

# Reorientation of mission and its action plans for a reformed missional ecclesiology in Africa



## Author:

Thinandavha D. Mashau<sup>1</sup> 

## Affiliation:

<sup>1</sup>College of Human Sciences  
Deanery, University of South  
Africa, Tshwane, South Africa

## Corresponding author:

Thinandavha Mashau,  
mashatd@unisa.ac.za

## Dates:

Received: 09 Sept. 2024

Accepted: 15 Oct. 2024

Published: 16 Dec. 2024

## How to cite this article:

Mashau, T.D., 2024,  
'Reorientation of mission and  
its action plans for a  
reformed missional  
ecclesiology in Africa', *In die  
Skriflig* 58(1), a3129. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v58i1.3129>

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The quest to understand and practise the church's missionary calling will remain a significant exercise in the church's life of every age. This article aims to provide a reorientation of the mission and its action plans for a reformed missional ecclesiology in Africa today. This is prompted by existing concerns around the demise of Christendom and the decline in numbers among some of the reformed churches in Africa. This is coupled with challenges of dualism, syncretism and Sunday-cult Christianity, which are accompanied by no or less societal impact because of a missionless and inward-looking ecclesial praxis. These are some of the reasons, as well as the professionalisation of mission at the expense of the involvement of the laity in the *missio Dei*, that led to this sorry situation (among these churches) towards the missional ecclesiology and ecclesial praxis of the Reformed Churches in South Africa (RCSA), which are used as an interlocutor from time to time. The main research question is: What kind of missional ecclesiology and praxis should the Reformed churches embrace to facilitate active participation in the *missio Dei*, resulting in numerical growth and having a societal impact in Africa today? Having investigated the missionary ecclesiology and missional ecclesial praxis of the Reformed churches through a literature review of readily available missiological publications, this article suggests that it should be a missional ecclesiology that is founded and grounded on the *missio Dei*, biblical, historical, contextual, practical, and eschatological impact.

**Contribution:** This missionary ecclesiology not only rediscovers the giftedness of individual church members but also encourages them to participate in the *missio Dei* through their lifestyle mission or actions in Africa today.

**Keywords:** evangelism; reformed; missional; Africa; *missio Dei*; ecclesiology.

## Introduction

The demise of Christendom and missionless and inward-looking missionary ecclesiology, have led some reformed churches to face the crisis of stagnation, drastic decrease in numbers, and societal impact in terms of agency and the social justice missional mandate. This crisis has been well documented (Dreyer 2020:250; Ferreira & Chipenyu 2021:2; Oliver 2019:3). Maponya (2018:1) asserts: 'The church has become stagnant and its worship in the liturgy is not missional-driven but rather mainly routine and self-serving'. This is in some instances prompted by the spirit of 'disobedience' (Ferreira 2024:9) and the treatment of mission work 'as an after-thought and appendix to church' (Saayman 1994:3). Mission, in these churches, is delegated to a mission committee or a smaller group of the like-minded in the church. They organise mission activities and projects which mainly require financial support more than ministerial presence.

The foregoing has not only led to the professionalisation and clericalisation of the mission by churches but also the loss of their societal impact as well. The latter is prompted by a theological deficiency in some Christian churches in South Africa, including reformed churches, and is captured by Forster and Oostenbrink (2015) as:

[A]n inadequate theology of work and mission, a dualism between faith and work, and an unbalanced emphasis on the role of clergy and a lesser focus on the role of the laity in the *missio Dei*. (p. 1)

This has led to Christianity in South Africa having no impact in the marketplace beyond Sunday. This has also led to the domestication or privatisation of faith (Forster & Oostenbrink 2015:4), nominal and syncretistic Christianity (Mashau 2007:327), and a spirituality that renders Christianity a 'Sunday cult' (Jentile 2020:1) with no impact on personal, communal and societal transformation. This is 'a dualistic experience and understanding of the practical existence of a Christian' (Manala 2018:7).

