Acts of the synods since 1997, it becomes clear that many local congregations in the GKSA show these characteristics.

The tendency of churches to become ingrown is not a new phenomenon. In the 1950's, Marvis (1957:30) wrote:

“Like persons, local churches are sometimes introvertive. Following the introvertive pattern in human personality, these churches turn their interest and their energies inwardly upon themselves. They are concerned primarily with their own affairs. Sometimes they devote most of their attention to spiritual introspection which results in a neglect of spiritual expression in their communities.”

This mentality seems to have been part of the GKSA for a long time. If you read the book, *Die Sending van die Gereformeerde Kerk In Suid-Afrika: 'n Historiese Oorsig* (GKSA, 1953?), you will find the view that the biggest task of the church had been to civilise the Bantu.<sup>9</sup> The book relates how the church even abandoned mission in 1871 for a few years because she feared equalisation of the races. It also recalls how the first missionary of the GKSA struggled because of the weak focus on mission by the GKSA in general.

It is clear the history of the GKSA reflects an ingrown mentality. Not only is the local church struggling with her calling, numbers and a lack of zeal, but it is also apparent that she has become ingrown to the point of not knowing how to engage the culture and context around her. To make this point even clearer the deputies on the declining membership of the GKSA makes the following alarming statement in their report to the synod (GKSA, 1997: 875):

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<sup>8</sup> See the statistics on people who were evangelised in the *Almanak* of the Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika (GKSA, 2011?:51).

<sup>9</sup> See [http://www.cjbf.co.za/pdfboeke/GKSA\\_Die%20SendingVanDieGKSAInSuidAfrika.pdf](http://www.cjbf.co.za/pdfboeke/GKSA_Die%20SendingVanDieGKSAInSuidAfrika.pdf)

“Van evangelisering kom daar nie veel tereg in die Gereformeerde kerke nie. Dit kan tereg gesê word dat die Gereformeerde kerke nog nooit juis evangeliserende kerke was nie.”

### **2.3.4.2 Formalism and institutionalism**

In reaction to constant changes in society, many people try to anchor themselves in manmade rules and traditions. They fall prey to formalism when they overemphasise the form of certain elements in office and liturgy. The big problem is that they regard form and function to be at the same level, and in the process, they start to write their own Bible on how to govern the church. The complacency causes congregations to become ingrown, which results in congregations becoming something of a club for the spiritual elite.

Many of the traditional Afrikaans speaking churches have fallen into formalism and institutionalism. In their article on the reasons for church decline, De Klerk and Van Helden (2011) show that there is an institutional mind-set in the traditional mainline churches of South Africa. This mind-set has reached a point of crisis, especially regarding the fact that most congregations do not appear to realise the problem.

Vorster (2007:249) explains how the struggle of the past and the development of a new social dispensation have bred churches that are either caught up in the extremities of institutionalism or in the ultimate form of spiritualism. He continues:

“Institutionalism portrays a form of church-life where the elected leadership is the sole face and voice of the church...Little activity on the level of the local church is noticeable...In this model clericalism tends to reduce the laity into a condition of passivity and to make their apostolate a mere appendage of the apostolate hierarchy...However, after 1994 the effectiveness of institutionalism faded away and, in particular, the established mainline churches experience a loss of both membership and influence in the new society.”

Hendriks and Erasmus (2005:106) show these mainline churches include the following traditions: Reformed, Methodist, Congregational, Presbyterian, Baptist, Lutheran and Roman Catholic.

The problem of formalism is that traditions and manmade laws become the religion. Spiritual growth disappears, because a living relationship with our Creator is sacrificed for dead spiritual routines.<sup>10</sup>

In his book, *Outgrowing the Ingrown Church*, Miller (1999:20) expresses his opinion on the subject:

“Perhaps seeking personal comfort is not wrong in itself. But it is desperately wrong when it becomes the primary reason for the existence of the local church. When that happens, the local church is no living fellowship at all, but a retreat centre where anxious people draw resources that enable them merely to cope with the pains of life. The church then becomes a religious cushion ...This religious cushioning may take a number of forms ... Among conservatives and evangelicals its primary mission all too often is to function as a preaching station where Christians gather to hear the gospel preached to the unconverted, to be reassured that liberals are mistaken about God and hell, and to renew one’s sense of well-being without having a serious encounter with the living God.”

When considering the ecclesiastical factors that contribute to the condition of the GKSA, I have to conclude that it comes down to a question of obedience. Wright (2010:274) argues that faith without obedience is dead.<sup>11</sup>When you separate faith and obedience from each other, you get people who call themselves believers and evangelicals, but who are actually obstacles that hinder others from considering the commands of Christ. The truth is, you are either obedient and take part in the *Missio Dei* or you are disobedient and form part of the problem.

## **2.4 The challenges the GKSA face**

The priorities of God’s Kingdom must be the priorities of the church. This means the focus of the church must be Christocentric. To be relevant the church needs to know the challenges facing her in order to confront people with Christ and His Kingdom. The changes in the society are huge and will continue even more so in future. Bosch (2009:4) shows that since the Second World War a fundamental paradigm shift has unfolded, not only in missions or theology, but also in the experiences and thinking of the whole world.

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<sup>10</sup> Compare: Col. 2:6-8 , Mat 15:2-6; Mr. 7:5-9 &7:1-13; Isa. 29:13; Ga. & 1 Th. 5:19

<sup>11</sup> Compare the letter of James in the New Testament.

The reasons for spiritual and numerical decline in the mainline church leave us with tough challenges. All of them have in one way or another helped to create an ingrown culture in most traditional Afrikaans-speaking churches. It seems that if the GKSA continue with this culture, the denomination will not only become extinct, but will also not be worthy to be called the church of Christ. It is obvious that some hard and direct questions have to be asked. At the Reformed Theological Society Conference in 2011, Dr P.J. Buys articulated the problem well:

“The deepest crisis of an ingrown mentality of churches i.e. lacking zeal and vision and passion for missions is not just styles of ministry and methods. The greatest need is that our lack of passion for missions and outreach is that it reflects a clouded vision on God and His eternal plan of redemption.”

The church has to evaluate herself<sup>12</sup> constantly and ask herself if she is really trying to build Christ’s Kingdom or is she working on her own spiritual club.

At many levels, the GKSA seem to have fallen into formalism, structuralism and institutionalism. The even bigger dilemma is that congregations do not seem to realise the problem. Bosch (2009:2) comments on this lack of insight when he explains that the church is always in a state of crisis and that its greatest shortcoming is that she is only occasionally aware of it. The traditional churches think they are fine in the way they are being church, even though they show signs of an ingrown mentality and a lack of zeal to “Go and make disciples” (Mt. 28). John Piper (2010:36) makes the following alarming statement:

“Where passion for God is weak, zeal for missions will be weak. Churches that are not centred on the exaltation of the majesty and beauty of God will scarcely kindle a fervent desire to ‘declare his glory among the nations’.”

The truth is if a church does not have a burning desire for mission, she is obviously not taking part in the *Missio Dei*.

The road from being stuck in formalism to being aligned with the *Missio Dei* and becoming a missional church is not always an easy road. Hendriks (1992:14) shows that denominations and congregations are easily caught up in some model of being church. This rigidity causes

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<sup>12</sup> Compare 2 Corinthians 13:5.

them not wanting to understand other people's views. When they have to go through a time of adjustment, they find it very hard. Often, it leads to congregations being torn apart.

The congregation that is stuck in formalism are like the Israelite slaves in Egypt. They have to pray that God will save them from their slavery. For them to get to Canaan (missionary community) means they will have to put all their trust in the Lord, follow his lead and probably spend some time in the wilderness. At first, Israel clung to a slave mentality and longed to be back in Egypt. They did not want to change and face the challenges of the new life. However, they had to learn to trust God. They needed to learn how to follow Him by responding to his missionary call and not to remain stuck in their own comfort. It was during this time that the Israelites truly learned what it meant to be dependent on God and to be truly free.

Congregations that remain stuck in the past develop a maintenance model where growth is impossible. Harry Reeder (2008:27-46) comments on this kind of church behaviour. He says the challenge is to learn from the past without living in the past. A church that is alive and healthy will be a ministry of movement rather than a ministry of maintenance. Reeder shows that maintenance ministries live in the past and hang on in the present to polish the monument. A ministry of movement, however, will learn intentionally from the past and then live effectively in the present to transform the landscape of the future.

A church that is ingrown and stuck in formalism needs to realign herself with the *Missio Dei*. A substantial part of our challenge is to work out how we are supposed to address the problem in the right way. Concerns are expressed that some churches and theologians are so desperate to draw more members and to turn downward trends of churches around, that they do not exercise discernment in their renewal strategies. Therefore, they apply strategies in their church that are not well thought through and not in line with Biblical principles and typical Reformational ecclesiology. Fears are also expressed of compromises that are made to attract more young people by accommodating worship styles that could result in the church actually losing its unique character as people of God in the world.

Reeder (2008:27-28) points out that many church leaders in their desperation have embraced a model for ministry that originates in Wall Street or Hollywood Boulevard and not really in the Bible. Because of the Church Growth Movement, churches hope to grow by applying business principles, or an entertainment model reminiscent of Hollywood, or a

therapeutic model seeking to address the deepest emotional and psychological needs of churchgoers. Reeder emphasising the need to study the concept of church revitalisation from a Biblical perspective has discovered that these Biblical principles for church revitalisation are more appropriate and effective in church renewal.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

Post-modernism has shaped the subjective context in which we find ourselves. Western individualism, secularism and pluralism have had a far-reaching influence on the church in the West, including the GKSA. In this culture, the word “tolerance” is very important and people feel that religion is a private matter.

In South Africa, we also have other factors that contribute to our ingrown, declining churches. The rate of urbanisation and technological advance is changing our physical context, and most congregations in the GKSA are not geared up for this multicultural and technologically advanced environment. When you add to these factors our political, economic and social baggage, the traditional churches are in a state of crisis as regards our calling. Consequently, many congregations are becoming quiet and ingrown instead of being partners in the *Missio Dei*, agents of God’s transformation. The question may be asked whether reformed churches succeed in taking the gospel to the poor, the lost and the strangers in their midst. Fewer and fewer congregations and Christians are fulfilling their prophetic vocation in this world.

We see more and more results of an ingrown culture in the Reformed Churches of South Africa, and obviously, these include a drastic decline in church membership. Some leaders in the traditional local churches do not understand that the church is God’s most important instrument for transforming societies (2 Co. 5:19). Eventually, they focus inwardly and adopt a maintenance approach toward ministry.

It is time to be honest and agree that we are starting to see signs of the church of the Ephesians in Revelation 2:1-7 and Laodicea in Revelation 3:14-22 in many of our congregations. The Lord warned these churches that they had to repent; otherwise, He would so to speak close their doors.

It is obvious many GKSA churches do not consider that the root cause of the lack of growth in numbers might lie in the church’s spiritual stagnation and functional breakdown.

Christians in the traditional mainline churches call themselves Calvinists. However, Calvinists that do not have a burning passion for mission are not truly Calvinists. They are like the Pharisees who said they believed, but their hearts were far from God and His honour. They were not driven and directed by God's sovereignty. They had a clouded vision of God and His mission. The result was they were not light and salt to the world,<sup>13</sup> they were not serving others with the love of Christ and they did not share the heart of Jesus for the lost. In short, they were not the church of Christ.

When a church falls prey to the above, the outcome is a selfish and spineless group of people who are too scared to engage the world around them. They have become totally ingrown and fail to be a part of God's mission in their context. The question could be asked if this ingrown mentality has been caused by a lack of knowing God as a missionary God.

In the chapters that follow, I will reconsider Biblical principles for transforming an ingrown congregation into a missionary church. In the next chapter, I will focus on the foundation for mission, and on what the Bible teaches us regarding God's mission and what it means to the church.

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<sup>13</sup> See Matthew 5:13-16.

## Chapter 3

### The relation between *Missio Dei* and missional church

#### 3.1 Introduction

God reveals himself generally in nature (history) and specifically in his Word.<sup>14</sup> That means if we want to know God, we must study his Word, because if we know God is a missionary, we will also understand why the church has to be missional. We can only truly understand the mission of God by what is revealed in Scripture. Therefore, our understanding of concepts such as *Missio Dei* and *missional church* must always be directed and shaped by God's revealed Word in Scripture. The term *Missio Dei* is the Latin for "the sending of God". In short, it concerns God's mission. The term *missional church* refers to the way the church relates to God's mission.<sup>15</sup>

To understand what God's mission is and how the church should relate to it, it is important to find a Biblical foundation. Since God revealed Him in the Old Testament for the first time, it follows logically that a study of mission should start with the Old Testament. Themes relating to mission are found at the very beginning of the Bible and then they are expanded throughout the Old Testament. These themes lay the foundation for mission in the New Testament. Protestant missiologist David J. Bosch (2009:17) agrees that the Old Testament is fundamental to understanding mission in the New Testament. Old Testament scholar Christopher Wright (2000) explains the Old Testament orientation towards mission in the following way:

"First, it presents the mission and purpose of God with great power and clarity and with universal implications for all humanity. Second, the Old Testament shaped the very nature of the mission of the New Testament church, which, indeed, felt compelled to justify its mission practice from the Scriptures we now call the Old Testament."

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<sup>14</sup> See the Belgic Confession. Article 2.

<sup>15</sup> For more detail concerning *Missio Dei* and *missional church*, see 3.4-3.6 of this study.

## 3.2 Mission in the Old Testament

William Dyrness (1983) developed the idea of exploring mission in the Bible as a divine drama. It is the narrative of how God, the creator of the universe, when seeing his creation ravaged by evil and sin, committed himself to the total redemption and restoration of the whole creation. Each scene is filled with twists and turns, including plots and sub-plots. Scott Moreau, Corwin and McGee (2004:29) suggest that the whole story be divided into seven acts. Wright (2010:35-47) chooses to divide it into four major sections. These divisions could be valuable in studying the story of the Old Testament. However, as the focus of this study is on an effort to understand what the missional church comprises, I will only give an overview of the Old Testament – with the emphasis on the relation between the *Missio Dei* and the missional church.

### 3.2.1 Creation and fall

#### 3.2.1.1 *God creates*

Creation is one of the major themes in Biblical theology. It will therefore definitely have a significant place in a Biblical theology of mission. God is revealed as the sovereign creator of the universe, and what He created was “very good” (Ge. 1:31).

That God is the creator of the universe establishes his concern for the people he creates. Because God is the creator of the human being, all people owe their very existence to Him. Scott Moreau *et al.* (2004:28) notes, “He does not ask for repayment, but he does ask for acknowledgement.” We are to honour and glorify God for what He has done for us. Piper (2011) shows that God is glorified in the best way when we delight in Him.

When we focus on God’s creation, it is important to remind ourselves of the mission He entrusted to us, viz. to care for his creation (Ge. 1-2). From the beginning, God created man in His image (Ge. 1:26-28). This fact has at least three clear implications:

- The image of God is linked to the command to have dominion over the rest of creation.
- Every human being is significant in God’s eyes.
- Being made in God’s image and being given responsibilities means we have a purpose in life.

Humans are created for a purpose and that means we have a mission. God gave this mission to us before the fall and it continues after it. The mission stayed in place even after the flood, as God repeated the command to multiply and subdue the earth in Genesis 9:1-7. The covenant that God established with Noah and his sons took into account all humankind (Ge. 9:8-19).

### **3.2.1.2      *The fall***

The drama tells us of the unfortunate events that followed. As creatures with a free will, Adam and Eve listened to the serpent and chose against God's plan for them. They fell into sin, and consequently all relationships were broken. In their book, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth*, Andreas Köstenberger and Peter O'Brien (2001:251) give a wonderful reflection on mission and the fall:

“There was no ‘mission’ in the Garden of Eden and there will be no ‘mission’ in the new heavens and the new earth (though the results of ‘mission’ will be evident). From the first glimmer of the gospel in Genesis 3:15 to the end of this age, however, mission is necessitated by humanity's fall into sin and need for a Saviour, and is made possible only by the saving initiative of God in Christ.”

God's mission started right after the fall, because the fall created the need for mission. After the fall, everything and everyone in the universe came under the judgement of God. In essence, the story of mission is God's initiative to reach out and once again reconcile people and creation with Himself. Right after the fall and judgement, we see God promising salvation. Eve would produce offspring who would defeat the serpent, carry our judgement and deliver us from our dark fate (Ge. 3:15).

Throughout the rest of the story, the consequences of the fall become evident. Brother murdered brother, humankind rebelled against God and sin infected entire societies. Ultimately, the nations themselves came to a fall (Ge. 11:1-9). Scott Moreau *et al.* (2004:30) explain the effect of sin on the nations. People, being image bearers of their creator, were searching to connect with their creator. They began to devise idolatrous systems. The story of the tower of Babel exemplifies this orientation to life. It shows the effects of this orientation, because in the end the people of the world were scattered and unable to

communicate with each other. Relationships were broken, people were separated from their creator and there seemed to be no answer to the despair of man.

### **3.2.2 The call**

The narrative continues with God's calling of Abraham (Gen 12:1-3). God called Abraham to leave his land and people to go to the Promised Land. There, God would make Abraham into a great nation and bless him. Scott Moreau *et al.* (2004:31) indicate that God gave Abraham three blessing promises. First, God would make Abraham into a great nation, a promise tied to the land to which God called him. Second, God would give Abraham a great name. They continue that the purpose of both blessings was that Abraham would be a blessing to others. The third blessing and purpose clarify that although Abraham was the means, he was not the goal. It was through him that others would be blessed, "all peoples on earth will be blessed." God's mission was to be manifest through an individual and the descendants of that individual.

Bosch (2009:18) explains that God's compassion embraces all the nations of the world. After the Babel episode, God decided He would start over, with Abraham. What Babel could not achieve, God would accomplish through Abraham, namely the blessing of all nations. Wright (2010:41) affirms this truth:

"By the time the story has reached Genesis 11, the human race faced two huge problems: the sinfulness of every human heart, and the fracturing and confusion of the nations of humanity. God's plan of redemption addressed both. In the call of Abraham God set in motion a historical dynamic that would ultimately not only deal with the problem of human sin but also heal the dividedness of all nations."

Walter Kaiser (2000:10) raises the point that the goal of the Old Testament is to see Jews and Gentiles come to a saving knowledge of the Messiah. He shows that anything less than this goal is a misunderstanding of the plan of God. God's eternal plan from the beginning was to provide salvation for all peoples, not just one people.

The New Testament also reflects this view. In Acts 3:25, Peter says to the Jewish crowd, "You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God gave to your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your prosperity shall all the families of the earth be blessed.'" In Galatians 3:6-8, Paul argues that the promise of Genesis 12 is applied in the gospel in the

commission to go out to all the nations. Through Abraham, God began to restore His kingdom as revealed in creation, but rejected by Adam and Eve. Abraham is blessed not for his own sake, but for the sake of the world. God's covenant with Abraham stands throughout history as the proper foundation for God's ultimate blessing of salvation in His Son (Ga. 3:14).

God promised to bless the earth's families through Abraham's seed (Ge. 12:3; 22:18). Stott (2009:9) explains that the nations will not be blessed in some automatic fashion. God's purpose is that we (Abraham's seed by faith) should go to the nations with the gospel. Piper (2009:132-136) concludes that Genesis 12:3 and its application in the New Testament show God's purpose is that the blessing of Abraham-the salvation achieved through Jesus Christ, the seed of Abraham-would reach out to all ethnic groups in the world. In this sense, the people of God become partners of the *Missio Dei*.