From time to time, this article will refer to the missional ecclesiology and ecclesial praxis of the Reformed Churches in South Africa (RCSA) as one of the Reformed family churches in South Africa, but one where the researcher is a member in terms of positionality. The RCSA are also experiencing similar challenges. In their research, Ferreira and Chipenyu (2021:2–6) noted that evangelism has become a peripheral activity in many local congregations and for that reason, the church has lost its impact and experienced a decline. Kruger (2007:2) considers this as ‘the perceived lack of missionary consciousness and activity’. Consequently, this article calls for the reorientation of the mission to bring about a paradigm shift in the Reformed missional ecclesiology and its praxis. If reformed churches understand mission correctly, what kind of actions should follow their missional ecclesiology to revitalise their missionary zeal and actions that seek to register their societal impact and transformation in all spheres of life? The main research question therefore is: What kind of missional ecclesiology and praxis should the Reformed churches embrace to facilitate active participation in the *missio Dei*, numerical growth and societal impact in Africa today? It is my hypothesis in this article that the church is missional and therefore Christian mission constitutes the very nature and heartbeat of the church, without which any Christian church, including the Reformed church, ceases to be a church in the service of the *missio Dei*. A missional ecclesiology that is founded and grounded on the *missio Dei* should facilitate a missional ecclesial praxis that seeks to bring both spiritual and physical transformation to every given mission context, including Africa today.

## Reorientation of mission

### Background

The church is said to be a missionary church by its very nature (Mt 28:16–20; Jn 20:21; Saayman 2000:4), but how churches conceptualise and apply their calling in their contexts, is something that remains a point of discussion globally. The words *mission* and *evangelism* continue to be understood and practised in diverse ways. In the 20th and 21st centuries, some scholars defined mission and evangelism as synonyms that can be used interchangeably with the word *witness*, while others made a clear distinction between the two terminologies. Bosch (1993:12) argues that ‘sometimes the difference was deemed to be merely geographical in nature. “Mission” was something we did in far-off, pagan countries; “evangelism” was something for our own environment’. One sees the influence of Gijbertus Voetius (Van der Watt 2019:1) and Johannes Cocceius (Thinane 2023:2) and their followers on this matter.

The foregoing definition was also embraced by the RCSA since her inception in Rustenburg in 1895. The RCSA was conscious of the missionary calling to the world, but she paid too much attention to the black Africans in rural areas and townships at the expense of those in urban areas. In 1928, the RCSA started with mission work among the Vhavenda

people in Siloam, followed by mission work in Soweto (Johannesburg) in 1950. This outreach project, as one of many, was influenced by her ecclesial-centric approach to Christendom and their traditional understanding of mission. However, there is a growing call within the RCSA to rethink ‘the missionary calling of our churches – or rather: the perceived lack of missionary consciousness and activity’ (Kruger 2007:550). In light of the declining numbers and stagnation, Ferreira (2020:1) opines: ‘It is clear that the RCSA will have to reform missiological to face the new post-Christendom reality of our globalising world’. The new impetus around proposed changes includes efforts to rethink the missional ecclesiology and the praxis thereof in light of the *missio Dei* among others.

## The need to redefine mission today

### Dynamic shifts in world missions

The need to redefine mission in the 21st century is forced onto the agenda of churches and missiologists by significant shifts in world missions. In his article, ‘Redefining Missions for the 21st century’, Brant (2004:2–3) identifies three dynamic shifts in world missions. The first major issue that he raises is the sudden emergence of Christianity as a worldwide phenomenon. The Christian faith has made powerful inroads into almost every country in the world. The second major issue is the fact that the entire globe has become an interconnected global village. The gospel can now be taken to everyone from anywhere in the world without much hassle. Escobar (2003) rightly notes that:

At the start of the twenty-first century, facilities for travel and the flow of information at a global level through the media, as well as colossal migration movements caused by economic change, allow Christians and churches everywhere to experience rich and diverse expressions of the Christian Church. (p. 14)

Christians are now able to rub shoulders with people of other faiths, and this has changed the face of the mission drastically.

The third major issue is that a globalised church is emerging from our globalised world. Churches around the world can network and exchange news more often. Churches across the globe can also pray and work together easily. This development has been accelerated by modern technology, which is also reaching not only urban but also rural Africa. The fourth major issue, which is closely related to the three mentioned by Howard Brant, is the major shift of Christianity to the global South, particularly to Africa (Lenkabula 2008:290). As the Christian faith continues to grow in the South, it has implications for the missionary nature of the church which is captured by Laing (2006:123) as follows: ‘[i]t must continually be translated into new cultures as it spreads’. Consequently, churches in the global South are perceived to be the next Christendom (Jenkins 2007:113), and therefore require special attention when it comes to the reorientation of Christian mission as well.

### Changing world context

The world is not only complex and diverse or varied, but ever-changing at the same time. Verster (2021:119) asserts that '[t]he present world is a radical-changing and totally new world'. In the face of the changing world context, we are therefore obliged to rethink and reconsider our ways of doing mission because the changing world context presents the church with new challenges as suggested by Kirk (1999:14). According to Bosch (1995:2), 'the dominant characteristics of the contemporary world are its thoroughgoing secular nature and its radical anthropocentricity'. Bosch refers to the post-modern inertia that has crept in on Europe, with most people losing interest in the church. In the religious arena, issues related to enculturation, interfaith dialogue, pluralism, development, poverty, globalisation, environmental care, secularism, humanism, urbanisation and post-modern culture are part of the theological agenda in the 21st century. We have also among others, (post) coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) witnessed the growth of the need to interface with technological advancement, global wars and woundedness, and the ecological crisis (Niemandt 2015:1) in mission.

### Identification of the face of the African church in mission

'In Africa, the proliferation of churches and other Christian communities is becoming proverbial', declares Oduyoye (1996:497). The most pressing factor regarding this rapid growth of Christianity in Africa has been the need to identify the face of the African church. Oduyoye (1996) continues to identify at least five faces of Christianity in Africa, represented broadly by five types of churches, as follows:

- (1) Africa has original first-century Christianity in the Coptic and Ethiopian Orthodox Churches.
- (2) Africa has Western churches planted as a result of the Euro-American missionary enterprise. These are churches that have grown to resemble those who created them. Most ecumenical structures are made up of these two types.
- (3) Another manifestation of the Euro-American mission enterprise is the Roman Catholic Church.
- (4) Out of the Bible in African languages and the Western churches have grown the African Instituted Churches, whose bold move to inculturate Christianity has invigorated the church in Africa.
- (5) Finally, Africa is now experiencing a new wave of evangelization that is producing another type of church whose nature is yet to be fully studied. (p. 497)

It is therefore critical for a Christian church in mission to define its identity in the process of defining its mission in the African context today.

### Christian mission in decoloniality

The need to redefine mission is further accentuated by efforts to contextualise or translate Christianity in the African context. Oduyoye (1996:494) rightly notes that '[m]uch of the church's history, mission, and theology of the first millennium of Christianity is yet to be properly claimed as African'. To achieve this, African scholars are calling for an urgent task to decolonise and Africanise missiology

(mission theology) and mission in Africa today (Weber 2017:6; White 2017:1). According to White (2017:2), '[d]ecolonisation is the meaningful and active resistance to the forces of colonialism that perpetuates the subjugation and the exploitation of our minds, bodies, and land'. Its definition includes the decoloniality of faith. Accordingly, Mashau (2018b:3) also states:

[W]e can, therefore, define decoloniality, not only as a political, economic (exploitation of labour and material resources to benefit colonial powers), educational and social project but also as a faith project. (p. 3)

The call to decolonise mission is a call in pursuit of justice in all spheres of life. The question *What is it to be a Christian missionary church?*, in the light of all the social, economic, political and religious contexts facing Africans in the 21st century, is crucial in this quest.