The rest of Genesis works out God's call of Abraham in the lives of Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, until the chosen people are in Egypt enjoying the blessings of God's protection because of Joseph's faith and wisdom. Stott (2008:34-35) indicates the missionary character of the history:

"The living God of the Bible is a sending God ... So he sent forth Abraham, commanding him to go from his country and kindred into the great unknown, and promised to bless him and to bless the world through him if he obeyed (Genesis 12:1-3). Next, he sent Joseph into Egypt, overruling even his brothers' cruelty, in order to preserve a godly remnant on earth during the famine (Genesis 45:4-8). Then he sent Moses..."

### **3.2.3 The rescue**

In this part of the story, God's people found themselves in Egypt, not in the land promised to Abraham. They had become slaves and were held captive by the Egyptians (Ex. 1:11-14). However, the time had come for them to claim the heritage that Abraham received by faith.

God decides to intervene. He sends Moses to his oppressed people in Egypt, giving him the good news of liberation: "Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring forth my people ... out of Egypt" (Ex. 3:10). Through God's mighty hand, Israel is rescued from Egypt. It almost seems as if God has forgotten about the rest of the nations while focusing on Israel's liberation; however, the Lord has not forgotten the promises made to Abraham.

Wright (2010:41) explains that the exodus provides the prime Old Testament model of God acting as Redeemer:

“This is what redemption looks like when God does it. It is an act that simultaneously demonstrates God’s faithfulness, justice and love. And the people who know themselves to be the redeemed people of this God, now revealed as YHWH, are called upon to model before the nations what it means to be redeemed and to live redemptively in their own society.”

Israel was supposed to show the nations who God was through their gratitude and obedience. Only through their obedience would God fulfil the promise to Abraham to be a blessing to all nations. God took Israel out of Egypt and into the desert on their way to the Promised Land. In that process, Israel’s national identity as the descendants of Abraham was forged. Wright (2010:41-42) continues to explain:

“At Sinai, God entered into covenant with Israel, still with the rest of the nations in view, calling them to be his representatives (priestly) and to be distinctive (holy). He gave them his law as a gift of grace-not so that they could earn his salvation, for they had already been redeemed, but to shape them as his model, to be the light to the nations.”

Scott Moreau *et al.* (2004:34) explain that although the story of rescue and separation involved one people in particular, the fact of God’s universal intent through that one people remains clear. God first called one person (Abraham) to be a blessing to the whole world. Then, beginning with that one person’s descendants (one people), He began to renew the whole world. Israel was only the starting point of the universal program of God.

Israel was to point the nations to God through their attitude of obedience and service. When writing on how fundamental the Old Testament is to the understanding of mission in the New Testament, Bosch (2009:18) emphasises that the purpose of God’s election of Israel was service. When service is withheld, election loses its meaning. Israel had to serve God by serving the marginal people in their midst. Whenever the people of Israel renewed their covenant with Yahweh, they recognised they were renewing their obligations to the victims of society. The fact that they were God’s elected people meant that they had to reach out and help those who could not help themselves. They had to be a blessing to victims of society.

After spending decades in the desert, Israel entered the Promised Land. The greatest danger for Israel was turning from God to worship false gods; unfortunately, they fell into the trap repeatedly. Wright (2010:42) shows as history passed it became clear that Israel would not live by the standard of God's law in response to his saving grace. They were not fulfilling their role to be a light for the nations.

One has to acknowledge, no matter what happened, Israel was connected to the rest of the world in some way or another. God's purpose was to bless all the nations on earth through his chosen people. Bosch (2009:18) comments:

"The entire history of Israel unveils the continuation of God's involvement with the nations. The God of Israel is the Creator and Lord of the whole world. For this reason Israel can comprehend its own history only in continuity with the history of the nations, not as a separate history."

### **3.2.4 The exile**

First, Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden; later, Israel was likewise expelled from the land. Scott Moreau *et al.* (2004:37) explain that the expulsion was more than just judgement. It was God's way of "clearing the deadwood" so that his purposes would be accomplished. It must be noted that the prophets of the exile and later do not stop proclaiming God's provision through the coming messiah. They strongly declare the universal nature of God's continuing work (e.g. Jer. 3:17; 31:27-37; Eze. 36:22-23; Zec. 2:11).

In the midst of exile, God continues to provide signs of hope. Wright (2010:42) comments:

"Nevertheless, the Old Testament continues through the prophets to point forward to insist that God would keep his promise to bring blessing to the nations and salvation to the whole world, and that he would do so through Israel. In other words, the failure of historical Israel was anticipated by God and did not represent a failure of God's plan."

God was still interested in all the nations of the earth. After the Babylonian captivity, He graciously sent Israel back to their land; He even sent more messengers with them and to them in order to help them rebuild the temple, the city and national life. He did not abandon his mission. When the time finally came, God sent His Son to fulfil all His promises.

When studying the Old Testament, we cannot ignore the themes of mission. God is a missionary God and He planned to make His people part of his mission. Even if Israel was not explicitly told to go out to the nations, God used them to be a light to the world. He was the One who worked through Israel. Bosch (2009:19) explains it well when he says:

“Israel would, however, not actually go to the nations. Neither would Israel expressly call the nations to faith in Yahweh. If they do come, it is because God is bringing them in. So, if there is a ‘missionary’ in the Old Testament it is God himself who will, as his eschatological deed par excellence, bring the nations to Jerusalem to worship him there together with his covenant people.”

God was also the One who would bring about all that he intended for the nations through his Messiah. Wright (2006:31) states:

“Through the Messiah as his anointed agent, YHWH, the God of Israel, would bring about all that he intended for Israel. However, what was that mission of Israel? Nothing less than to be ‘a light to the nations,’ the means of bringing the redemptive blessing of God to all the nations of the world, as originally promised in the title deeds of the covenant with Abraham. For the God of Israel is also the creator God of the entire world.”

### **3.2.5 The psalms**

The psalms are not often thought of as missionary, but they clearly relate to God’s universal intent. George Peters (1972:116) points out that a universal focus can be found in more than 175 references in the psalms. He asserts, “the Psalter is one of the greatest missionary books in the world.” He advises the reader to study psalms 2, 33, 66, 72, 98, 117 and 145. Kaiser (2000:30) adds to the list psalms 67, 96 and 100. Wright (2006:232) explains the missionary focus of Psalm 67. It is a prayer that God bless Israel so that when the peoples of the world look at Israel, they will see God’s hand and come to know God. He goes on to show how different psalms have God’s universal vision in mind. One of these is Psalm 96. This psalm celebrates the kingship of God over all creation and his salvation. The psalmist calls for all the nations to sing a new song (Wright, 2006:480). Here we see an invite to celebrate in advance the ending of the old world order and the beginning of God’s new creation through Christ, who has come and is coming again, his Spirit focussing our hearts and eyes on his great future. When you read the psalms, it is obvious they are filled with

God's mission of reconciliation. They are songs of praise that echo his mission to all the nations of the world.

### 3.2.6 The prophets

The universal intent of God' mission is also developed through a particular people. The prophets are sent by God to call the people to repentance and deliverance. Israel as a nation was to serve in the same capacity as the prophets among the nations of the world, but unfortunately failed to live up to God's call. The result is brokenness and scattering.

Scott Moreau *et al.* (2004:34-36) give a summary of how the pre-exilic prophets add their voices to proclaiming a universal thrust for mission:

“Joel prophesies the outpouring of God's Spirit on all people (2:28) and God's coming judgment of all nations (3:11-12). Amos predicts that God's restoration will involve all the nations that bear his name (9:11-12). Habakkuk declares that the whole earth will be filled with the knowledge of God, as waters cover the sea (2:14). Micah looks to the day when the nations will come to worship God (4:1-4). Jonah preaches, against his will, to the Assyrians; to God's delight and Jonah's chagrin, they repent. Zephaniah prophesies universal judgment (3:8) and restoration of God's people before the eyes of all nations (3:20). The most significant missionary message in the Old Testament prophets comes from Isaiah. He declares God's servant will be a light for the Gentiles and that all the earth will see his salvation (42:6; 49:6) and be full of the knowledge of him (11:6-9).”

Prophets like Isaiah had a special focus on the nations. Köstenberger and O'Brien (2001:45-50) show the importance of this prophet's writings with regard to the “Servant of Yahweh”. Although the Servant's work is in the first place bound with Israel, that work will affect the whole world:

“The covenant made with Abraham, in which God promised to make of him a great nation and to bless all peoples of the earth through him (Ge. 12:1-3), will be effected through the ministry of the Servant of Yahweh. And this will lead ultimately to new heavens and a new earth (Isa. 65:17; 66:22).”

The book of Isaiah is full of quotes regarding the nations. The nations encourage each other to go up to the mountain of the Lord (Isa. 2:5) and they carry precious gifts with them (Isa.

18:7). A highway is constructed, from Egypt and Assyria to Jerusalem (Isa. 19:23). The glory of God will be revealed to all (Isa. 40:5) and He makes his servant known as a light to the Gentiles (Isa. 42:6; 49:6). All the ends of the earth are called upon to look to God and be saved (Isa. 45:22), the nations are waiting for Yahweh and are trusting Him (Isa. 51:5) and God's house will be called a house of prayer for all peoples (56:7). Bosch (2009:19) notes:

“The visible expression of this global reconciliation will be the celebration of the messianic banquet upon the mountain of God; the nations will behold God with unveiled faces, and death will be swallowed up forever (Isa. 25:6- 8).”

### **3.2.7 Conclusion**

When surveying the Old Testament we see how the missionary God is present from the very beginning. I have shown how God has been actively involved in mission through the Old Testament-during the creation, the fall, the calling of Abraham, the rescue and exodus of Israel and the exile. When we read the psalms and the prophets, God's mission to all the nations becomes evident. All of these events, songs and prophecies serve as testimony that the Old Testament should be regarded as a missionary text.

God created everything with a purpose. Humans also had a purpose, but because we abused our free will, everything in creation fell under the judgement of God. Our relationship with God was broken, but God chose to restore this relationship. In this regard, we see that God's mission commenced as result of the fall, because God decided to take initiative to rescue us from eternal damnation. He wanted to reconcile this broken world with Himself.

God had a mission. He planned to reconcile the world with Himself through a chosen people. They had to be a people who would take part in His mission to rescue the world. God called Abraham and promised him that through his seed the whole world would be blessed. The rest of the story tells us how God sent, led, rescued and exiled Abraham's descendants (Israel) to fulfil his promise to the world. They had to be obedient to God's mission and so become a sign to the world of God's saving grace, a shining light of God's love. They were to be a blessing to the world, because from them the Messiah would be born, the One would reconcile the world with God.

The story of God's rescue mission does not end here. I will now give an overview on how the Missio Dei continues in the New Testament.

### **3.3 Mission in the New Testament**

In the New Testament, the One promised long ago by God comes in the person of Jesus. "Sending" was an important element in the Old Testament picture of mission; it is even more important in the New Testament. After the fall of Adam and Eve, God promised to send a messiah and after thousands of years of hoping and waiting, the time finally came.

In his book, *Transforming Mission*, David Bosch (2009) points out how a careful study of the New Testament and the early church may help us to come to greater clarity about what mission meant in those days and might mean today. He shows that the New Testament writings are directed at communities that are primarily defined by their missionary vocation. They are communities founded by the apostolic proclamation with the purpose of continuing that witness. We could say they were created through the Missio Dei to be a part of the Missio Dei.

#### **3.3.1 Mission in the gospels and Acts**

The Gospels are a collection of historical documents telling the story of Jesus. Though they do not contain a systematic theology of mission, each of these documents has a strong missionary character. Scott Moreau *et al.* (2004:40) reflect on the missionary purpose of each Gospel account:

"These various perspectives reflect each author's view of Christ's purpose and are in turn reflected in the different versions of the missionary commission of Christ found in the Gospel accounts."

The book of Acts gives us an account of the birth and growth of the church. It is the link between Jesus' earthly ministry and his ministry through his Spirit. It links the gospels with the rest of the New Testament and is in essence a document about the mission of Christ through his church. Bosch (2009:15-55) argues convincingly that the whole New Testament was to be understood as a missionary document, because all the letters were written in the mission field.

### 3.3.1.1 *Matthew*

Matthew was a Jew who wrote for a predominantly Jewish Christian community. Bosch reasons that the entire purpose of Matthew's writing was to nudge his community toward a missionary involvement with their environment. Bosch (2009:56-62) explains that Matthew's Gospel account is essentially a missionary document, because he wrote it to provide guidance to a community in crisis on how they should understand their identity, calling and mission.

Matthew's Gospel account is full of passages that describe his missionary intent. Scott Moreau *et al.* (2004:41-46) describe how Matthew splits the history of God's salvation into four missional periods. Today, the church stands in the third epoch namely, "the commissioning of the disciples to make disciples of all nations". They continue to show Matthew's missionary purpose for his time by reflecting on different passages.<sup>16</sup> Writing for a Jewish-Christian crowd Matthew uses the Old Testament as the foundation for their mission. Köstenberger and O'Brien (2001:255) analyse the way Matthew grounds the missions of Jesus and his disciples in the Old Testament:

"According to Matthew, Jesus the Messiah fulfilled Israel's destiny as the representative, paradigmatic Son of God, with the result that God's blessings to the nations, promised to Abraham, are to come to fruition through Jesus in the mission of his followers."

Bosch (2009:59) also shows that Matthew uses the Old Testament in a missionary way to embolden the faith community for witnessing and service to people around them.

It is important to note that Matthew sees discipleship as an essential ingredient in mission. Matthew ends his account with the words, "Go and make disciples" (Mt. 28:16-20). Generally, scholars agree that the entire gospel points to these final verses. Köstenberger and O'Brien (2001:255) explain how Matthew's account transcends Mark's, precisely because Matthew ends his gospel with the Great Commission, viz. Christ's commands to his followers to disciple the nations. Bosch (2009:79-83) shows the paradigm of Matthew's account is largely built on missionary discipleship. He points out that discipleship comprises much more than just evangelism or mere social engagement. He (2009:81) explains:

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<sup>16</sup> The passages they reflect on are Matthew 9:35-38; 24:14 & 28:16-20

“Discipleship involves a commitment to God’s reign, to justice and love, and to obedience to the entire will of God. Mission is not narrowed down to an activity of making individuals new creatures, of providing them with ‘blessed assurance’ so that, come what may, they will be ‘eternally saved’. Mission involves, from the beginning and as matter of course, making new believers sensitive to the needs of others, opening their eyes and hearts to recognize injustice, suffering, oppression, and the plight of those who have fallen by the wayside. It is unjustifiable to regard the ‘Great Commission as being concerned primarily with ‘evangelism’ and the ‘Great Commandment’ (Mt. 22:37-40) as referring to ‘social involvement’.”

Matthew wanted to assist his community in developing a missionary ethos that would match the challenges they were facing. The suggestion is that the issues dividing the community could only be overcome if they joined hands in a mission to the Gentiles among whom they were living. From a current perspective, it could be said that Matthew’s Gospel shows great care in describing the missionary practice of Jesus and his disciples, most probably to stimulate and activate the Christian community. Christians can only discover their identity when they are involved in God’s mission.

### **3.3.1.2 Mark**

Mark’s Gospel is probably the least Gentile-focused of all the Gospel accounts, according to Scott Moreau *et al.* (2004:46). Köstenberger and O’Brien (2001:255) show that Mark presents Jesus according to the pattern of the Old Testament Israel. The presence of Israel had to attract the gentile nations to God, instead of them being sent on a mission to the gentiles. There are, however, a few contributions to be noted:

- Mark focuses his message on the mission of Jesus, the Son of God (1:1).
- He points out that mission will take place in a hostile world; therefore, suffering will be part of our lives when we follow Christ. Suffering is found throughout Mark’s Gospel (8:31, 34; 9:49; 13:9-13; 14:36).
- Jesus refers to the Old Testament to interpret the worldwide purposes of God. When He cleanses the temple in Mark 11:17, he quotes Isaiah 56:7: “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations?’”
- Jesus says that the gospel has to be preached to “all” the nations (13:10).

- Mark refers to the future proclamation of the gospel to the gentiles. He notes that a gentile was the first to acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God (15:39).

In conclusion, I can say that Mark focuses on God's mission through the mission of Jesus, the Son of God. Even though Jesus' ministry was primarily directed at the Jews, there is an indication of a future mission to the gentile nations. Mark also gives an account of the realities of suffering and discipleship failure. God uses fallible people as his instruments. Mark assures us that even though the disciples sometimes failed, Jesus still used them to turn around the world.

### **3.3.1.3 John**

In John's Gospel God is the centre of mission (Joh. 3:16). Köstenberger and O'Brien (2001:203) explain that while God is the centre of mission, Jesus is the focus of mission. He is the One that is sent – the One who shares deity with God (1:1). He came from the Father (1:18), did what he was sent to do (5:36) and glorified God (1:14; 13:31-32). He returned to the father (13:1). Now, he sends those who follow him to continue his work (20:21). In John's version of the great commission, we find a striking parallel: as Jesus was sent, so He sends us (20:21).

Scott Moreau *et al.* (2004:49) point out that we find the word "send" almost sixty times in John's Gospel. If we want to understand the mission of the church, we need to understand the mission of Jesus. When we take a closer look at the account of John, we see why Jesus was sent: to save the world (3:17); to do God's will (4:34); to finish God's work (5:36; 9:4); to work for the honour of the One who sent him (7:18); and to tell the whole world what he had heard from God (8:26; 12:47-50), in this way making God known to the world (17:25-26).

When Jesus sends the disciples, their task is clear: to make God known to the world in the same way He did. Köstenberger and O'Brien (2001:260) explain how the risen Lord, the Sent One, "breathes his Spirit on the disciples and charges them to proclaim forgiveness of sins in his name (20:21-23)." They had to glorify God and tell the world about the great deeds He had done through Christ. This remains our task until the day of our Lord's return.

### 3.3.1.4 *Luke-Acts*

Luke is the author of the Gospel of Luke and of Acts. They belong together, as the one is an account of the ministry of Jesus on earth, and the other of his ministry through his church. Köstenberger and O'Brien (2001:256) note that the one tells the story of Jesus and his salvation, and the other traces the story of the outward movement that was concerned with the salvation of the gentiles. Luke writes his accounts to Theophilus (a Greek). This is already an indication that Luke ventures beyond the people of Israel to bring Christ to the nations. These two accounts probably provide the clearest picture of mission in the Bible.

In Luke, Jesus is the sent One, and the One who sends others. Two key passages in this regard is Luke 4:16-21 and Luke 24:46-48. Bosch (2009:84) explains that especially Luke 4:16-21 has become very prominent in the debate about a Biblical foundation for mission. In practice, it has become the key text for understanding Christ's own mission as well as that of the church. It regards Jesus as the sent One. In the text, Jesus is in his home synagogue in Nazareth and He applies the prophecy of Isaiah 61:1 to himself and his ministry. He is explaining the nature of His mission on earth. Scott Moreau *et al.* (2004:47) point out that the passage incorporates four infinitives to mark the nature of what Jesus was sent to do, viz. to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim freedom to the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to release the oppressed and to proclaim the year of God's favour.

In Luke, Jesus is not only being sent, he is also portrayed as the One who is sending. In Luke 9:1-6 and 10:1-16 we read how Jesus sends his disciples to the house of Israel. Scott Moreau *et al.* (2004:48) remind us that the symbolic nature of sending out seventy disciples should not be overlooked. They explain that in Jewish tradition humanity was thought to encompass seventy nations. This means that the sending of the seventy is an implicit claim that all men must hear the message of Jesus. In Luke's version of the great commission, Jesus tells his disciples that they will preach repentance and forgiveness of sins to all the nations of the world (24:46-48).

Bosch (2009) explains that the theme of "salvation" is central to Luke's two-volume work. The words *soteria* and *soterion* ("salvation") appear six times each in Luke and Acts, in contrast to no occurrences in Mark and Matthew, and only one in John. To him salvation means liberation from all bondages, as well as a new life in Christ. Luke's whole story is framed by the idea that salvation dawned in Christ. The ideas of repentance, conversion and

forgiveness are part of this theme. It is the theme that dominated the ministry of Jesus, the apostles and evangelist after them, which entails that it has to dominate our ministry today as well.

Luke takes great care in showing that the salvation of Jesus was not limited to the Jewish nation. He makes it clear that Jesus' salvation was meant to be proclaimed to all people. Köstenberger and O'Brien (2001:256-257) explain that even Luke's genealogy concerns all the nations. They show that Luke reaches beyond Abraham to Adam (3:23-28), pointing to Jesus' identification with all people. This means the gospel of God's salvation has to be spread to the ends of the world. Luke's second volume accounts for the progress of the gospel from Jerusalem to the "ends of the earth" (1:8). Köstenberger and O'Brien declare, "Nothing can hinder the irresistible progress of the gospel, and God's people, through his Spirit, overcome all obstacles." Jesus Christ, being the sent One, is the only one who can bring true salvation for all. Now, He sends us, his church, to proclaim this truth to all the nations in the world.

In both Luke and Acts, salvation is tied to the person of Jesus. Bosch (2009:107) elaborates:

"The disciples, those of both the gospel and Acts, turn their backs on their previous life and lifestyle because of their extraordinary encounter with Jesus, for the reign of God is already present in him (cf. Luke 17:21) ... Jesus is, really, the person who invites the cripples and the outcasts to a banquet. He is the Samaritan, who takes pity on his Jewish archenemy. He is the father, in whose home and heart there is room for both lost sons. Only in his name and in his power are true repentance, forgiveness of sins, and salvation to be found (cf. Ac. 4:12). Seen from this perspective, Luke-Acts becomes a paean of praise to the incomparable grace of God, lavished upon sinners."

Luke has a specific interest in the social outcasts of society. In Luke's carefully researched account, Jesus fulfils the Old Testament promises and offers salvation to the people on the fringes of society. Bosch (2009:84-117) describes the paradigm of Luke as "Luke-Acts: Practicing forgiveness and solidarity with the poor". He shows that when Luke writes about the new relationship between rich and poor, he has a particular interest in economic justice. Luke describes how Jesus drew his listeners' attention to the conditions of the poor, the blind, the captives and the oppressed (Lu. 4:18-19). He reminds us of the sacrificial attitude in the early church of Jerusalem. They shared everything they had (Ac. 2:44; 4:32), with the

result that there was no needy person among them (4:34). Luke is calling all the rich and privileged Christians to show solidarity with the poor (Christian and non-Christian).

Linked to the above is, "Preaching the good news of peace by Jesus Christ" (Ac. 10:36). Today we live in a world full of violence, hate, crime, terrorism, war and poverty. Peacemaking is a major ingredient of Jesus' mission; therefore, it is part of the church's calling in this world. There is no room for vengeance in the heart of the follower of Jesus.<sup>17</sup> Jesus demonstrated this attitude to us when he prayed for those who crucified Him (Lu. 23:34). This prayer was echoed in the prayer of the dying Stephen (Ac. 7:60).

More than the other evangelists, Luke deals with the role of the Holy Spirit in mission. Luke describes how Jesus was anointed and led by the Spirit (Luke 4:18). He explains that Jesus' disciples would be his witnesses as soon as they are filled by the Spirit (Lu. 24:46-49; Ac. 1:8). Bosch (2009:114) comments, "The gift of the Spirit is the gift of becoming involved in mission, for it is the direct consequence of the outpouring of the Spirit." The Holy Spirit initiates mission and guides mission. Without the Spirit of Jesus, there can be no mission.<sup>18</sup>

Luke's missionary paradigm also deals with ecclesiology. Luke's church had an "inward" and "outward" orientation – inward, because the church members formed a community that devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer (Ac. 2:42); outward, because they were actively engaged in mission to those who did not know the gospel. Luke's church refused to be understood as a sectarian group. Bosch (2009:120) explains: "The church is intimately linked to the apostles, in a dual sense of the word. It is founded on the 'teachings of the apostles' and like them sent into the world as witnesses."

It is evident that Luke had deep a conviction regarding God's mission and the role the church has to play in that mission. To obtain a better overview of God's mission in the New Testament, I will now investigate Paul's writings.

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<sup>17</sup> From studying Luke 4, we could also make out a case that vengeance must be omitted.

<sup>18</sup> There is more discussion on this theme in this study in the section "Pneumatological foundation of mission".

### 3.3.2 Mission in Paul's writings

In recent years, a great deal has been written on Paul and mission. Several letters in the New Testament are undisputedly regarded as from Paul's hand: Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon.<sup>19</sup> Discussing the authorship of the letters falls outside of the scope of this study. An important fact is that all of these letters were written in the mission field during Paul's years of active missionary service. The value of these letters increases when we realise that they were written about fifteen to thirty years before the Gospel accounts. Sadly, the missionary dimension in Paul's theology has not been recognised sufficiently. Bosch (2009:124) points out that for many years, Paul has only been seen as the creator of a dogmatic system. Only gradually have scholars discovered that above all Paul must be understood as an apostolic missionary.

#### 3.2.2.1 Conversion and call of Paul

To understand mission in the writings of Paul, we first need to reflect on his conversion and call. Here was a man who hunted the church, and then suddenly he turned into the biggest missionary of the whole New Testament!<sup>20</sup> What changed this Pharisee and persecutor of the early church (cf. Ga. 1:4; Php. 3:4-5) into Christ's apostle to the Gentiles? Paul gives the answer himself: It was his encounter with the risen Christ.<sup>21</sup> Scott Moreau *et al.* (2004:54) comment, "reading through Acts, one is quickly struck by the fact that an obscure person who participates in the persecution of the church (7:54-8:3; 9:1-2) is turned around by Jesus ... It is obvious that this man is special in God's early work of spreading the gospel."

Together with Paul's conversion came his calling. In the light of Paul's own testimony, Köstenberger and O'Brien (2001:161-164) are convinced there is no reason to doubt that the two acts coincided. Bosch (2009:126) notes: "Whenever Paul refers to the appearance of Christ to himself, he claims that he was thereby called and commissioned as an apostle." In this event, Paul underwent a radical change in identity, values and commitments. Where he used to follow the Torah and tradition, he now followed Christ. The risen Christ

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<sup>19</sup> See Belgic Confession, Article 4.

<sup>20</sup> See Acts 8:1-3 & 9:1-19.

<sup>21</sup> Paul refers to this event in Galatians 1:11-17 and Philippians 3:2-11.

transformed this persecutor into his special ambassador. He was going to use Paul in His mission to reach the gentiles. Paul writes that God “was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles” (Ga. 1:16). It is no wonder that Paul’s theology is described as a “missionary theology” (Bosch, 2009:124).

Another important element of Paul’s conversion is that it shaped his eschatology. Köstenberger and O’Brien (2001:162) note that through Paul’s Damascus encounter he experienced God’s personal saving intervention. After that event, he knew God decided to save and reconcile everything with Himself through his Son and by his Spirit. It was God’s purpose that “in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the gentiles” (Ga.3:13-14). Those acts of God marked the end of the old world and the beginning of the new.

### **3.3.2.2 Paul’s missionary journeys**

Paul’s journey as a missionary starts in Antioch. Scott Moreau *et al.* (2004:54) explain how the book of Acts relates the establishment and development of the church in Antioch from believers who were scattered after persecution (Ac. 11:19-29). Barnabas was sent to Antioch. Encouraged by what he saw he went to Tarsus to fetch Paul. The two of them ministered in Antioch for a year. In that period, God called Paul and Barnabas to proclaim the gospel throughout the world (Ac. 13:1-3). God sent them from the Antioch church to the ends of the world. From that point onwards, we come across the accounts of Paul’s missionary journeys (13:4-14:28; 15:36-18:22; 18:23-21:19). Scott Moreau *et al.* (2004:54) complain that too many people want to treat these journeys as carefully planned itineraries. For Paul it was more a case of being led by the Spirit in divine revelations. Following the Spirit of Jesus Christ, he moved from city to city and proclaimed the gospel wherever he went. He was a part of God’s mission and went wherever God directed him to go. Paul’s life serves as an example of a believer taking part in the *Missio Dei*.

In the book of Acts, we see clearly how Paul took part in God’s mission. The Spirit of Jesus Christ led him on different missionary journeys. When the Lord decided they had to move, He opened doors and showed them the way (Ac. 16:6-10). Paul’s obedience in taking part in God’s mission resulted in the gospel spreading across the globe, people coming to faith and the planting of different churches.

### **3.3.2.3 Pauline missionary theology**

Paul's theology was written according to a certain paradigm. Different things influenced his view of God and the church. Bosch (2009:123-178) argues convincingly that Paul's paradigm was a missionary paradigm. When describing the Pauline missionary paradigm, Bosch points out that Paul developed his missionary theology in a very specific context. He was indebted to Christ and to Jew and Gentile, to extend his vision of mission to his fellow-workers. In the same sense, we are indebted to Christ and each other to do the same.

First, Paul saw the church as a new community. Köstenberger and O'Brien (2001:180) say Paul knew that conversion to Christ meant incorporation into Him, and thus membership within a Christian community. The churches Paul wrote to found themselves in a world divided by religion, race, culture, economically and socially. However, Paul never gave up on the unity of the one body of Christ, in spite of all the differences. His motivation is based on the theological principle that once people have been "baptized into Christ" there can no longer be a separation between Jew and Gentile, slave and freeman, and between male and female. At this point, all are one in Christ (Gal 3:26-28). Our unity is non-negotiable. The church is a new creation in Christ (Eph. 2:10) and has to reflect the values of God's coming world.

Second, Paul was the apostle of the gentiles (Ro. 1:5; 15:16), but he knew that the church still had a responsibility to reach out to the Jewish nation. To reach people for Christ he was prepared to embody every culture, both Jewish and non-Jewish (1 Co. 9:19-22). This means the issue of continued evangelistic mission to the Jews remains an item on the agenda of today's church.

Third, Paul understood his mission in the context of God's imminent triumph. Bosch (2009:175) explains how Paul saw his mission within the horizon of Christ's parousia, when he says,

"... with Paul, we must expect an ultimate resolution to the contradictions and sufferings of life in the coming triumph of God. Our life as Christians is only real when it is anchored in the sure knowledge of God's victory: 'If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied' (1 Co. 15:19)."

Our mission to the world only makes sense when it is imbedded in Christ's victory. Only through His victory can our minds be remade and our nature transformed (Ro. 12:2). Believers as people who keep the eschatological hope alive are in possession of the first fruit of the Spirit. We look forward to the day of redemption (Ro. 8:23).

Fourth, Paul opposes people who claim "non-involvement in society". Bosch (2009:176) underlines that God's victory emphasises active participation in God's redemptive will here and now. The world is crying out for God's world of justice and peace. Therefore, Christians have to combat the oppressive structures of the powers of sin and death. In society, the church has to be a sign of God's new world.

Fifth, Paul understood our mission as mission in weakness. For Paul, suffering was primarily an expression of the church's active engagement with the world for the sake of the world. Paul bore in his body "the marks of Jesus" (Ga. 6:17), which he acquired as servant of Christ (cf. 2 Co. 11:23-28). He shared in Christ's sufferings (2 Co. 1:5) and completed in his flesh "what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church" (Col. 1:24). Towards the end of 2 Corinthians he says, "As for me, I will gladly spend what I have for you – yes, and spent myself to the limit" (12:15).

Sixth, the aim of mission for Paul is to worship God through service of the gospel (Ro. 1:1, 5). Paul was "sent to proclaim that God has effected reconciliation with himself and also among people" (Bosch, 2009:178). He was called to preach the gospel of unconditional love and undeserved grace. This aim of mission has not changed. Just as it was for Paul, so it is for the church of today. The gospel is the power of God (Ro. 1:16) and we need to proclaim it to all.

### **3.3.3 Conclusion**

There seems to be a growing consensus among scholars about the central position of the church's missionary vocation throughout the New Testament. In all the gospels and in Acts we read about the mission of God. The life and ministry of Jesus Christ, the calling of his disciples, the great command and commission, the outpouring of the Spirit and the new covenant of grace are all clear testimonies that the New Testament is a missionary text. It becomes clear that all the authors had in some sense a missionary purpose when writing their accounts. They wanted to guide their communities as they participated in God's mission of reconciliation.

We live in a world with many problems and challenges. All of these find their root in sin and separation from God. Jesus was sent to present a solution to the problems we have. He was sent to reconcile the world with God and now he calls his followers to join in his mission (Joh. 20:21). Paul is arguably our best example of a person that wholeheartedly took part in God's mission. At first, he prosecuted the church, but his confrontation with the risen Christ changed his life. With his conversion also came his calling, namely to be the apostle to the gentiles. Jesus intended to use him in his mission to the gentile nations. In the book of Acts, we read how the Holy Spirit led Paul on different missionary journeys. God worked through Paul to spread the gospel, change people's lives and plant churches. This all resulted in a movement that would affect the history of the entire world. When analysing Paul's theology, we can clearly see he wrote from a missionary paradigm. In fact, we can say that his theology was a missionary theology. To Paul, missiology and theology were not separated from each other – actually, the one shaped the other.

The *Missio Dei* did not end with the ministry of Paul and the other apostles. On the contrary, God used them as forerunners on the road ahead. The book of Acts starts with Jesus promising his disciples, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Ac. 1:8). Acts records how the persecution of the Christians drove them from Jerusalem to surrounding regions and it ends with Paul giving testimony for Christ in Rome. The body of Christ was now established. God would use the church in His mission throughout history until the day He returns. In the 2000 years that followed, Christianity spread across the globe.

When we read the New Testament, it becomes clear that God makes the church part of His mission. The Lord makes us part of his ministry of reconciliation and sends us to proclaim it (2 Co. 5:19-20). When you read verse 20, it becomes clear that God Himself called the Corinthians through the words of Paul. Today, this principle still applies for the church. God chose to make Him known through the church. He chose to speak through the church to the rest of the world. He works through His church to call the world to Him. When concerned with the *Missio Dei* (mission of God) it becomes clear that the church has to take part in it to fulfil her purpose in the divine drama. That means that if a congregation does not take part in the *Missio Dei*, that congregation cannot be called "church".

### 3.4 Mission in history

The Christian faith is a historical faith. To find the meaning of mission for our own time we have to study how Christianity developed through the ages. In his book, *Transforming Mission*, Bosch (2009:181-182) discusses the manner in which the Christian church has, through the ages, interpreted and carried out her mission. In a fascinating study, he uses the paradigm theory of Thomas Kühn and applies it to the history of Christian mission. He shows that throughout history there have been different paradigms in the missiology of the church:

“In each of these eras Christians, from within their own contexts, wrestled with the question of what the Christian faith and, by implication, the Christian mission meant for them. Needless to say, all of them believed and argued that their understanding of faith and of the church’s mission was faithful to God’s intent.”

The paradigms Bosch identifies are:

- The missionary paradigm of the Eastern Church
- The apocalyptic paradigm
- The Hellenistic paradigm
- The patristic and orthodox missionary paradigm
- The medieval Roman Catholic missionary paradigm
- The missionary paradigm of the Protestant Reformation
- The modern Enlightenment paradigm
- The emerging ecumenical missionary paradigm

Every missionary paradigm of the church (from New Testament times to the modern era) was formed in a historical context. The general worldviews of a specific era challenged the church at different levels. This resulted in the church adapting her missionary idea. Clearly, the way the church viewed mission throughout history has influenced the way she related to the *Missio Dei*. When the view on mission did not relate to the *Missio Dei*, it caused the church to become ingrown. It is not within the scope of this study to analyse each paradigm. However, it is important to realise that every paradigm was used by the sovereign God in his mission.

We have seen from Scripture and history, that God has a mission and that He chooses to fulfil this mission through a certain people. I will now discuss topics that are more theological in nature with regard to the *Missio Dei* and the relation of missional church to the *Missio Dei*.

### 3.5 The God of mission

In the past, people saw mission as something that started with the church or people (what the missionary does). Phrases like, “The church has a mission,” were widely used, but since the theologian Karl Barth a shift of emphasis has taken place. It has become clear that mission is something that God does. The phrase *Missio Dei*, Latin for “the sending of God”, was coined later on. Scott Moreau *et al.* (2004:73) show that over the course of the twentieth century, scholars have gained new appreciation for the fact that mission originates in God.

In his article on “New frontiers for mission in a post-modern era”, Dames (2007:41) explains that Karl Barth’s influence was critical for missional theology. Barth shifted the theological basis for mission to the doctrine of the Trinity. The church discovers her identity by becoming part of God’s mission (*Missio Dei*).

Bosch (2009:390) agrees with this statement in his discussion of mission as *Missio Dei*. He explains that mission has to be understood as being derived from the nature of God:

“It (is) thus put into the context of the doctrine of the Trinity, not of ecclesiology or soteriology. The classical doctrine on the *missio Dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit (is) expanded to include yet another ‘movement’: Father, Son and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world ... Mission is not primarily an activity of the church, but an attribute of God. God is a missionary God ... Mission is thereby seen as a movement from God to the world: the church is viewed as an instrument for that mission ... There is church because there is mission, not vice versa. To participate in mission is to participate in the movement of God’s love toward people, since God is a fountain of sending love.”

Basically, the above means that our mission has no life of its own. Mission is seen as participating in the sending by God. It is only in the hands of the sending God that it may be called “mission”.

More and more scholars are agreeing that the only mission is God's mission. Niemandt (2007:148) says, "Mission is the result of God's initiative rooted in God's purpose to restore and heal his creation." When writing about the foundation of Missions, Bavinck (1960:57) says:

"In summarizing our conclusions the first thing that strikes us is that the work of missions is God's work. God in the last days calls the heathen to his glorified people, to Christ, the true Israel, thereby causing them to share in his salvation ... The words of the Heidelberg Catechism (answer 54) are indeed true: 'The Son of God gathers himself a church out of the whole human race.' This Son of God is 'witness to the nations' (Isa. 55:4)."

John Stott (2008:34-35) explains that God is a sending God. This is essential information to anyone who wishes to understand mission. When the time came, the Father sent his Son, and after that, the Father and the Son sent forth the Spirit (Ga.4:4-6; Joh. 14:26; 15:26; 16:7; Ac. 2:33). Stott states that the primal mission is God's, for it is He who sent his prophets, his Son, his Spirit. When studying the Bible, history and these authors, it becomes clear that the initiative in mission lies with God alone. The church's mission can only be authentic when the church participates in the mission of God.

In conclusion, it is evident God is in essence a missionary God. Mission starts and ends with Him. He is the One who sends the Son, Spirit and church into the world. That means the only way the church can do mission is by being part of God's mission. I will now focus on the essence of this mission. What is God's mission in this world?