### Towards a working definition

Mission(ary) or missional? Must we choose? Saayman (2010:16) reveals, 'there is no fundamental etymological difference between the two, both being rooted in the *missio Dei*'. The two words can therefore still be used interchangeably. However, the rebranding or reorientation is necessitated by the need to shrug off the historical baggage of unpleasant entanglements of Christian mission with colonialism, slavery and apartheid (Mashau 2020:44–45; Saayman 2010:7). While the term *mission(ary)* would be limited to ordained office-bearers, the notion of *missional* seems to embrace laity or all members of the church in terms of mission agency.

According to Van Aarde (2017):

[M]issional means that it is not the ordained pastors and missionaries who step out on behalf of all Christians, but it is the call of all Christians to actively live out a missional lifestyle through service, through a lifestyle which affirms a conscious decision to proclaim the Gospel. (p. 2)

Van Aarde (2017:2) further asserts that '[i]t is the calling of the entire body of Christ to become participants in God's mission and his purposes'. Another major paradigm shift in mission theology is the rediscovery that mission primarily belongs to the *missio Dei* and not the church. The church thus serves as an instrument in the hands of the missionary God in advancing God's mission and kingdom here on earth. Saayman (1995:188) rightly concludes: 'No church or Christian community or mission organisation can ever themselves be subjects of mission'. Van Aarde (2017) further remarks:

The distinction between missions and missional is that the church by its very nature is missional ... The word missional represents a fresh, profoundly theological, response to a diversity of human needs in the world. This missional function is building missional bridges over which the Kingdom of God can penetrate into the life of people and give them a new meaning. (pp. 2–3)

This approach also involves the unleashing of the priesthood of all believers as participants in the *missio Dei* by using

their charismas. Van Aarde (2017:7) also opines that ‘in the missional model, the function of the “gifts” is to equip the laity so that they can fulfil their calling both within and outside of the church’.

Consequently, the mission should be defined as the empowerment of the church as the body of Christ to be partners with God in saving and transforming the lives of the world population to serve God, one another and the rest of creation for the glory of God and the realisation of God’s kingdom on earth. This definition is a reaffirmation and an exposition of Bavinck’s (1960) definition of mission:

Missions is the great work of Jesus Christ, through which after his completed work as a mediator, he draws all peoples to his salvation and makes them to partake of the gifts which he has obtained for them. (pp. 57–58)

It may be said that mission has nine elements, namely: mission as God’s work, mission as the task of the church, mission as the proclamation of the rule of Christ, mission as transformation, mission as a partnership, mission as empowerment, mission as a prophetic witness and presence, mission as service in the advancement of the kingdom of God here and now, and mission as eschatological. Dyrness (1983) opines that the foregoing definition of mission reaffirms the position of those who hold to the holistic approach to mission.

### Mission as God’s work

There is a growing use of the concept *missio Dei* (the mission of God) in missiological circles in the twentieth century (Buys 2020:5; Otiso 2022:22; Verster 2021:123). Thinane (2023:4) asserts that ‘[t]he *missio Dei* is based in its entirety on the missionary model of the triune God or, so to speak, on the mission of the Trinity’. It was at the International Missionary Conference (IMC) in Willingen, Germany, where the concept of *missio Dei* received serious attention (Saayman 1984:15; Thinane 2023:1–2). Rosin (1972:23) assumes it was after Karl Hartenstein contributed to the debate in his *Theologische Besinnung*, where he placed the mission within the framework of the *Heilsgeschichte* and God’s plan of salvation. The Trinitarian foundation of the mission was established at this conference. Thinane (2022) therefore correctly concluded:

Beyond reinforcement of the rich historical concept of *missio Dei*, the Willingen Conference attributed the missionary enterprise in its entirety to the Triadic God as the source and ultimate custodian of his own mission [*missio Dei*]. (p. 2)

### Mission as the task of the church

According to Mashau (2007:337), ‘[t]he *missio Dei* concept has direct implications for the *missio ecclesiae*’. ‘*Missio ecclesiae* is derived from the *missio Dei*’, but the two are mutually inclusive as partners in God’s mission (see Meiring 1994:41). However, it should be noted that the rediscovery of the *missio Dei* marked a drastic and fundamental shift and focus from the church-centredness to the theocentric view of mission. Thus, the church serves

as an active participant in the mission of God. This relationship is expressed in the following words of Verster (2022):