## **3.6 The mission of God**

### **3.6.1 Goal and motivation for mission**

It is very important to understand the goal and motivation for mission. Bosch (2009:5) admits that an inadequate foundation and motives for mission will eventually lead to unsatisfactory missionary practice. Bavinck (1960:3) shows that throughout history people had a variety of motivations and goals with regard to mission. Some missionaries were motivated by an ascetic view of life; others were stimulated by a desire to hasten the return of Christ. Frequently, missionary work has been connected with the tendency to spread

Western culture. What would the goal of mission then be? Wright (2010:53) comments on questions like this:

“The creation exists for the praise and glory of its creator. We humans, being creatures ourselves, share in that reason for existence. As the Shorter Catechism of the Westminster Confession of Faith states, ‘Man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.’ Our ‘chief end’, the prime goal of all human life, is to bring glory to God, and in doing so to enjoy ourselves because we enjoy God.”

The honour and glory of God is the foundation of mission through the whole Bible. Everything starts and ends with Him. Köstenberger and O’Brien (2001:52) agree with this statement: “The goal of mission is the glory of God, that he may be known and honoured for who he really is.”

God is the creator and sovereign over all things. It therefore stands to reason that worship is the ultimate goal and motivation for mission. In their missional manifesto, people like Ed Stetzer *et al.*, affirm that the *Missio Dei* is the mission of the triune God to glorify Himself.<sup>22</sup> Hawthorne (2009:49-63) comments that the purpose of God revealing his glory to all nations is that He wants to receive glory from the people who worship Him. It is understood that if worship is the heartbeat of our relation with our missionary God, as is revealed in Scripture, then it must always be central to the agenda of his missionary people.

It is only when we truly grasp God’s sovereignty and the grace that He has bestowed upon us that we will have the fuel for death-defying mission.<sup>23</sup> John Piper (2010:35) agrees with this:

“Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exist because worship doesn’t. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man...Worship, therefore, is the fuel and goal of missions.”

In conclusion, it can be said that worship is the goal and motivation for mission. We cannot do mission without it, and we cannot aim at anything else when doing mission. In the words

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<sup>22</sup> See their manifesto at <http://www.missionalmanifesto.net/>

<sup>23</sup> See sermon of Dr David Platt [www.youtube.com/watch?v=DJigOyNFGY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DJigOyNFGY)

of Romans 11:36, “Because of Him, and through Him, and to Him (are) all things. To Him be glory to the ages. Amen.” (Literal translation)

### 3.6.2 Essence of God’s mission

There are many definitions of God’s mission. R.W. Glenn (2007) formulates his definition as follows: “Through Jesus Christ, and by the Holy Spirit, God, for his own glory, will unite people from every tribe, nation, kingdom and language to worship him forever in the new world.” Bavinck (1960:62) summarises mission as an activity of Christ, exercised through the church.

At the Reformed Theological Society in 2011, Dr P.J. Buys summarised *Missio Dei* as follows:

- 1 Saved in Eternity – God’s plan of redemption (Zec. 6:13; Ac. 2:23).
- 2 God will send Jesus to the world to take the sins of all those whom the Father gives to Him on himself to liberate them from guilt, fear and the rule of Satan.
- 3 The Father and the Son will then send out the Holy Spirit to renew (hearts and wills) of his people, shaping their characters (sanctification) and developing fruit (Ga. 5:22), and equip them (gifts Ro. 12:6-8; 1 Co. 12; Eph. 4:7-16; 1 Pe. 4:7-11) to be effective instruments of God’s mission in his redemption of the whole universe.

Bosch (2009:412) states that *mission* denotes the total task God sets the church for the salvation of the world, but it is always related to a specific context of evil, despair, and lostness. He shows how mission is the church sent by God into the world, to love, to serve, to preach, to heal and to liberate. He ends his book with the following description (Bosch, 2009:519):

“Looked at from this perspective mission is, quite simply, the participation of Christians in the liberating mission of Jesus (Hering 1980:78), wagering on a future that verifiable experience seems to belie. It is the good news of God’s love, incarnated in the witness of a community, for the sake of the world.”

In conclusion, we could say the mission of God is his redemptive purpose to reconcile the universe with Himself through Christ (cf. 2 Co. 5:18-19). That mission can be seen as a movement from God through the church to the world.

### 3.7 The people of mission

In the past, people had many different views regarding mission and church. Bosch (2009:1) thinks some people saw mission as something an individual did in another country. Others saw mission as something that a group of people in the congregation do. He explains these views are actually of recent origin, and that the term “mission” previously (until the sixteenth century) referred to the doctrine of the Trinity.

When studying the church and mission we have to go to the beginning. God brought his covenant people, the people of mission, into being with Abraham (Ge. 12:1-3). According to Hesselgrave (2000:18), God was not surprised when Adam sinned. In fact, He had a plan to reconcile humans with Him. In this plan, Abraham and his descendants were to be the people through whom the world would be blessed. The church is the descendants of Abraham through faith (Ga. 3:6-8). That means the church is part of God’s mission to reconcile the world with Him.

The *Missio Dei* determines why God created the church. Included in God’s mission is the missional church. God is a sending God, a missionary God, who calls and gathers His people, the church, to be missionary agents of His love and glory<sup>24</sup>. Warren (2002:17-18) states correctly, “You were born by His purpose and for His purpose. You didn’t create yourself, so there is no way you can tell yourself what you were created for.” If you want to know why you were placed on this planet, you must begin with God.<sup>25</sup> Laing (2009:91) comments on the implications of the *Missio Dei* concept for the church. He explains how it changes our understanding of the nature of the church, because the church is missional in its very character. God is sending the church continually into the world.

When concerned with the doctrine of the *Missio Dei* we realise that the important fact is not so much that the church has a mission; it is that the mission of God has a church. God is the God who sends, and that means that our missiology determines our ecclesiology. The very nature of the church is missional, as described by Bosch (2009:8):

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<sup>24</sup> See The Heidelberg Catechism, LD 21:54.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Colossians 1:16

“The Christian faith is intrinsically missionary. It regards the “reign of God” which has come in Jesus Christ as intended for ‘all humanity’. This dimension of the Christian faith is not an optional extra: Christianity is missionary by its very nature, or it denies its very *raison d’être*.”

Missiology does not flow forth from ecclesiology or soteriology, because mission originates in God. We are a part of his mission, which means the *Missio Dei* eventually creates ecclesiology. Bosch (2009:370) in his further comments on elements of an emerging ecumenical missionary paradigm, explains the relation between the *Missio Dei* and missional church:

“God’s salvific work precedes both church and mission. We should not subordinate mission to the church nor the church to mission; both should, rather, be taken up into the *missio Dei*, which now became the overarching concept. The *missio Dei* institutes the *missiones ecclesiae*.”

The principles above have a profound impact on the way we view the church and are church today. Bosch (2009:391) explains what the mission of God (*Missio Dei*) means for the church. He says God’s mission remains primary and our missionary activities are only authentic when they are aligned with the *Missio Dei*:

“The primary purpose of the *missiones ecclesiae* can therefore not simply be the planting of churches or the saving of souls; rather, it has to be service to the *missio Dei*, representing God in and against the world, pointing to God, holding up the God-child before the eyes of the world in a ceaseless celebration of the feast of the Epiphany.”

He is so adamant about this point that he states the *Missio Dei* constitutes the church (Bosch, 2009:519), that is – the *Missio Dei* establishes the church.

A missional congregation allows God’s mission to permeate everything that the congregation does – from worshipping to witnessing and training members for discipleship. It bridges the gap between outreach and congregational life, since church members embody God’s mission in their life together (Barrett, 2004). This means to say *church* is to say *mission* (Bevans & Schroeder, 2004:7). A *missional church* is a church that is shaped by participating in God’s mission, which is to set things right in a broken, sinful world, to redeem it and to restore it to what God has always intended for the world. Members of a

missional church do not see themselves so much as a church sending out missionaries, as a church being sent out. Being a missional church means to follow Jesus radically in our mission (Hirsch, 2010). Metaphorically speaking, we have to walk in His footsteps on earth. Wherever his Spirit leads us, we have to follow.

It is important to realise that a missional church is not a new model for being church. It is the *essence* of being church. If we are not a missional church, we have to repent and reform according to Scripture in order to be aligned with the *Missio Dei* (mission of God). It entails allowing the *Missio Dei* to determine our missiology, which in turn determines our ecclesiology. Many people still use the description “God’s church has a mission,” but according to missional theology, a more accurate expression would be “God’s mission has a church” (Eph. 3:7-13). Mission moves from God, through the church, to the world. Hirsch (2006:218) comments:

“The basic idea is that the church’s mission is inextricably linked to the mission of God – that God is a missionary and the church is the principal historical agent of that mission in the world. What this means is that the redemptive purposes of God therefore flow right through every Christian community into all the world.”<sup>26</sup>

This would mean if a church is not part of the *missio Dei*, she will become an obstacle in God’s redemptive purposes.

In conclusion, it can be stated that a missional community is one that regards the *Missio Dei* as both its originating impulse and organising principle (Ac. 1:8). Jesus is at the centre of God’s plan. That means the church as the body of Christ is the primary medium of God’s mission to his world. While God’s work is not limited to the church, the proclamation of the gospel of Christ takes place through the church. The church is the instrument in spreading God’s message (2 Co. 5:18-19) and the primary agent through whom God works to reconcile the world to Himself. We should not neglect the ministry of reconciliation that Jesus entrusts to us. In this ministry, beliefs and decisions are based on the fact that every believer participates in Christ’s (God’s) mission in the world and that he or she must make

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<sup>26</sup> See footnote in Hirsch’s book, *The Forgotten ways*, p. 218.

God known through their covenantal life and proclamation of God's love. Christ sends us into the world, just as the Father sent Him into the world.

The existence of the church is a revelation of God's gracious heart. Christ loved the church and gave himself for her (Eph. 5:25) in order that she might live. Some people think it ends there, but it does not. The church is in essence a part of the gospel. The church is made up of those that are called (John 6:44) and sent by Jesus Christ (John 20:21) to be a part of the *Missio Dei*. The church is the body (Eph. 1:23) through which Christ moves on earth, and we are called to be a part of God's plan for reconciliation and redemption. The church is the instrument of God's love. Mission is not a trademark of the church. It is God's heart beating to reconcile a broken world with Him. The fact that God is a missionary God makes his church a missionary church. Mission is not just a task of the church, it is the essence of being church. Even our prayers acknowledge this truth, because when we pray, "Let thy Kingdom come," we pray, "Preserve and multiply thy church" (Heidelberg Catechism, LD 86). Our focus is to be outwards, not inwards. Christians do good works (in all aspects of life) to honour God and in order to win their neighbours for Christ.<sup>27</sup> We are the bride of Christ when we are missional. This means, if a congregation's focus is inward and not missional, they cannot claim to be the bride of Christ.

### **3.8 Theological considerations regarding mission**

The early church's theological reflection grappled with the challenges the church had to face in being a missionary church. Bosch (1982:27) explains that theologians should not forget that the early Christian mission was the progenitor of theology. Guder (1998:7-8) explains that the purpose of theological labour in the early church was to equip and support the church in its missionary vocation. Unfortunately, with the establishment of Constantine Christianity, the missional sense of the nature and calling of the church faded. He explains how Christendom and global Christianity have revealed the Western gospel as being reduced and culturally diluted. He pleads for a missional rethinking of the Christian doctrine for the sake of the future of the church. If God's mission determines the very nature of the church, then theologians have to start aligning the doctrinal disciplines with the *mission Dei*.

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<sup>27</sup> See Belgic Confession, Article 32.

He continues, “We do not end up with mission as the precipitate of all our theologizing; we start with God’s mission and work our way through the theological agenda of faith.” This means there are theological considerations regarding the *Missio Dei* and missional church that we have to consider. I will now focus on the Trinitarian, Christological, pneumatological and eschatological foundation for mission. If we neglect one of these, the church runs the danger of becoming ingrown, or only a social agent for change.

Almost the entire New Testament was written in the mission field. Mission has therefore a very large role to play in theology. Our theology was never meant to be an ivory tower theology. The church is on mission with Jesus Christ every day until his return, and our theology should reflect that. The first believers were even called people of “the way/path” (*odos*), before they became known as Christians (cf. Ac. 11:26). Mission is not an add-on to theology, it is the essence that shapes it. Bosch (2009) argues convincingly that the “theology of mission” is in essence “missionary theology”.

### **3.8.1 Trinitarian foundation**

Proper understanding of mission begins with recognising the triune God’s missionary nature. Each person of the Trinity is missionary-driven. The Father is the source of mission, the Son is the embodiment of that mission, and mission is done in the power of the Spirit. By nature, God is the “sending one” who initiates the redemption of his entire creation. Jesus consistently spoke of Himself as being “sent” in John’s Gospel; and subsequently, He commissioned his disciples for the same purpose (Joh. 17:3, 8, 18, 23, and 25). As the “sent” people of God, the church is the instrument of his mission (Joh. 20:21).

The triune God empowers the church for witnessing and service and then He leads them on his mission. Scott Moreau *et al.* (2004:40) point out that God sent Jesus (Joh. 20:21). In turn, Jesus returns to the Father and they send the Spirit to Jesus’ followers (Joh. 15:26; 16:7). In the power of the Spirit, Jesus and the Father sent Jesus’ followers into the world. They have to proclaim God’s kingdom and call people to glorify the King of kings through a worshipful lifestyle (Joh. 20:21-22; Ac. 1:8).

The *Missio Dei* is the mission of the triune God to glorify Himself. God does it in this world by redeeming sinful humans and, in the future, by restoring the corrupted creation. Stott (2008:34-35) explains that the Father sent the Son, and then the Father and the Son sent

the Spirit. The Father sent the Son to accomplish this redemption and then sent the Spirit to apply this redemption to the hearts of men and woman.

John Flett (2009:15) proposes a Trinitarian understanding of the *Missio Dei* that is rooted in the undivided being and act of God. The essence of his view is that one cannot separate God's mission from the existence and purpose of the church. God is a missionary God and any community that lives in doxological correspondence to Him is of necessity a missionary community. Guder (2009:64) emphasises that this Trinitarian point of view has very large implications for our understanding of mission and forming an appropriate theology.

### **3.8.2 Christological foundation**

Jesus is at the centre of God's plan. Every part of the Bible points in some way or another to Christ and his mission. John Stott (2008:34-35) affirms this point of view

“Of these missions the mission of the Son is central, for it was the culmination of the ministry of prophets, and it embraced within itself as its climax the sending of the Spirit. And now the Son sends as he himself was sent.”

Bosch (2009:178) explains, however important as the church would, to Paul the church is not the ultimate aim of mission. He comments:

“Christ has been exalted by God and given a name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, ‘declared Son of God by a mighty act in that he rose from the dead’ (Rom 1:4).”

The discussion of Wright (2006:65-66) it is clear that Jesus was convinced that He was sent:

“God's mission determined his mission. In Jesus, the radical theocentric nature of Biblical mission is most clearly focused and modelled. In the obedience of Jesus, even to death, the mission of God reached its climax. For ‘God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ’ (2 Co. 5:19).”

It becomes clear that there is a very strong focus on Christ and His Kingdom in the mission *Dei* and that is why our focus should also be on Him too (cf. Col. 3:1-4).

### 3.8.3 Pneumatological foundation

The Protestant Reformation tended to put the major emphasis on the work of the Spirit as bearing witness to and interpreting the Word of God. Bosch (2009:113-115) explains the rediscovery on the *missionary* character of the Holy Spirit in the twentieth century. He shows that this came about because of a renewed study of the writings of Luke.

Bosch interprets pneumatology as one of the major ingredients of “The Lukan Missionary Paradigm”. The author of Luke and Acts dealt with the fact that history continued and that Christ did not immediately return. The community of that time knew that Jesus was no longer with them physically. However, Jesus showed them why they did not need to be in distress. He showed that He as the risen Christ was indeed present in the community – pre-eminently through the Spirit. Jesus is still leading his mission through his Spirit, as Bosch (2009:113) suggests:

“The idea of being led by the Spirit into mission is then, however, applied in a far more comprehensive manner to the ministry of the disciples. They will turn into Jesus’ witnesses as soon as they are clothed with the power from on high (Luke 24:49; Ac. 1:8).”

Actually, the Holy Spirit is performing missionary work through the disciples of Jesus. The Holy Spirit is the empowering factor, and therefore the One that does mission. The disciples are privileged to be part of the *Missio Dei*.

When we read the New Testament (especially Luke and Acts), we see how the same Spirit, who led Jesus in mission, now leads his disciples in mission. Mission can only be done under the guidance and in the power of the Spirit. Scott Moreau *et al.* (2004:47) comments on encountering mission in the gospels:

“Central to Jesus’ understanding is that it is the Spirit on him and anointing him to carry out his mission. Thus, mission comes out of the anointing and sending of the Spirit, not our own initiative.”

The Holy Spirit becomes the empowering force of mission. This means a church cannot participate in the *Missio Dei* if the Holy Spirit does not lead her. Without the Spirit, there is no mission.

### **3.8.4 Eschatological foundation**

The church is in essence an eschatological community. Bosch (2009:83) discusses Matthew and Paul's view of the church as a community in the context of eschatological expectation. Bosch describes Paul's missionary paradigm:

“Wherever he (Paul) arrives he finds ecclesia, churches, which are expected to be manifestations of the new creation which is now ‘restored to the state from which Adam fell’ and in which the powers of the world, other than death, no longer reign (Kasemann, 1969:134). They are to be manifestations of Christ's body on earth. A sign to the rest of the world, supposed to show God's love to the world.”

Guder (1998:9) points out that it is crucial for the church's missional renewal to rediscover her Biblical eschatological foundation. The church lives up to her vocation in the tension between what God has begun and what he is about to complete when Christ returns. With the entire creation awaiting the return of Christ, the church is already has an identity shaped by the characteristics described below:

#### **3.8.4.1 Chosen people of God (Eph. 1:4)**

The church is a covenant community of imperfect but redeemed believers living in our world. The people of God are elected to be a blessing to all the nations (Ge. 12:1-3). They are chosen for the ministry of reconciliation (2 Co. 5:18-19), and to be the light and salt for the world (Mt. 5:13-16).

#### **3.8.4.2 Body of Christ (Eph. 1:23; Col. 1:18)**

Christ moves through His body on earth (Eph. 1:22-23). The church is already a re-created community (1 Co. 5:17; Joh. 3:3 & 6; Eph. 2:8 -10; Ro. 6:3-4), who under the headship of Christ is busy with His redemptive work (Eph. 2:8-10).

#### **3.8.4.3 Spirit-filled community (Ga. 5 & Joh. 15:1-8)**

Followers of Christ do not live up to their mission in isolation, but rather the Spirit gathers believers in local Christian communities. It is in and through such a community that the mission of the church in the world is enhanced. The Spirit is busy with recreation through the body of Christ (every new believer is recreated in Christ).

This Trinitarian perspective of the church also highlights its purpose. The church is a sign and sacrament of the Kingdom of God, given birth by the gospel of the Kingdom and tasked with the mission of the Kingdom. Von Allmen (1965:79) says the following about worship:

“By the mere fact of its celebration and because it is a power radiating joy, peace, freedom, order and love, it becomes an evangelical force, and hence something which impinges upon the surrounding world. Worship provides a sign which is for the world a challenge and a promise.”

The church as the body of Christ is to be a sign. For some people the church is a sign of life and for others a sign of death (Php. 1:27-2:4). Bieder (1964:12) pleads that the church needs to be something of a sacrament for the world. Our corporate worship, prayer, preaching, love and devotion should communicate the death, resurrection and return of our Lord Jesus Christ to the whole world. The church as the people of the Kingdom of God is in the world, but not from this world. God has created a new community to worship and serve Him in this world. He moves through the church to the world. His redemptive work results in people of every tribe, tongue and nation responding in lifelong worship to Him. Ultimately, the *Missio Dei* will encompass all of creation when God creates a new heaven and new earth. This section is concluded with the words of Horton (2006:183):

“More fully stated, the one church of God is not an institutional but a supernatural entity in process of growth toward the world to come. It is the sphere of the action of the risen and ascended Lord. All its members are in Christ and are knit together by a supernatural kinship. All their gifts and activities continue Christ’s work by the power of the Holy Spirit, originate from Christ, and are coordinated by him to the final goal. Then the church will appear in the age to come as the one people of God united in one congregation before the throne, as the one celestial city – the new Jerusalem.”

### **3.9 Conclusion**

I have shown that God’s mission is the starting-point for the church’s theological agenda. First, we find a Trinitarian foundation in the *Missio Dei*. All three persons are missionary-driven and have an integrate role to play. Second, we find a Christological foundation. Jesus is the centre of God’s plan to reconcile the world with Him. Third, a pneumatological foundation is present since Holy Spirit empowers mission. Fourth, the eschatological

foundation of the Missio Dei is manifest in the fact that God chose to fulfil His mission through the church. We have to be a sign and a sacrament to the rest of the world regarding God's Kingdom. This also means that if a church is not part of the Missio Dei, it cannot be a sign of the Kingdom of God. When a church is not driven by the mission of God, it becomes a spiritual club that will fade and die. The question is how does a church re-align herself with the Missio Dei. In the next chapter, I will investigate the Biblical principles for aligning a church with the Missio Dei.

## Chapter 4

### Biblical principles for aligning a church with the Missio Dei

#### 4.1 Introduction

In order to be a *missional community* (*missio ecclesia*) we have to turn back to God and grow towards the Missio Dei. The publications of Wright (2010), Hirsch (2006), Reeder (2008), Rainer and Geiger (2011) and Barna (2005) are testimonies of people returning to the Bible to gain a perspective of the way the church can start taking part in the Missio Dei and thus fulfil her calling. The churches of the GKSA need to reform back to Scripture to find out what it means to be the body of Christ in our social context. Using sound Biblical principles, they will be able to break down the obstacles that are hindering them. It is time for many congregations to transform from ingrown, denominationally focussed congregations to communities that are Christocentric and take part in the Missio Dei. There is a great need for reformed churches in South Africa and around the globe to reconsider Biblical principles of church abasement, reformation and growth. This chapter aims to set out how an ingrown congregation can go through a process of abasement, reformation and growth to take part in the Missio Dei and become a missional church.

#### 4.2 Biblical considerations to call a church back to the Missio Dei

The idea or concept of a dying church being turned around to take part in the Missio Dei and thereby becoming alive again is found in several passages in the Bible. Perhaps the clearest example of a dying church is found in Revelation 3:2, where it is said of the church of Sardis that she is dead. She must wake up and strengthen what remains but is about to die. Buys (2011) states that such a general conversion or covenant renewal is described many times as a resurrection from death or a revival. He believes that we could use the term *revitalisation* as a comprehensive term for revival, repentance and reformation.

When a church wants to take part in the Missio Dei, she has to realise that God continues to build the church for his honour, holiness and name (Hendriks, 1992:45).

The main purpose of everything the church does is to honour and praise God. At the synod of 2000 (GKSA, 2000:505-510), it was correctly agreed that a church that is part of the Missio Dei must adhere to the principles described below.

#### **4.2.1 God's honour and the church (Eph. 1:3-14)**

The Missio Dei concerns God's honour and praise. The triune God brought the church into being and determined that her nature and purpose would be to honour Him. The church does not belong to human beings, but to God. This means the church that takes part in the Missio Dei will try to honour God in everything she does and says. God's honour becomes visible when his church increases in holiness (Eph. 5:27) and grows numerically (Eph. 1:11-14). When a church takes part in the Missio Dei to honour God, she can expect his blessing.

#### **4.2.2 God's care and the church (Joh. 17:11-24; Eph. 4:7, 12-16; Joh. 13:34-35; HC, 21:55)**

The triune God takes care of his church. The church is God's covenant community chosen to build his Kingdom and to be a blessing to all the nations. This means if a church takes part in the Missio Dei she can count on God to take care of her and provide for her.

#### **4.2.3 God's mission and the church (Mt. 28:18-20)**

The church taking part in the Missio Dei represents God's mission in this world. Mission is God's concern. That means if a church wants to take part in the Missio Dei, mission will be a part of her existence and work. Mission must be understood from a Trinitarian perspective: God the Father sent his Son; the Father and the Son sent the Holy Spirit. The implication is the triune God sends the whole church into the world to take part in his mission.

#### **4.2.4 God's co-workers, the church (Ro. 10:14-15)**

God uses his children as co-workers in his mission. 2 Corinthians 6:1 states, "As God's fellow-workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain." God's purpose in building his church by co-workers is to form a Spirit-filled community that grows in faith

and wisdom as disciples of Christ. The members of the community have to build each other by serving one another with their gifts. In this way, they become equipped to take part in the Missio Dei and carry his message of reconciliation into a broken world.

#### **4.2.5 God's Kingdom and the church (Col. 3:1-4)**

The church taking part in the Missio Dei is focused on Christ and his coming Kingdom. The existence and growth of the church is the realisation of God's Kingdom in this world (HC, LD 48:123). The church is not only the fruit and sign of the Kingdom, but also God's instrument for proclaiming his Kingdom in all parts of life. This means that the growth of a church or denomination is no goal in itself. The church needs to be faithful to her calling to follow Jesus and take part in the Missio Dei. Out of love for and in accordance with the gospel, the church has to bring hope to a broken world and focus on building God's Kingdom.

These principles serve as the foundation for calling a church back to take part in the Missio Dei. Continual revival could be achieved if churches keep renewing their minds, repent and reform (De Klerk & Van Helden, 2011:5). We can only accept God's gift of a new life if we relinquish the old ways to which we cling so stubbornly (Dames, 2007:48). Guder (2000:150) shows that the missional challenge we face is a crisis of faith and spirit, and that the only response to it is conversion – the continual conversion of the church: "The continual conversion of the church happens as the congregation hears, responds to, and obeys the gospel of Jesus Christ in ever new and more comprehensive ways." There is a dire need for many congregations to confess their guilt before God, to repent and reform back to the way God wants us to be church.

In the previous chapter, I have shown that a church taking part in the Missio Dei is driven and guided by the Holy Spirit. It is God's Spirit that aligns the church with the Missio Dei by a process of abasement, reformation and growth. In order to get a better understanding of this alignment I will now focus on the work of the Holy Spirit in this process.

### 4.3 The Holy Spirit's work in calling the church to the Missio Dei

#### 4.3.1 The work of the Holy Spirit in the Missio Dei

It is the Holy Spirit that calls a church to return to taking part in the Missio Dei. The basic reformed theological principle is that the Holy Spirit alone quickens and gives life to individual believers and to the church as a whole. Barrett *et al.* (2004:119) explain that the church, the body of Christ, is completely dependent on the Holy Spirit for following the Missio Dei. This means the church is incapable to fulfil its missional call unless she receives guidance and empowerment from God's Spirit.

When we look at the history of God's people in the Old Testament, it becomes clear that it happened repeatedly that God's people sinned against Him and evoked his anger and punishment. After a while, however, God in his loving kindness restored the relationship with them by exhorting them to a general conversion, covenant renewal and reformation. One of the clearest examples of using resurrection from death to describe a general conversion and restoration of God's people is found in Ezekiel 37:1-14. God's sinful people in exile are looked upon as though they were dead. God in His power and mercy raises them from death to life and fills them with His Spirit. The way God establishes his Kingdom, is to bring his people repeatedly back to life from being dead in their sins.

In the New Testament, we read that the Holy Spirit wants the whole world for Christ. The Spirit's all-consuming passion is to exalt Christ *in* the church, but also *by means of* the church to the end of the earth. It is the Spirit of Christ, who fills, enables and empowers us (cf. Ac. 1:8; 1 Co. 12: 4; 2 Ti. 1:7) to serve and proclaim the gospel. In arguing for a missional ecclesiology, Guder (2009:68-69) explains, "The Spirit enables and equips all such called communities, such ecclesiae, for that missional vocation, setting them apart and equipping them for their missional purpose." Hendriks (1992:47) explains the way in which God builds his church is by giving them his Spirit.

The reasons why the Holy Spirit was sent are the following:

- The Holy Spirit wants to reveal the glory of Christ in the church.

- He empowers Christians to proclaim the glory of Christ with word and deed to the world.
- He provides salvation, healing, hope, new life and a reverence for God and establishes signs of the Kingdom.

We need the guidance and protection of God's Spirit in order to take part in the *Missio Dei*. Greenway (1999:54-55) explains the way God's missionary Spirit works in believers. He says the Holy Spirit,

- awakens an interest in missions in the hearts of believers;
- plants a compassion for people who are perishing in the minds of believers;
- builds faith in God's promise that the proclamation of the gospel will not be in vain;
- creates a willingness in the believer to obey Christ's missionary command; and
- breaks down our social and racial prejudices and makes us love people who are different and welcome them into the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Writing on the book of Acts for today's missional church, Niemandt (2010:4) explains that the early church was more focused on where God's Spirit was moving than what they had to do. It is the Spirit that initiates mission and guides the missionaries on where they should go and how they should proceed. Laing (2009:92) declares that if we want our missions to have validity, they need to be rooted in the *Missio Dei* while deriving their vitality from God's Spirit. Miller (1999:24) concludes:

"I believe that it is right here that we encounter the essence of the threat to the modern congregation: its tendency to despair and defeat because it has redirected its faith towards the past or to human resources, rather than to the promises of God with their focus on the power of the Spirit to revive us."

We should also note that God will give His grace and the Holy Spirit only to those who constantly and with heartfelt longing ask Him for these gifts and thank Him for them (HC, LD 45). A healthy church depends entirely on the Holy Spirit.

### 4.3.2 Times of ebb and flow in the work of the Spirit

It is clear from the whole New Testament that the Holy Spirit never leaves the true church of Jesus Christ completely. Jesus promises his church that He, through his Spirit, will be with them to the end of time (Joh. 14:16; Mt. 28:19; 1 Pe. 4:14). Kruger (2012:175-183) shows how people sometimes neutralise the work of the Spirit. Buys (2011:4) explains the Holy Spirit's work of ushering in the kingdom of God by redeeming (actually recreating) the universe can be compared with the tide of the sea. There are times of ebb and flow in the work of the Holy Spirit. A condition of ebb in the work of the Holy Spirit in the church may occur because the sin of God's people grieves and quenches the Spirit.

We read in Ephesians 4:30 the following about grieving the Holy Spirit: "And don't grieve God's Holy Spirit, who sealed you for the day of redemption." From a semantic discourse analysis of the whole passage, it is quite clear that grieving the Spirit refers to all the sins mentioned in verses 25-32, namely lying, fighting, stealing, swearing, bitterness, wrath and not forgiving others. The chapter starts by referring to the unity amongst God's people and the way it should be maintained (Eph. 4:1). Disunity, or anything that causes it, grieves the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit is "grieved" by sin (Eph. 4:30), He ceases to fill the believer. Repentance is then the only road to recovery.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:19 we read: "Do not quench the Spirit." The work of the Holy Spirit is like a fire that burns. Quenching the Spirit means to smother the fire of the Holy Spirit in our lives by the ashes of our own sinful ideas and structures. It implies a suppression of the operations of the Spirit in the congregations through formalism. Kruger (2012:80-83) notes that the Holy Spirit starts withdrawing his work in our lives when we look down upon Him. A sad Spirit is a withdrawn Spirit. When this happens, the congregation will experience less and less of the transforming power of God in their lives.

To take part in the *Missio Dei* a church has to be driven and guided by the Spirit. If a church grieves or quenches the Spirit, she will either fall apart or become more ingrown and less missional. Both the acts of grieving and quenching the Spirit lead to decline and a lack of zeal for missions. Bosch (2009:386) acknowledges that a witnessing and serving church can only exist when she is intensely driven by the Spirit. She can give only in the

measure that she receives. The Holy Spirit is the one who bestows gifts (cf. 1 Co. 12:4-7) and equips the believer for the service he or she has to perform.

It has been shown that a church taking part in the *Missio Dei* is a missional church. This means that in the body of Christ everyone's life has to be a missional life. Bavinck (1949) writes that two key elements are identified in the Holy Spirit's work in you and me, and in the church for that matter. First, to become truly missional the Holy Spirit convinces us of our sin; second, He convinces us of our salvation. If the full comprehension of any of these two should be lacking, missionality would also be lacking. A personal missional life is an incomprehensible joy to a believer, because the Holy Spirit, who is working in the believer, convinces the believer of personal salvation.

The Holy Spirit is the one who re-aligns the church with the *Missio Dei*. Every church needs re-alignment at some time or another. This flows forth, first, from the above theological premise of times of ebb and flow in the work of the Holy Spirit in the church, and second, from the reality of sin in the lives of individuals and the church at large. From the work of the Apostle Paul described in Acts, it is clear that he realised that he had to return to churches that were established by his missionary work earlier on. According to Acts 15:36, Paul realised the necessity to revisit and to strengthen the churches already established. He wanted to go from city to city to acquaint him with their issues, to determine in what state they were and to impart to them such spiritual gifts as were suited to their needs. The ministry of Paul and Silas involved strengthening the churches (Ac. 15:41, 18:23). Paul understood that fulfilling his calling not only meant he had to plant churches, but also to revisit and strengthen them. Reeder (2008:20) understands the revisiting and strengthening as a Pauline ministry of revitalisation: "If Paul's churches suffered from decline, we should not be ashamed or reluctant to admit that ours are hurting too."

Reeder (2008) is right also to refer to the letters in Revelation 2 and 3 as examples of Christian Churches that had declined and that were then addressed by Jesus in order that they may be revitalised. Five of the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3, specifically Ephesus, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis and Laodicea, who had been strong churches previously, were urgently in need of revitalisation.

In Article 4 of Chapter 5 of the Canons of Dort, the church confesses that sometimes believers depart from the guidance of God's grace and then they are seduced by the lusts of the flesh. Examples are the fall of David and of Peter, and of other saints described in the Holy Scriptures.

In [Article 5](#) of Chapter 5 of the Canons of Dort, the church confesses that Christian believers through their sins, "highly offend God, deserve death, grieve the Holy Spirit, interrupt the exercise of faith, severely wound their conscience, and sometimes lose the sense of God's grace for a time, until on their returning into the right way of serious repentance, the light of God's fatherly face again shines upon them."

In [Article 6](#) of Chapter 5 of the Canons of Dort, the church confesses that God, "who is rich in mercy, according to his unchangeable purpose of His election, does not wholly withdraw the Holy Spirit from his own people, even when they fall grievously. Neither does he let them fall down so far as to lose the grace of adoption, and forfeit the state of justification, or to commit sins unto death; nor does he permit them to be totally deserted, and to plunge themselves into everlasting destruction."

In [Article 7](#) of Chapter 5 of the Canons of Dort, the church confesses that God, "by his Word and Spirit, certainly and effectually renews them to repentance, to a sincere and godly sorrow for their sins, that they may seek and obtain remission in the blood of the Mediator, may again experience the favor of a reconciled God, through faith adore his mercies, and henceforward more diligently work out their own salvation with fear and trembling."

What is said of individual believers in the confession holds true for the whole church. Each congregation is a corporate gathering of individual believers. In every church, there will be times when she drifts away from God's purposes and needs to be re-aligned with the *Missio Dei*. Niemandt (2010:5-6) writes the following: "It is the work of God's Spirit when we recognise that the church must constantly experience re-shaping and re-forming – as the phrase *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda* suggests." This means when a church realises that she needs to re-align her with the *Missio Dei*, the Holy Spirit is at work. Guder (2000:150) explains that it is the work of God's Spirit when we recognise that the church must constantly experience re-shaping and re-forming under the guidance of God's Word.

It is the Spirit, who takes the initiative in aligning the church with the Missio Dei. The Spirit does this by a process of abasement, reformation and growth. In order to understand how the Spirit re-aligns a church with the Missio Dei, I will now focus on the process of abasement, reformation and growth.

#### **4.4 The process of abasement, reformation and growth in the Missio Dei**

The time to take part in the Missio Dei and become a missional church is *now*. Paul writes to the believers in Rome:

“Besides this, knowing the time, it is already the hour for you to wake up from sleep, for our salvation is nearer than when we first believed.” (Ro. 13:11)

In Revelation 3:2-3 John writes:

“Be alert and strengthen what remains, which is about to die, for I have not found your works complete before My God. Remember therefore what you have received and heard; keep it, and repent.”

If a church shows signs of being ingrown, she needs the Holy Spirit to guide her by a process of abasement, reformation and growth in order to take part in the Missio Dei.

##### **4.4.1 Abasement**

In order to take part in the Missio Dei, the Holy Spirit guides the church to abase her before God. It is clear that many churches in the GKSA are not fulfilling their calling to take part in the Missio Dei. One of the main problems is that these congregations have a wrong understanding of what it means to be church.<sup>28</sup> The only road for these congregations to take in order to take part in the Missio Dei is a process that starts with abasement (cf. 2 Sa. 2:16; 1 Ki. 21:29; 2 Ch. 12:6; Ne. 1:6-7). *Abasement* consists of the following elements: self-examination, confession of guilt, repentance, prayer and a new commitment to live completely obedient and dependent on God.

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<sup>28</sup> For more detail, see the acts of the GKSA synod of 2000 (GKSA, 2000: 502-518).

#### **4.4.1.1 Self-examination**

Every church council should take care that the people in their congregation continue to examine themselves prayerfully. The whole church needs to examine herself to ascertain if she is still taking part in the *Missio Dei* (cf. 2 Co. 13:5; Ne. 1:8-9).<sup>29</sup>

#### **4.4.1.2 Confession of guilt and repentance**

True repentance begins with confession of sin. Reeder (2008:48) shows if we want to bring about corporate repentance, we need to encourage confession of sin. We do this by creating an atmosphere of grace. Miller (1999:28) explains that the ingrown church reflects members' unbelieving resistance to the will of the King, which is expressed in his missionary mandate (cf. Mt. 28:18-20). Ingrown churches are indifferent to God's mission and ignorant of it as a great promise. They are not just out of line; they are radically disobedient to God's will. Repentance can only be genuine if a church realises that God's grace is available to them if they confess their sins.

When you study the history of a declining or dead church, you will see that some things are completely wrong. That means the church is in need of repentance, as emphasised by Reeder (2008:47-48):

“This is not as depressing as it sounds because it presents an opportunity for God to do a new and exciting work in the church when we humble ourselves, repent and pray (cf. 2 Chron 7:14). It may be that God has been withholding his blessings because the body has not repented, and when it does, He will open the floodgates and pour out his grace in unprecedented measure.”