The church is God’s church, and mission should always be in relation to the Living Triune God. God calls upon the church to follow him in proclaiming and living the gospel. *Missio Dei*, *missio ecclesiae* and the *missio humanitatis* form the basis of the relation between the church and mission. (p. 1)

Verster (2022) further remarks:

The essence of the *missio Dei* is that God is the sending God in sending His Son to the world. The Son sends the Church into the world to present the living God. The human person is then empowered in the world by the living God by his Son and through the Holy Spirit. (p. 1)

### Mission as a proclamation of the rule of Christ

Mission work must always be viewed as the proclamation of the Lordship of Christ. According to Mashau (2012):

[T]he Christological foundation of mission reminds us not only of salvation in and through Christ, but of his Lordship which must be communicated when the church participates in the *missio Dei*. (p. 4)

This is the gist of the gospel proclamation and is done to subject every knee to bow and every tongue to confess the authority and Lordship of Christ, both in heaven and here on earth (Phlp 2:11). The reason why the proclamation of Christ remains key in the *missio Dei* is captured as follows by Thinane (2022):

Christian theology as a whole is built on the person and work of Jesus Christ. In other words, Christian thought is rooted in the inseparable nature of Jesus Christ as the Lord who brings salvation to the world. (pp. 3–4)

It should be noted, however, that the proclamation of the Lordship of Christ also involves Christian readiness to engage in electics – readiness to expose and refute wrong teachings in defence of one’s faith (1 Pt 3:15–17). Christian mission in this instance will always involve the dimension of encountering and engaging in dialogue with people from diverse religious backgrounds and contexts. This will include efforts to listen, discern, judge and make a case for the Lordship of Christ. Writing in the context of Reformed Christians engaging others, Wilson (2021:79) concludes that ‘[w]e also need to be ready to listen to the evaluation of our own tradition, beliefs, and practices by others and to truly hear what they may teach us’.

### Mission as transformation

In his magnum opus, *Transforming mission: Paradigm shifts in theology of mission*, Bosch (1991) advocated for a transformational paradigm of mission both in terms of theology and ecclesial praxes. Christian mission broadly includes more than just mediation of salvation or conversion, but also a holistic agenda that entails the active participation of Christians in transforming humanity, society and the environment. Issues around social and ecological justice,

healing and peace initiatives in the face of global pandemics, wars and woundedness form an integral part of this transformational agenda.

This agenda is grounded on the mission of Christ which is life-giving, life-affirming and life-changing or transforming (Lk 4:18; Jn 10:10). Transformation in this instance should bring about a kind of paradigm shift that is inherently and intentionally driven by the renewal agenda (change of minds, attitudes and interactions) on how we relate to God, one another and our environment (Rm 12:2). Based on the preceding, the agency of the church is about change or transformation in any given context. This is an ongoing process and speaks to the popular Reformed dictum, '*ecclesia reformata semper reformanda* [the Reformed church should always be Reformed]' (Koffeman 2015:1). Accordingly, there should always be a creative balance between *human action* ('always reforming') and the awareness of being 'an instrument in the hands of the Holy Spirit' ('always being Reformed') as espoused by Koffeman (2015:5).