Guder (2009:73) is of the opinion that congregations start to struggle with their missional calling as soon as the demands of institutional maintenance assert themselves. He states emphatically:

“I find more and more reasons to insist that the challenge before us is not one merely of renewal, or re-tooling, but of conversion – the conversion of the church to its radically simple missional vocation.”

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<sup>29</sup> The principles in 4.2 should be used in this examination process.

Throughout the centuries, we read how the prophets called God's people to repent. The most profound missional passages in the Old Testament are found in contexts where Israel's failings are exposed and they are called to radical repentance. To add to this, the first recorded command of Jesus was not "Go," but "Repent." Just as with Israel of old, so it must be for the church of today (Wright, 2010:282). The failings and shortcomings of the church are hindrances to God's mission. Unless the church walks in God's way, there will be no visible mission to the nations. Therefore, we can only take part in the *Missio Dei* if we return to Jesus and follow him on his mission. The only way to get back is by repenting (returning). G. E. Dames (2007:1) correctly states:

"The crisis of today's church can be defined as a crisis of vocation, the calling to God's mission, of being, doing and witnessing in faithfulness to Jesus Christ, the Lord. The missional challenge is a crisis of faith and spirit, and can only be answered through conversion, the continuing conversion of the church."

Guder (2000:26-27) concludes that evangelising churches are churches that are being evangelised. For the sake of its evangelistic vocation, the continuing conversion of the church is essential.

#### **4.4.1.3 Prayer**

Prayer is essential for a church to take part in the *Missio Dei*. Barrett *et al.* (2004:119) warns against the lack of prayers:

"A people sent on *missio dei* (the mission of God) who do not constantly pray are bound to lurch along in confusion and pain. Trouble will surely batter them; indecision will plague them; evil will terrorize them."

Throughout Scripture, we see that prayers are essential in God's renewal of his people (cf. Ne. 1:4; Ac. 4:23-31). In prayers (Ezr. 9:6-15; Ne. 1:5-11), we see the close relationship between God and his people. Israel had the habit of being disobedient, but God was always faithful to his covenant. He restored his people to take part in his mission.

In relation to the *Missio Dei* and growth of the church, the Bible shows that we have to pray continually,

- that God will send people to help with evangelisation (Mt. 9:38);
- that the Holy Spirit will open the hearts of those that hear the gospel (Col. 4:2);
- that the Holy Spirit will give us the boldness and insight to proclaim the gospel (Ac. 4:29; Eph. 6:19);
- for growth in faith of those who are young in faith and for protection from the attacks of the devil (Php. 1:9-10);
- for any need in the work that honours God and praises his name (Php. 4:6);
- in addition, that we might be co-workers in spreading the gospel (Ro. 15:30).

A church that takes part in the Missio Dei is a praying church. Question 116 of the Heidelberg Catechism is the following: “Why is prayer necessary for Christians?” The answer is:

“Because it is the chief part of [a] thankfulness which God requires of us: and also, because God will give his grace and Holy Spirit to those only, who with sincere desires continually ask them of him, and [b] are thankful for them.”

As the chief part of thankfulness, it is also a sign of our dependence, commitment and obedience to God. The continuing prayer for the work of the Holy Spirit is indispensable. When we focus on Christ and his Kingdom we cannot stop praying, “Let thy Kingdom come!” (HC, LD 48:123)

#### **4.4.1.4      *New commitment to living in obedience and dependence on God***

The Bible is full of examples on how God restored his people. The process always started with the Holy Spirit initiating abasement in the people of God. One of these examples we find in Ezra 9:3-5 and Nehemiah 1:4. The people sat in the dust and humiliated themselves before God in prayer. All people that identified them with God came and confessed their guilt and dependence upon God. The priests led them in corporate worship, and in their prayers, they confessed that they had drifted away from God time and again. In Nehemiah 10, we read how they made a new commitment to live in obedience and dependence on God. If a church realises that she has not been taking part in the Missio Dei, she needs to make this new commitment toward God and his mission publicly.

In conclusion, the abasement part of the process is difficult to many congregations. Stetzer and Rainer (2010:18) point out that the local church that finds herself in despair, must (re)learn to rely more on God's empowered mission than the personal preferences of the congregation. They conclude, "churches do not change until the pain of staying the same is greater than the pain of change." This part of the process takes people out of their comfort zones and frustrates personal vision, but it is essential if a church wants to re-align her with the *Missio Dei*.

#### 4.4.2 Reformation

In order to take part in the *Missio Dei*, the Holy Spirit also guides the church to return to the Word of God. In the Reformed tradition, the phrase *ecclesia reformata secundum verbi Dei semper reformanda* is commonly used. Guder (2000:150) points out that this tradition emphasises, "the church once reformed is always in the process of being reformed according to the Word of God." Bosch (2009:387) agrees that today all traditions subscribe to this adage. Buys (2011) shows when we consider Reformed traditions concerning church renewal, the idea is not merely to stimulate an attitude of nostalgia and motivate churches to live in the past, but there is a much deeper motivation. The church has to seek principles that have been widely accepted in reformed theology, and she has to seek principles that stand on firm Biblical grounds and apply them afresh to address the contemporary challenges that we are facing.

The Holy Spirit shapes God's people for taking part in the *Missio Dei* by continual encounters with Scripture (Guder, 2000:160). This means the Holy Spirit continually guides the church back to Scripture in order to renew her. Guder goes to the heart of the topic, when he remarks, "Continuing conversion happens as the community 'indwells' the Scripture." According to Prof. Klaas Runia (1968:45), revival and reformation "are two sides of one reality. Just as there are two aspects in the church, the organizational visible and the spiritual visible, so there are also two aspects in the renewal of the church, revival and reformation, they constitute an inseparable unity." Therefore, Runia concludes:

"This is what we need today. Yes, we need revival. We should pray; 'Veni Creator Spiritus! Come Creator Spirit!' But this revival needs ecclesiological form and structure; otherwise it

will soon come to a dead end... The church also needs a reforming that will not only give new enthusiasm and understanding to the church, but also, through the church's witness and testimony in every sphere of life, bring about a revolutionary reforming of individual social life. This will come only when the church returns to its Reformation foundations and builds once again on the doctrines set forth and applied by the Reformers."

Dr Francis Schaeffer (1970:9) affirms that the church in our generation needs reformation and revival. He explains how men think of the two words "reformation" and "revival" as standing in contrast to one another. In fact, both words are related to the word "restore". Reformation refers to a restoration of pure doctrine; revival refers to a restoration in the Christian's life. Buys (2011:7) concludes that the great moment of church history will come when these two restorations come into action simultaneously, so that the church returns to pure doctrine and the lives of Christians in the church radiate the power of the Holy Spirit. There cannot be true revival unless there has been reformation; and reformation is not complete without revival.

When writing on the church that is not missional, Bosch (2009:386-387) comments:

"We know today – what many of our spiritual forebears would have found difficult to accept – that the empirical church will always be imperfect. Every church member who loves the church will also be deeply pained by it. However, this does not call for discarding the church but for reforming and renewing it. The church is itself an object of the mission Dei, in constant need of repentance and conversion."

Bavinck (1960:61) shows whenever a church degenerates to the point that she no longer serves as an organ of the redeeming love of Christ in the world, the church ought to be reformed.

In conclusion, in Scripture we read that every believer is sent out to take part in the Missio Dei (Joh. 20:21). In John 21, Christ restores Peter as apostle. He emphasises that Peter must love him. The moment the church loses her love for Christ, she must be reformed to have a personal relationship with Him. In order to do this, we have to know what God's mission is. Because we are the body of Christ, His mission is our mission. We have to reform by returning to Scripture so that everything we do will be aligned with the Missio Dei.

### **4.4.3 Growth**

In order to take part in the *Missio Dei*, the Holy Spirit lets the church grow in her relationship with the triune God. Often, the Bible uses the concept of *building* and *growing* together (cf. Jer. 1:9-11; Col. 2:6-7; Eph. 2:20-22 & 4:11-16). It is important to have the right insight into growth if we are to take part in the *Missio Dei*, because if we have a wrong perspective of growth, we will become a spiritual club only looking for more members. Then we take the risk of falling for a consumer culture in our approach to ministry, because everything is about attracting more numbers. The right perspective of growth will also help us to be patient and not to get discouraged when taking part in God's mission.

#### **4.4.3.1 Growth comes from God**

The Bible is very clear that God is the one that initiates growth. Paul argues this fact when writing to the church in Corinth, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth" (1 Co. 3:6-7). When writing about Christ to the believers in Rome he declares, "From Him and through Him and to Him are all things" (Ro. 11:36). God uses the church in his mission, but only He has the power to let them grow.

The church does not need a ministry model that comes from Wall Street or Hollywood Boulevard to entertain the notion of growth (Reeder, 2008:27). Horton (2009:11) says the following: "Consistent with the message that it proclaims, the church is receiving its life, identity, growth, and expansion from above rather than creating these for itself and from its own resources." MacIvaine (2010:103-104) explains when we have the right perspective of God's role in mission we get confidence knowing that God has preceded our mission. God will let grow faith where he wants. Our role is to discern prayerfully where and how God is working and to come alongside Him in the work He is already doing. The church has to re-align herself with the *Missio Dei* and follow God's principles. Then the God-given growth will be healthy and we will honour him through our obedience.

#### **4.4.3.2      *Numerical growth is the result of spiritual growth***

Numerical growth is important, but it should never be our main focus. Reeder (2008:29) points out that many pastors and church leaders today strive for church growth as their main goal, but that is putting the cart before the horse. Our objective should rather be church health. God is the one who gathers his church. He is the one who initiates growth (1 Co. 3:6-7). Bosch (2009:415-416) is convinced that “numerical growth is, therefore, in a sense nothing more than a by-product when the church is true to its deepest calling. Of greater importance is organic and incarnational growth.” The church as the body of Christ should focus on being healthy (the way God intends), and our Lord will take care of numerical growth. God calls His people together, and obviously He will call more people to grow in communities that are spiritually healthy, than to congregations that think only of themselves.

The church that takes part in the *Missio Dei* will grow in a healthy way. Buys (2012:7-8) shows that the qualitative and quantitative building and growing of the church have a theocentric, doxological purpose. The main purpose of our growth is to honour God so that he will be everything to everyone (cf. 1 Co. 15:28). He goes on to explain that God’s honour becomes visible when the church grows in holiness and numerically.

#### **4.4.3.3      *Growth is the result of the gospel***

The church taking part in the *Missio Dei* is a gospel-driven church. The gospel is in all accounts the good news about God’s mission. This means the primary instrument that the Holy Spirit uses for the qualitative and quantitative growth in the church of Christ is the gospel of Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Pe. 1:23; Ro. 10:17; H.C., Q. 65). Growth is the result of proclaiming the gospel. We see in Acts that everywhere where the believers lived and proclaimed the gospel, growth occurred (cf. Ac. 2:43-47; 5:12-16; 6:1; 8:14; 16:4-5). In Romans 1:16 Paul states: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is God’s power for salvation to everyone who believes ...”

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the only thing that can truly change people’s lives. Horton (2009:20-23) agrees when writing:

“But the gospel makes us stand erect, looking up to God in faith and out to the world and our neighbours in love and service. Not every piece of news can do that, but the gospel

can ... Only the radical news concerning Jesus Christ can distract us from all the trivial pursuits and transform us from the inside out. Only the gospel can cause such a radical reevaluation of our core identity that we are willing, like Paul, to throw away what we thought was a great resume in exchange for being found in Christ ... The only thing that the church can provide to the world that is truly unique is the gospel. Only the gospel brings a new creation into this present age of sin and death.”

We have to grow in our understanding (cf. Ro. 12:1-2) of the gospel. It is only Christ who changes our minds so that our thoughts will be focused on him and his Kingdom (Col. 3:1-4).

If a church wants to take part in the *Missio Dei*, she has to place the gospel in the centre of everything she does. The gospel is essential for spiritual and numerical growth in a church, and it has to be proclaimed in word and deed by the church every time she gets a chance.

#### **4.4.3.4 *Growing towards Christ and his Kingdom***

God’s mission to reconcile the broken world with Him was executed by the obedience of his son Jesus Christ. Then the father lifted him up and put everything under his control (cf. Eph. 1:20-22; Php. 2:6-11). God appointed Christ as the head of the church. He is the head and we are the spiritual body by means of which He moves on earth (Eph. 1:23). Hughes (1990:63) refers to the following explanation of John Calvin:

“This is the highest honour of the church, that, until He is united to us, the Son of God reckons himself in some measure imperfect. What consolation it is for us to learn that, not until we are in His presence, does He possess all his parts, or does He wish to be regarded as complete.”

We are the living body of Christ (1 Co. 12:12, 13 & 27; Eph. 1:23 & 4:7-16; Ro. 12:1-8). As a physical body needs to grow in order to live, we also need to grow as a spiritual body. To bear the fruit of a healthy body, you have to work hard to be healthy, for sickness can infect the body. Moreover, it is contagious and can spread.

Spiritual growth is not optional to believers. Growing in the image of Christ is part of being his body (cf. 2 Co. 3:18; Col. 3:10; Ro. 8:29; Eph. 4:11-16). In 1 Corinthians 3:1-3,

Paul admonishes the believers in Corinth for still being spiritual babies.<sup>30</sup> As they have not been intent on growing, he cannot speak to them now as spiritual adults. In order for us to grow into a healthy full-grown body, we need to look at the reasons why the church was created and what her function is. If we know this, then we will know what aspects we should focus on in order to grow.

The focus of our growth should be on Christ and his Kingdom. The Bible teaches that the missional church finds her identity in the person of Jesus Christ, not in a denomination. He is the source and head of the church (cf. Col. 1:15-18). The church as a community grows out of Christ, through Christ and towards Christ (Col. 2:19 & Ro. 11:35-36; Eph. 4:15-16). Christ lives in us through his Spirit and we have to grow in his image (2 Co. 3:18; Col. 1:28 & 3:9-10). The church taking part in the *Missio Dei* is one that finds its roots in Christ (cf. Col. 2:6-7) and grows in Him. He is the Groom and the church his bride, the object of his love and provision (Eph. 5:25-33). He is the foundation (the cornerstone) that the temple of God (the church) is being built upon (Eph. 2:20-22; 1 Pe. 2:4-5; 1 Co. 3:10-11; Col. 2:6-7).

The existence and growth of the church is the realisation of God's Kingdom on earth (cf. Heidelberg Catechism, LD 48:123). The church is not only the fruit and sign of God's Kingdom, but also the instrument through which the Kingdom of God should to be proclaimed in all areas of life. We are born again by the Spirit of Christ (Joh. 3). This means we are a community that bears the fruit of Christ's Spirit. When we read John 15:1-8 and Galatians 5:22, it becomes clear that if Christ lives in you, you will bear his fruit. It is through this fruit that the world will see we are a re-created community under the headship of Christ. That means if you claim to have a living relationship with Christ, but do not bear his fruit, you are a liar and have a problem with your relationship with Christ.

In conclusion, to re-align an ingrown church with the *Missio Dei*, such a church has to be guided by the Spirit by a process of abasement, reformation and growth. The church

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<sup>30</sup> Compare also with Hebrews 6:11-14 where the writer admonishes the Hebrews for not growing spiritually.

that abases herself, reforms by returning to Scripture and grows in Christ will focus on the Kingdom of God and take part in the Missio Dei.

In the next chapter, I am going to look at the character traits, values and habits of a church that takes part in the Missio Dei. This will serve as a preliminary paradigm for turning an ingrown congregation into a missional church.

## **Chapter 5**

# **Preliminary paradigm for changing an ingrown congregation into a missional church**

### **5.1 Introduction**

I have shown that the church taking part in the Missio Dei finds her identity in Jesus Christ and his Kingdom. This means every believer needs to be living up to their new identity in Christ (cf. Joh. 20:21). 2 Corinthians 6:1 states, "As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain." The missional church is a community driven by the Missio Dei (Joh. 5; 6; 14:15-24; 16:5-7). It is a community where a stream of living water is to be found. We have to ask ourselves the following question: Is our church part of God's streams of living water (Joh. 7:37-38)?

In order to be a missional church we have to know what a church participating in the Missio Dei looks like and what she does. When a church wants to take part in the Missio Dei there has to be a paradigm to follow. I will now give a preliminary paradigm of a church that takes part in the Missio Dei. This paradigm will be split into two parts. The first part will concentrate on the character traits that comply with the Missio Dei, and the second part will focus on the values and habits of a church taking part in the Missio Dei. When a church upholds the values and continue to practise the good habits, she will show the character traits of a missional church.

### **5.2 Character traits of a church taking part in the Missio Dei**

When we look at the New Testament, we see how the earliest Christian community participated in the Missio Dei. Bevans and Schroeder (2004:10) state that the church can only be a church when she embraces her mission everywhere and in all situations. This is exactly what the early church in the book of Acts did. The church in Acts was a community who lived up to their corporate identity in Jesus Christ through their

*leitourgia, koinonia, kerugma and diakonia* (cf. Ac. 2:42-47).<sup>31</sup> These ministries are regarded as the character traits of a church that takes part in the *Missio Dei*. That means when an ingrown church turns away from her to Jesus Christ and finds her corporate identity in Him, she become part of the *Missio Dei* and will show these character traits. We will now discuss them in detail.

### **5.2.1 Leitourgia (Worship)**

The final goal of the *Missio Dei* is that God will be everything for everyone (cf. 1 Co. 15:28). The church takes part in the *Missio Dei* through true, obedient and dynamic worship of God. Buys (2012) agrees that missiology is rooted in doxology, because worship is the church's final goal. R.W Glenn (2007) formulates his definition of mission as follows: "Through Jesus Christ, and by the Holy Spirit, God, for his own glory, will unite people from every tribe, nation, kingdom, and language to worship him forever in the New World." When a church allows the *Missio Dei* to determine their worship, she will become missional for the rest of her life. Barrett, *et al.* (2004:100) declares worship the act by which believers celebrate with joy and thanksgiving both God's presence and God's promised future. Flowing from her worship, the church has to give a vital public testimony.

Participation in the *Missio Dei* means the worship of a church worship will be focused on God and his honour. Piper (2010:35) declares, "Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man." He goes on to show that all of history is moving toward one great goal, the worship of the triune God by all the nations of the earth. When asked about the biggest commandment, there is a very good reason why Jesus answers (Mark 12:29-30), "Listen Israel! The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength". When a congregation start to live according to this command in their everyday worship of God, their entire lives will be aligned with the *Missio Dei*, because whatever is important to God will be important to them. Piper (2010:35) explains that if passion for God is weak, zeal for

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<sup>31</sup> With reference to Romans 12:4-8, Ephesians 4:11-16 and 1 Corinthians 12:27-31, the conclusion can be made that these ministries are the responsibility of all the believers in a congregation.

missions will be weak. Worship therefore is the fuel and goal of missions. This means true, obedient and dynamic worship becomes a missional launch pad for taking part in the *Missio Dei*.

Corporate worship goes beyond Sunday services. The *leitourgia*<sup>32</sup> of a church participating in the *Missio Dei* is much more than particular techniques of the liturgy of the Sunday morning service. In Matthew 18:20 Jesus says, “Whenever two or three of you come together in my name, I am there with you.” Every time two or more believers come together in obedience to the great command and commission, with the purpose to honour God and to be spiritually edified, a *leitourgia* shaped by the *Missio Dei* will be found.

In order to take part in corporate worship that participates in the *Missio Dei*, a church needs to practise close fellowship with one another. Therefore, the second character trait of a church taking part in the *Missio Dei* is *koinonia*.

### **5.2.2 Koinonia (Community)**

One of the purposes of the *Missio Dei* is to create a community who would point the world to Jesus Christ<sup>33</sup>. This community is to be the light and salt of the earth (cf. Mt. 5:13-16). Buys (2012:13) explains that the New Testament teaches that the quantitative and qualitative growth of the church can only take place where you find a community filled with love. In Christ, the church was recreated for fellowship, and obviously, you cannot be a fellowship on your own.

A congregation can only take part in the *Missio Dei* when they form a loving community. It is through *koinonia* that people learn life’s most important lesson – learning how to love. A life without love is a life without meaning (cf. Mt. 22:37-40). Love can only be realised in relationships and that is what the Christian life comprises. In John 13:34-35

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<sup>32</sup> Liturgy refers to what we do when we meet God, personally and corporately. Chapell (2009:17-18) shows that our gospel understanding is also communicated in the worship patterns of the church. He explains that liturgy describes the public way a church honours God in its times of gathered praise, prayer, instruction and commitment. A liturgy that is taking part in the *missio Dei* is one where Christ takes the lead through his Spirit and in Truth (cf. Joh. 4:23). The Holy Spirit gathers and enables the congregation to meet God in a dynamic and authentic way in order to honour and praise Him. This type of liturgy flows from our gatherings into our everyday lives.

<sup>33</sup> In John 17, we read how Jesus prays for the unity of this community.

Jesus tells his disciples, "I give you a new commandment: love one another. Just as I have loved you, you must also love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." It is only when Christians love each other that the rest of the world will be convinced that they are God's community.

In the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 21 we confess:

**Question 54.** What believest thou concerning the "holy catholic church" of Christ?

**Answer:** That the Son of God (a) from the beginning to the end of the world, (b) gathers, defends, and preserves (c) to himself by his Spirit and word, (d) out of the whole human race, (e) a church chosen to everlasting life, (f) agreeing in true faith; (g) and that I am and forever shall remain, (h) a living member thereof. (i)

The unity in Christ presses upon the church a duty to live as one in order to reach the world (1 Co. 1:10-17; Eph. 4:1-7). Christ made the church and because of that, she is a community (1 John 1:7) that give themselves to each other with the purpose of spreading the gospel (2 Co. 8:4-5). 1 Corinthians 1:10 says, "You must learn to be considerate of one another, cultivating a life in common." What does it mean to cultivate a life in common? In the Bible, the Greek word for fellowship is *koinonia*. Louw and Nida (1988:446) explain that it means "an association involving close mutual relations and involvement." It means to be committed to each other as you are to Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Jo. 1:3; 1 Co. 1:9). Banks (1980:33) explains, "To embrace the gospel then is to enter into community." In this community, believers experience fellowship. Real fellowship is much deeper than just socializing. It means serving together and even sometimes suffering together (Warren, 2004:8).

When a congregation participate in the *Missio Dei*, their *koinonia* will be focused on serving the society around them. The service of love may not only be dedicated to believers. In Luke 10:25-37, Jesus tells the lawyer that we should love our neighbour as ourselves and gives him the example of the Good Samaritan (cf. Mt. 22:34-40; Mk. 12:28-34). We should realise that part of God's mission was to create a new community. This community was to take part in God's mission of restoration, and in that sense become a *missional church*. One of the signs that a community is taking part in the *Missio Dei* is that they share Christ's love for the people outside the community of faith

(cf. Mt. 5:43-48; Lu. 6:32). Through the reconciliation of Jesus Christ Christians are able to walk in God's light and have fellowship with God and each other (cf. 1 Jo. 1:7). This means believers give themselves unconditionally to each other with the goal of taking part in the *Missio Dei* by spreading the gospel (cf. 2 Co. 8:4-5; Joh. 13:34, 35; 17:21, 23). In Philippians 1:27 Paul says, "above all else, live in a way that brings honour to the good news about Christ...Then I will know that you are working together and struggling side by side to get others to believe the good news." God expects us to collaborate in sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ with the rest of the world (Warren, 2004:9). In a closely-knit community, a church can reach out to others better.

The church participating in the *Missio Dei* is a multi-cultural community (cf. Eph. 2:14-22). One of the biggest challenges the traditional church in South Africa is facing is our multi-cultural environment. Horton (2009:11-22) explains that the gospel creates the kind of community that reflects the kingdom's marriage feast that awaits us. He writes, "Religious programs and outreach strategies might create social centres defined by niche demographics, but the gospel creates a genuine 'cross-cultural' community that gathers the generations, races, rich and poor around Christ and his feast of grace." The body of Christ is a multi-cultural community (cf. Eph. 2:11-22). Niemandt (2010:7) concludes that the vision given in Luke-Acts serves as a call to the church that wants to take part in the *Missio Dei* in order to be multi-cultural. This means that if a church displays a tribal mentality, she shows that she is not taking part in the *missio Dei*.

A community of believers who takes part in the *Missio Dei* needs to follow God's purpose for them. Bevans and Schroeder (2004:299) describe a community that takes part in the *Missio Dei* as follows:

"The church community, participating in God's life, is God's special people, a people living God's life of communion in a covenant of relation and love, a people convinced of its fundamental equality through its common baptism in the name of the triune God. But as communion-in-mission, this image takes on a dynamic meaning as God's people on pilgrimage. God's people chosen not for themselves but for God's purposes."

This means that if a church follows her own plans and does not intentionally expand as a community, she is not taking part in the *Missio Dei*.

A part of being a community (*koinonia*) is that the congregation proclaim the Word while they worship God. The third character trait of a church participating in the *Missio Dei* is therefore that the believers proclaim the great things God has done in history as revealed in his Word and as experienced in the everyday lives of the believers.

### **5.2.3 Kerugma (Proclaiming)**

God uses messengers. “Kerugma” was a word for the public announcement made by a herald who spoke on authority of one who sent the message by royal decree (Barrett *et al.*, 2004:105). In 2 Corinthians 5:20 Paul said, “Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ; certain that God is appealing through us, we plead on Christ’s behalf, ‘Be reconciled with God.’” Greenway (1999:15) explains that the word “ambassador” shows the body of believers are official representatives sent from one government to another. Ambassadors do not speak for themselves but for the government they represent. Their words are backed up by the power and authority of their government.

The kerugma concerns the message/witness that every believer shares with the world. The following words in 2 Corinthians 4:5-6 tells us what the missional church proclaims:

“For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord... For it is the God who said, ‘Let light shine out of the darkness,’ who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

In order for Christians to do this they need to be driven and led by the Holy Spirit.

The church can only bear witness to Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. In John 15:26-27 Jesus says, “When the Counsellor comes, the One I will send to you from the Father – the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father – He will testify about Me. You also will testify, because you have been with Me from the beginning.” Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would be sent to be his witness. Greenway (1999:16) explains that the Spirit would empower the disciples to know the truth and declare it to the world. He writes, “The special office of the Spirit is to bear witness to Christ through the lives and from the lips of believers.” When guided by God’s Spirit to take part in the *Missio Dei*, believers start sharing the gospel message in their worship, community and service with everyone around them.

The gospel can only be proclaimed by true witnesses. True witnesses are people who are transformed by the Word and service. This means the kerugma of believers is always attached to their diakonia.

#### 5.2.4 Diakonia (Serving)

The church of Christ is a community that serves. Vorster (2007:18) explains, because Christ took on the nature of a servant we could contend that he became the example of a believer's relation with God. Every believer in Christ is called to serve (Joh. 13), and that means the identity of a church takes shape in service. Bosch (2009:414-418) writes the following:

“Not that the enjoyment of salvation is wrong, unimportant, or unbiblical, even so, it is almost incidental and secondary. It is not simply to receive life that people are called to become Christians, but rather to give life... At its heart, Jesus invitation to people to follow him and become his disciples is asking whom they want to serve. Evangelism is, therefore, a call to service.”

The Bible is clear about a life of service:

- “Based on the gift they have received, everyone should use it to serve others, as good managers of the varied grace of God” (1 Pe. 4:10).
- “So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet” (Joh. 13:14).
- “For you are called to freedom, brothers; only don't use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but serve one another through love” (Ga. 5:13).
- “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life – a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

The Lord's Day 32 in the Heidelberg Catechism gives a beautiful summary of the reasons why we should live a life filled with good works of service.

**Question 86:** Since then we are delivered from our misery, merely of grace, through Christ, without any merit of ours, why must we still do good works?

**Answer:** Because Christ, having redeemed and delivered us by his blood, also renews us by his Holy Spirit, after his own image; that so we may testify, by the whole of our conduct, our gratitude to God for his blessings, (a) and that he may be praised by us; (b)

also, that every one may be assured in himself of his faith, (c) by the fruits thereof; and that, by our godly conversation others may be gained to Christ. (d)

If a church wants to take part in the *Missio Dei*, she has to become what she is in Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament, we see that God's people were always meant to be in service of His mission. In Exodus 19:5-6 God says, "Now if you will listen to me and carefully keep my covenant, you will be my own possession out of all the peoples, although the earth is Mine, and you will be *my kingdom of priests* and my holy nation." These words echo in the New Testament (1 Pe. 2:9), when we read, "But you are a chosen race, *a royal priesthood*, a holy nation, a people for his possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of the One who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." When writing on the church as a sacrament, sign and instrument, Bosch (2009:374) explains the gift priesthood as follows:

"The New Testament books list many gifts conferred on individuals for the benefit of all: teaching, healing, apostleship, etc. The gift of priesthood is never mentioned, however; instead (cf. 1 Pe. 2:9), God entrusted this gift to the community as a whole (cf. Piet 1970.64)."

The church is chosen and called to serve God, her fellow believers and the people in society so that she may proclaim God's praise everywhere she goes.

The early church in Jerusalem had the kind of love, unity and community that drew outsiders to the church (cf. Acts 2:46, 47; 5:13, 14; 6:1, 7). Through her deeds of love she proclaimed the gospel (cf. Mt. 5:16; 1 Pe. 2:12). It becomes clear that everywhere the church presents her to the world through deeds of love and service, there the Kingdom of God becomes visible. When writing on the early church Barna (2005:23-24) comments as follows:

"The early Church fostered the notion that serving other people was the best means of demonstrating the example that Jesus had set for them. Servanthood also showed the transformation that their faith had wrought within them. Like Christ, they lived to serve rather than to be served."

In Matthew 20:26, Jesus says that those who want to become great in the Kingdom of God must become a servant of others.

The church participating in the Missio Dei will also serve the society around her. In writing on the serving church in South Africa Vorster (2007:257) comments, “The holiness of the church does not transfer Christians to an ‘other worldly sphere’ of the ‘spiritual things,’ but implies a deep involvement in the society in order to change society for the better on the basis of Christian moral principles and norms.” Bosch (2009) explains how the Missio Dei has a strong focus on serving justice. This means a church participating in the Missio Dei works hard to see justice being served in society. She is also committed to serving society around her by being a prophetic voice against all forms of corruption, violence and crime.

I have explained the character traits of a church that participates in the Missio Dei. She lives up to her corporate identity in Jesus Christ through her *leitourgia*, *koinonia*, *kerugma* and *diakonia*. In order to do this she needs to embrace certain values and habits. Only when the church upholds these values and practise these habits, will she display the above mentioned character traits.

### **5.3 Values and habits of a church taking part in the missio Dei**

The church participating in the Missio Dei lives up to their identity in Christ through their *leitourgia*, *koinonia*, *diakonia* and *kerugma*. We could call these ministries the character traits of the missional church. The publications of Barna (1999, 2001), Kruger (2012), Miller (1999), Rainer & Geiger (2011), Reeder (2008), Stetzer & Rainer (2010) and Warren (1995) formulate how these trademarks are lived up to in the everyday life of the church. They show how churches participating in the Missio Dei have certain values and habits.

#### **5.3.1 Values**

In order to take part in the Missio Dei, a church needs to uphold certain values. These values are not just spoken, but they are woven into every part of the ministry of a church so that they can portray the missional character traits.

### **5.3.1.1 *Gospel-driven and Christocentric***

The Missio Dei is in essence about the gospel. That means that if a church wants to take part in the Missio Dei, she will strive to be gospel-driven in every aspect of their lives. Reeder (2008:57) says the first thing a church in despair needs to recover is the gospel of God's grace. The apostle Paul told the church at Corinth in 1 Corinthians 15:3, "I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received" – the gospel. The gospel is the power of God to transform lives, and people can only enter into a relationship with God through the gospel (cf. Ro. 1:16; 10:17). Reeder (2008:64) explains that the gospel must become the clear focus of intent in every church revitalisation ministry. He writes the following:

"It must be the priority, the parameter, and the preeminent point of our ministry, so that Christ will be exalted above all. The gospel of salvation by grace is the foundation, the formation, and the motivation for a 'first love' church (and for the life of any individual Christian)."

When a church is gospel-driven, she will be Christocentric. Too many churches today are still denominationally centred. In order to take part in the Missio Dei, a church should be focused on Christ and his Kingdom. Guder (2000:153) explains: "Evangelization as the heart of ministry means that the gospel-centred community continually encounters and celebrates Christ." Vorster (2007:256) argues convincingly that Jesus Christ and his Kingdom should always be the main concern of the church. In order for a church to take part in the Missio Dei, Christ needs to be in the centre of everything she does. In the Heidelberg Catechism (Lord's Day, 1:Q1) believers confess that their lives are not their own; they belong to Jesus Christ. This means a church can only participate in the Missio Dei if everything they do is Christocentric. When a church acts in such a way that everything revolves around Christ, she will become a sign of God's reign and grace in this world.

The church participating in the Missio Dei will be driven by God's gospel of grace, and this means she will be Christocentric in everything she says and does. In the previous chapter, I showed the importance of the gospel to spiritual growth. The second value that churches participating in the Missio Dei should uphold is spiritual growth.

### 5.3.1.2 *Discipleship*

Discipleship is an essential component of participating in the Missio Dei (cf. Mt. 28:18-20). Barna (2001:17) defines discipleship as “becoming a complete and competent follower of Jesus Christ.” He continues to show that churches that are most effective in discipleship have a philosophy of ministry that places daily spiritual growth at the core of their ministry.

The following are examples of some of the texts that speak of spiritual growth:

- 2 Corinthians 3:18: “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.”
- Colossians 3:10: “... and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him”.
- Ephesians 4:11-15: “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ... But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ.”

When reading the New Testament, it becomes clear that spiritual growth is not an optional extra for Christians. It is a lifelong process. This implies that the church taking part in the Missio Dei focuses on spiritual growth in everything she organises, structures and does. In their book *Simple Church* Rainer and Geiger (2011) comment on what they call the “simple revolution”. They show how churches that are transforming people’s lives are building everything by a simple discipleship process designed to help people grow spiritually. Hull (2010:213-214) explains how the disciple-making church has the great Commission at the heart of her ministry. When reading all the material, it becomes evident that a church that takes part in the Missio Dei has a deep sense of helping people to grow spiritually and of making disciples of Christ.

In order to grow spiritually, a church needs to focus on relationships. The community of believers is the body of Christ (cf. Ro. 12:5; Col. 1:18). Just as a hand cannot grow if it is severed from a body, a person cannot grow spiritually if he or she is detached from fellowship with a local body of believers. Every member of the body is important and

necessary for the body to function as our Lord intended. The only way Christians can grow toward the image of Christ (cf. 2 Co. 3:18; Eph. 4:11-16) is by the body building each other in community. Keller (2008:124-125) describes the communal nature of salvation. He writes, "There is no way you will be able to grow spiritually apart from a deep involvement in a community of other believers." That is why the next value of a church taking part in the Missio Dei is what Ed Stetzer and Thom Rainer (2010:99) call "relational intentionality".

### **5.3.1.3      *Relational intentionality***

The Missio Dei is about relationships. When the fall took place, the relationship the human beings had with God, each other and nature was broken (cf. Ge. 3:15). God's mission was to sacrifice his only Son for the sake of reconciliation with people. As the body of Christ we are called to continue the ministry of reconciliation (cf. 2 Co. 5:19). This means the church taking part in the Missio Dei has to be serious about relationships. Barna (1999:73-75) explains that when we read about the early church in Acts and the church throughout history, we can clearly see that relationships are emphasised at every point in the ministry of the early church.

The church taking part in the Missio Dei is a church that is based on relationships, not on programs. Stetzer and Rainer (2010:110-108) explain that the Bible gives the church a relational mandate. Christianity is an interdependent, community-oriented faith. In transformational churches, the members are intentional on developing and building platforms to create relationships. Relationships become the substance of the church culture. People are not treated as projects or pawns to help churches grow, but they are loved and valued as people on a journey with Jesus. These churches realise that programs are not the goal; they are only part of a bigger picture of a changing life and a mission that builds peaceful relationships.

When a church participates in the Missio Dei, the purpose of relationships is to see lives changed through the power of Christ. In order to accomplish this goal, the relational approach is woven into every part of the ministry and practice of a church. The churches participating in the Missio Dei have a fourth value, because the only way a church can be

gospel-driven and Christocentric, relational-intentional and continue to grow is through continual reformation.

#### **5.3.1.4      *Continual reformation according to Scripture***

The church that takes part in the *Missio Dei* is a church that reforms continually according to the Word of God, and therefore becomes part of his mission. In Chapter 4, a plea was made for the continual conversion of the church. In order to reform continually according to the Word of God, the church needs to use the Scripture as her norm. The Holy Spirit guides us through Scripture and the missional church knows the power that is found in continual reformation according to God's Word. When a church stops to reform, she falls into the trap of formalism or antinomianism.

The church participating in the *Missio Dei* assesses her context in relation to her values. To uphold these values, she must practice certain habits.<sup>34</sup>

### **5.3.2    Habits**

Each habit can be clearly distinguished, but at the same time, it is dependent on the other habits to uphold the values so that the church will eventually be characterised by missional traits. All of these habits are important to the ministry of a church who wishes to take part in the *Missio Dei*.

#### **5.3.2.1      *Missio Dei spiritual formation (Missionary mentality)***

In order to be truly missional a church needs to be shaped spiritually by a *Missio Dei* mentality. Stetzer and Rainer (2010:46) explain the importance of a missionary mentality in transformational churches. They describe (2010:34) this mentality as follows: "It is the sense that we are not here by accident but sent by God." These churches understand, and are deeply involved with their cities, communities, and people. They live up to the essence of disciple making in everything they do, be it worship, practising communion or mission. The first question these churches ask is, "To whom and where are we sent?"

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<sup>34</sup> In his book on the habits of highly effective churches, Barna (1999:19) explains that one of the ministry secrets of these churches is their reliance upon good habits. He defines a *habit* as "a repeated behaviour".

The church participating in the *Missio Dei* is focused on Christ and his Kingdom (cf. Col. 3:1-4), but in order to acquire such an attitude they need to be transformed by renewing their minds (Ro. 12:2). They need to see their context and calling through God's eyes and ask constantly, "In what way can we become a part of God's mission in this context?" Reeder (2008:83) explains that this can only happen through a process of personal shaping by the gospel. He shows how the Bible records one case of perfect personal shaping, namely the shaping of our Lord Jesus Christ. Luke 2:52 says, "Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favour with God and man." He explains further that we can learn from Jesus' shaping how to practise the disciplines given to us so graciously by God in order that we may become transformed and grow as disciples of Christ.

The details of *Missio Dei* spiritual formation fall outside the scope of this study. However, it is important to realise that churches participating in the *Missio Dei* all seem to have a process in place with a view to establish the habit of shaping their members. This shaping can only be steered by the ministry of prayer. Any church that wishes to take part in the *Missio Dei* needs to be prayerfully dependent on God.

### **5.3.2.2 *Prayerful dependence***

Churches who want to take part in the *Missio Dei* and be missional are always enthusiastic about prayer (Barrett et al., 2004:120). Michael Green has done comprehensive research on the early church. He formulates the importance of prayer as follows:

"Do you know a church where the priority is prayer? Prayer in individual lives, in prayer cells, in half-nights of prayer? If you do, I can tell you one thing about that church. It will be evangelizing. In some way or other the good news of Jesus will be going out. Prayer is a priority in evangelism. Without it lives do not get changed however great the activism and however enthusiastic the proclamation. Most churches do not see church growth because they do not want it enough to pray for it." (Green, 1979:27).

Most churches would say that prayer is very important, but the church that takes part in the *Missio Dei* takes it to the next level. Stetzer and Rainer (2010:124) show that transformational churches are prayerfully dependent on God. They explain the strength gained from prayerful dependence as follows:

“Researchers referred to prayer as the engine to the churches we identified as transformational. It sustains their worship. It is evident in their community (their relationships). Prayer fuels their missional engagement.”

In these churches, prayer is not a program, but it undergirds everything they do. These churches know that their vitality is entirely dependent on God; therefore, praying without cease has to be a habit of the church wishing to be a part of his *Missio Dei*.

Biblically and historically, the one non-negotiable, universal ingredient in times of spiritual renewal is corporate, prevailing, intensive and Kingdom-centred prayer. The Redeemer Presbyterian Church gives a summary of the characteristics of a Kingdom-centred prayer:<sup>35</sup>

- It focuses on God’s presence and Kingdom (cf. Ac. 4; Ex. 33 or Ne. 1).
- It is bold and specific (cf. Ex 33; Joh. 14:12-14; Lu. 11:13).
- It is prevailing and corporate.

The church participating in the *Missio Dei* understands that in order to follow God’s mission you need to be in close contact with Him all the time. Reeder (2008:95-100) explains the priority of intercessory prayer for the dying church in the following way:

“When we desire to see our churches go from embers to a flame, prayer is the spiritual element that corresponds to oxygen in a fire. Without the oxygen of prayer to produce the flame of renewal, no amount of human effort can make it happen.”

He shows how the early church in Jerusalem was founded on prayer and how the prayer in Acts 4:23-31 is of specific relevance to revitalisation. The words of 1 Thessalonians 5:17, “Pray without ceasing,” ring true in this regard. Miller (1999:98) writes on outgrowing the ingrown church and he shows the importance of the praying local church. The truth is a church can only take part in the mission of God if she establishes a habit of praying every day, and not just sometimes.

Prayer is the chief part of our thankfulness towards God and plays a crucial role in the life of any church who wants to participate in the *Missio Dei*. This has been true since

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<sup>35</sup> See [http://www.redeemer.com/connect/prayer/kingdom\\_prayer.htm](http://www.redeemer.com/connect/prayer/kingdom_prayer.htm)

the beginnings of the church (Ac. 1-2). The habit accompanying prayerful dependence is preaching. In the book of Acts, we read how the church in Jerusalem was conceived in a prayer ministry (Ac. 1) and born in a sermon (Ac.2).

### **5.3.2.3      *Preaching the Word of God***

A church participating in the *Missio Dei* habitually practises transformational preaching in their services. The character trait of *kerugma* (every believer taking the gospel to other people) can only happen if the gospel is preached with clarity in the worship services. Niemandt (2010:7) concludes that this kind of preaching reframes the identity of the church. He writes, “Spirit-led missional congregations anticipate new insights into the gospel. Their preaching becomes a reframing of the text and the occasion.” Vorster (2007:259) argues convincingly that the church is a preaching community. He explains that all preaching should point to Christ as the only hope for the fallen world (compare also Ac. 20:21). People have to be reminded of the gospel and they have to be called to repentance and faith.

The importance of preaching the gospel in the missionary church cannot be overstated. The Scripture makes it clear that everybody needs the gospel, both the believer and the unbeliever. The gospel is the power of God transforming lives (cf. Ro. 1:16). The New Testament warns that we have to acknowledge the possibility of unbelievers or hypocrites in our gatherings (cf. 1 Co. 10:6-12; Heb. 3:12-13 & 4:1 & 10:26-29; 1 Jo. 2:19; Ac. 20:30; Ro. 9:6). An unbeliever could even walk into our gatherings (1 Co. 14:25), and a congregation that takes part in the *Missio Dei* will go out of their way to connect to outsiders on every occasion.

The apostles gave top priority to preaching the gospel. When confronted with problems in the early church, they chose seven other leaders to take care of the problems, because they had to focus on their work of preaching and teaching. The apostles thought preaching the gospel to be of such importance that they said, “We will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word” (Acts 6:4). The church in Jerusalem was a church who successfully participated in the *Missio Dei*, because the Word of God served as the foundation for all they did as the body of Christ. When writing on the primacy of preaching, Reeder (2008:113) emphasis, “God’s thoughts and ideas have

divine power, with which they can grip hearts and change lives, regardless of the weaknesses of the person presenting them.” Reeder presents a convincing argument why a church always needs to be preaching God’s message.

The next habit of a church participating in the Missio Dei is authentic and inspiring worship services.

#### **5.3.2.4      *Authentic and inspiring worship services***

When a church takes part in the Missio Dei, their worship gatherings are authentic and inspiring. They experience true, obedient and dynamic worship in their Sunday services. Such gatherings imply that every believer meets God and each other in Spirit and in Truth (cf. Joh. 4:23). Viola and Barna (2002:50) point to the example set by the early church in the following comment:

“The meetings of the early church were marked by every-member functioning, spontaneity, freedom, vibrancy and open participation (e.g. 1 Co. 14:1-33; Heb. 10:25). The first-century church meeting was a fluid gathering, not a static ritual.”

Reading the book of Acts and concentrating on the words that describe the worship of the first believers we see their liturgy were connected to prayer, praise, service, love, witnessing and teaching. The need for a dynamic liturgy becomes apparent in Acts 2:42. The faith of the first believers became visible in their liturgy. All of their worship flowed from their love for God and their neighbours. It was their habit to gather for authentic and inspiring worship of God.

The problem in the traditional churches today is that many people understand worship to be a static concept. Many people seem to understand worship as a Sunday morning service with a formal program. In principle, the GKSA acknowledges a dynamic gathering and meeting with God and his congregation. The reality gives reason to be worried, because the fruit in many congregations do not resemble true, obedient and dynamic worship. The synod acknowledged in its report<sup>36</sup> on revising the liturgy (GKSA, 1997:739): “Tog is daar rede om aan te neem dat die dinamiese ontmoeting en

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<sup>36</sup> For the full report of the deputies for studying the revision of the liturgy, see the acts of the synod of 1997 (GKSA, 1997:731-732).

aanbidding nie deur almal beleef word nie – en dat kerkdiens en preekdiens vir baie mense voorop staan.” Many churches have fallen into an institutional paradigm that leads to orthodoxy, formalism, absolutism, fundamentalism and rationalism (De Klerk & Van Helden, 2011:7). This paradigm is an obstacle to the church to worship God in a true, obedient and dynamic way.

The people who gather to worship have to understand and experience that they are meeting the Creator of heaven and earth. When believers gather, there has to be an environment where people can connect with God personally and intimately to glorify, honour and praise him (Barna, 1999:87). In 1 Corinthians 14, we read that the gathering of the congregation served to build the church in a qualitative and quantitative way (Buys, 2012:12). The unbelievers were called to repent by the worship and praise of the believing community. Verses 24 and 25 contain the following testimony:

“But if all are prophesying, and some unbeliever or uninformed person comes in, he is convicted by all and is judged by all. The secrets of his heart will be revealed, and as a result he will fall down on his face and worship God, proclaiming, ‘God is really among you!’”

It is important to realise missional worship services are neither inwardly directed, meant to satisfy the congregation, nor outwardly directed, intended to attract the unchurched. It is God-directed (Barrett *et al.*, 2004:100). Many congregations have embarked on seeker services, but the fact that our worship has an evangelising impact does not mean the main purpose in worship is the repentance of unbelievers. Barrett *et al.* (2004:102) explains why it is flawed thinking to evaluate worship for its ability to attract and recruit people. He writes, “Worship is by its very nature God-directed. And understood that way, its relation to the missional character becomes apparent.”

When believers gather for true, obedient and dynamic worship, it becomes a sign that is a challenge and a promise to the world (cf. Php. 1:27). Corporate worship has evangelising power because it is aimed at honouring and glorifying God. Meyers (2010:50) considers how liturgy can be a locus of the *Missio Dei* in the following passage:

“Gathered by the Spirit, the assembly is drawn into Christ’s liturgy, the paschal mystery of his dying and rising. Remembering God’s work of creation and redemption, the people of

God offer praise and thanksgiving and pour their intercession for a world still hungering for the fullness of God's reign. In liturgy, public service performed for the sake of the world, the assembly enacts and signifies God's reconciling love for all creation. Such missional liturgy can only take place in a missional community, a congregation in which God's mission permeates every aspect of its life."

If a church habitually practises authentic and inspiring worship services, it also results in the congregation displaying their "leitourgia" as a character trait.

In order to take part in the *Missio Dei* a church needs leaders who take part in the *Missio Dei*. That is why the next habit is servant leadership multiplication.

### **5.3.2.5      *Servant leadership multiplication***

God uses leaders in his mission, but leadership in a mission differs from that the world understands by leadership. Reeder (2008:149-175) shows that servant leadership multiplication is one of the most effective strategies for church vitality.

Church leaders need to develop and enable their members to be leaders who influence others to take part in God's mission. This is one of the basic ideas of discipleship (Mt. 28:18-20). Barna (1999:31) explains it thus:

"To be an effective leader, one must be called by God to lead, possess the character of a person of God, and demonstrate a group of competencies that result in leadership. A leader implements the gift and ability to lead by motivating, mobilizing, resourcing and directing people to pursue a jointly shared vision from God."

Hull (2010:220) writes on the importance of apprenticeship in developing leaders. He explains, "By organizing and establishing a leadership community, you can expect to keep the vision before the people and see greater creativity and ownership of your goals...This is the fruit and work of the discipling church, so why not start now?" The church participating in the *Missio Dei* knows the importance of practicing the habit of leadership development.

The next habit flows forth from the responsibility of the leaders. They are responsible for the structure of a church. In order to participate in the *Missio Dei* it is very important that the leaders should structure the church effectively.

### **5.3.2.6      *Effective structuring***

The missional church makes it a habit to structure the church according to the *Missio Dei*. This means that the structures of the church are in service of the *Missio Dei*. De Klerk and van Helden (2011:8) explain that structures should be functional and effective for building up Christ's body. Structures should not be formalistic and autocratic. Barna (1999:58) stresses the point that churches can only be agencies of transformation if they are structured to facilitate effectiveness.

The problem in many of the traditional churches is that their structures are still very institutional. This has resulted ordained officials doing all the work and the believer as an official becoming passive. When we compare Romans 12:4-8, Ephesians 4:11-16 and 1 Corinthians 12:27-31 we see that all believers are responsible (personally and corporately) for living up to their identity and building God's Kingdom (De Klerk & Van Helden, 2011:7). Bosch (2009:467) explains that one of the most dramatic shifts in the contemporary church is the movement away from ministry as the monopoly of ordained men. Barna (1999:58) is of the opinion that leaders at great churches are very adamant that you cannot be part of the real church unless you get involved in ministry. Ministry is the responsibility of the entire people of God, the ordained as well as the non-ordained. God's mission becomes our mission in every aspect of our ministry and our structures should reflect this.

If a church is structured to take part in the *Missio Dei*, it will enable the believer as an official to fulfil his or her calling. That is why the next habit of these churches is to focus on gift-driven ministry.

### **5.3.2.7      *Gift-driven ministry***

The churches participating in the *Missio Dei* have the habit of enabling their members to serve God and others with their spiritual gifts. Smit (2003) argues convincingly the importance of gift-based ministry in the missional church. In order to take part in the *Missio Dei*, a church needs to have their charismata (gifts) functioning. The body of Christ is made up of different parts, each with a role to play. In the New Testament, it is clear that every believer has been given certain gifts that need to be used to build the body of Christ (Ro. 12:3; 1 Co. 12:11 and 28-31; Eph. 4:7 and 1 Pe. 4:10). Keller

(1997:157) writes, “Though every believer is prophet, priest, and king, each of us received spiritual gifts that make us especially fruitful in particular areas of ministry.” Buys (2012:14) explains that in congregations where believers are given space and support to use their gifts, the body is built in a qualitative and a quantitative way.

In the Lord’s Day 21 of the Heidelberg Catechism, we confess a gift driven-ministry:

**Question 55:** What do you understand by "the communion of saints"?

**Answer:** First, that all and every one, who believes, being members of Christ, are in common, partakers of Him, and of all his riches and gifts; (a) secondly, that everyone must know it to be his duty, readily and cheerfully to employ his gifts, for the advantage and salvation of other members. (b)

In order for people to have space to serve each other and society with their gifts, most of these churches have implemented the habit of small-group discipleship. This is one of the most effective ways of channelling spiritual growth.

### **5.3.2.8      *Small-group discipleship***

The church that takes part in the *Missio Dei* needs to have a Biblical delivery system for effective discipleship (Reeder, 2008:177). The primary approach Jesus was to deliver his message by a small group of people. In the Gospels, we see how Jesus spent most of his time with a small group of men called his *disciples*. Even when surrounded by the masses, he often spoke to his “small group” of disciples (cf. Mt. 5:1-2). Later, in the book Acts, we also read how the early church gathered in the temple and in small groups in their houses to listen to the Apostles’ teaching, to have fellowship in breaking the bread and praying together (cf. Acts 2:42-47). Hull (2010:218) explains that Jesus and the disciples taught and practised the house-to-house concept. He continues expresses his thoughts as follows:

“Acts 6:1-7 proves the disciples thought in management terms. They placed seven men in leadership positions. Scripture does not record how they supervised the hundreds of others, but with five thousand to ten thousand people, they had to have hundreds of cell leaders.”

Hull believes that effective discipling must take place in a small group setting.

The church that wants to take part in God's mission will need to embrace God's vision. That is why the next habit is a God-centred vision.

### **5.3.2.9 God-centred vision**

God invites the church to participate in the *Missio Dei*; it is not the church inviting God to participate in a mission ecclesia. This means God calls his people – the church – to be involved in the coming of his kingdom. Having a God-centred vision means that a congregation understand its calling. The Holy Spirit guides and gives a specific congregation a specific calling at a specific time to work and live as God's people in a specific context (Buys 2012:8). Barna (2009:26) explains the power of setting a vision and having a clear understanding of God's purpose for each individual church. He defines vision as, "a clear mental image of a preferable future imparted by God to his chosen servants and is based upon an accurate understanding of God, self and circumstances." To take part in the *Missio Dei* a church needs to know to whom they are sent and why. They need God's vision for them.

In order to grasp God's vision it is important to know that part of God's mission is to work in the world manifesting the *shalom* of his kingdom by the following actions:

- Healing
- Justice
- Reconciliation
- Beauty
- Freedom

Stanley (1999) explains that God uses the need of people to plant a vision in his people. His vision evokes passion, gives motivation and direction and transfers these qualities into our purpose. God's vision propels us into action by implementing the gospel to make a difference in our society. This means that many congregations will probably be called to minister in circumstances where the following needs are manifest:

- Poverty and unemployment
- Lack of education
- Lack of healthcare

- Domestic violence
- Dying aids patients and orphans in communities

In order to take part in the *Missio Dei*, a church needs to listen to where and what they are called to do. It must be a habit to *listen* frequently to God in his Word to recognise his vision. Without God's vision, people become unsure of what to do; this results in a congregation becoming aimless and ineffective.

God's vision leads people to be reconciled with Him; that is why the next habit is so important. The church following God's vision will practise relevant evangelisation in their dialogue with society while attending to the needs of the people.

### **5.3.2.10      *Relevant evangelisation***

The church participating in the *Missio Dei* has the habit of taking part in evangelising the people in their community. This means they take great care to address people continually with the gospel and give well thought answers to the problems society is facing. To a congregation it is important that every congregant is enabled to give an answer to anyone about the hope that lives in him or her (cf. 1 Pe. 3:15).

Such a congregation share the Apostle Paul's attitude described in 1 Corinthians 9:20-21 thus:

“And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, not being myself under the law, that I might gain them under the law; to them that are without law, as without law, not being without law to God, but under law to Christ, that I might gain them that are without law.”

A church with this attitude accepts her mission to penetrate people's hearts and present the gospel of Christ to them as an alternative to their idols in order to win them for Christ. The vision these churches receive from the God helps them to engage in effective evangelism. Barna (1999:113-114) writes that many churches see them self as evangelistic, but those that are effective engage in strategic evangelism. They get direction from God, plan and prepare how they are going to proceed.

In order to reach the seekers and unreached in society, a church needs to be committed to God's mission. That is why the last habit of a church participating in the *Missio Dei* can be described as *the great commitment*.

### **5.3.2.11     *The great commitment***

In order to take part in the *Missio Dei*, a church needs to make a great commitment to the Great Commandment (Mt. 22:34-40) and the Great Commission (Mt. 28:18-20). These two Bible passages inform our mission and shape our vision. Stott (2008:34) relates what Dr W. A. Visser't Hooft said at the Uppsala Conference:

“A Christianity which has lost its vertical dimension has lost its salt and is not only insipid in itself, but useless to the world. But a Christianity which would use the vertical preoccupation as a means to escape from its responsibility for and in the common life of man is a denial of the incarnation, of God's love for the world manifested in Christ.”

In his book *From Embers to a Flame*, Reeder (2008:187-200) explains that this commitment is one of the core strategies to revitalise a church. It is important to note that without practising all the other habits, it would be almost impossible to be committed to the great commandment and commission. Commitment is also a habit when you regularly focus on Jesus as the head and saviour of the church.

## **5.4     Conclusion**

To be a missional church implies more than doing evangelism. It has a passion for the glory of God and his mission in the world. A church that takes part in the *Missio Dei* finds its identity in Christ through its *leitourgia*, *koinonia*, *kerugma* and *diakonia*. These ministries can be distinguished from each other, but they cannot be separated. They constitute the character traits of a missional church. A church participating in the *Missio Dei* shows these traits, because she has certain values and habits that she lives up to in everyday live.

The values a missional church incorporates into all her ministries are as follows:

- A gospel-driven and Christocentric attitude
- Relational intentionality

- Spiritual growth
- Continual reformation according to Scripture

To uphold these values, a missional church practises the following habits:

- Missio Dei spiritual shaping
- Prayerful dependence
- Preaching the Word of God
- Authentic and inspiring worship services
- Servant leadership multiplication
- Effective structuring
- Gift-driven ministry
- Small-group discipleship
- God-centred vision and social development
- Relevant evangelisation
- The great commitment

A church that lives according to these values and habits will have a missional leitourgia, koinonia, kerugma and diakonia. These character traits, values and habits form a preliminary paradigm of what a church participating in the Missio Dei looks like.

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