### Mission as a partnership

One of the distinctive features of the 21st mission is the rediscovery of the biblical concept of *partnership*. It is remarked that '[p]artnership in mission (PIM) is a laudable concept in the furtherance of God's mission' (Duncan 2007:54). It is a conversation that started to receive attention in the 20th century; and the relationship between the sending, or mother and the mission, or younger daughter churches is thus interrogated. It was necessitated by the unequal and sometimes, unhealthy relationship, which resulted in paternalism and dependency between the mother and mission churches. Writing in the context of RCSA, Kim (2019:317) remarked the following: '[h]owever, paternalism and dependency continue in many ways in the relationship between the white churches and the white churches only support the black churches financially'. A new ecclesial praxis is needed to embrace the partnership vision, trying to do away with paternalism and dependency. Consequently, Duncan (2007) concludes:

The need is for *metanoia* as a turning from independence in a relationship towards interdependence [*koinonia*] so that both partners can begin to listen to one another in a relationship of comparative equality. (p. 56)

In addition, Kim (2019:316) opines as follows that the RCSA requires a biblical model: 'Perhaps such a holistic transformational model of missions could help overcome tendencies of paternalism and dependency in the missionary situation'.

The equality between the sending and young churches brought some form of relief and fresh air to those who were used to paternalism. It helps to eradicate superiority and inferiority complexes in the practice of mission and evangelism. There are three dimensions to understanding this concept: (1) partnership in mission has as its source the

partnership of the three distinct persons in the Godhead, namely the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; (2) the body of Christ is in partnership with God in mission. God chose to use them as his co-workers in reaching out to all of humanity; (3) all members are not only with God but also with one another in reaching out to fellow human beings and the entire creation or the environment.

### Mission as empowerment

According to Lotter and Van Aarde (2017), '[t]he involvement of the believer in the *missio Dei* necessitates a recovery of the priesthood of believers as the emphatic practice of the Reformation'. This call is made against the backdrop of issues around nominal Christianity, dualism, and the involvement of the laity in the *missio Dei*, as some of the noticeable challenges around Reformed ecclesial praxes. This call also necessitates the need to view the Christian mission as empowerment, where believers are empowered to service in and outside the church (Eph 4:11–13). It is for this reason that Forster and Oostenbrink (2015) conclude:

[T]he church will need to revisit and rediscover its missional theology, refocuses its efforts on broader society as well as empowering and equipping its members for ministry in the marketplace in order to be faithful in partnering with God in the *missio Dei*. (p. 7)

Mashau (2007) further asserts:

The church should be structured in such a manner that the individual members of the church, clerics and laity alike, should join hands in their service, as the body of Christ, to serve God, one another and the world. (p. 339)

The word, *empowerment*, is also about the work of the Holy Spirit regarding the agency of the church in mission today. In this regard, the mission is not only God-originated and Christ-centred, but also Spirit-empowered. The Spirit empowers every individual member to be a witness about God in this world. The coming of the Holy Spirit as captured in Acts 1:8 ushered in a new dawn of the missional church. Mashau (2007) opines:

The church can therefore not afford the luxury of inward looking and become an ingrown church. It must participate fully, utilizing all individual charismas given to them by the risen Lord through the work of the Holy Spirit, in the mission of God. (p. 338)

The Holy Spirit uses the leadership of the church (disciples of Christ) to equip others by teaching them to observe what Christ commanded (as God's Word) as spelt out in the great commission (Mt 28:16–20). A missional church, and particularly teachers of the Word of God, should ensure that all members are provided with both informal and formal training enabling them to serve as instruments of the missionary God. Van Aarde (2017) asserts:

One of the roles and functions of such a leader or an elder, is to be a servant or steward of God, which includes missions, and to lead the church into missional expression. (p. 8)

Consequently, efforts to mobilise, unlock and empower all believers will surely turn churches into faithful agents of the missionary God. Forster and Oostenbrink (2015) opine that:

[I]f Christians were inspired and equipped to understand the potential that their presence, talents and abilities could make towards achieving the aims of God's kingdom in society, we could see a new missional thrust emerging within the church. (p. 1)

### Being missional as prophetic witness and presence

According to Maponya and Baron (2020):

[I]f the church members perceived themselves as being 'sent by God' (*missio Dei*) as their disposition, they would act 'prophetically' through life and worship in the church, and this is what is considered to be 'prophetic' in this article. (p. 6)

The essence of this prophetic witness in society is summed up by Baron and Pali (2021):

We assume that their prophetic role in society will shape their lives to be one that demonstrates service, integrity, to be in dialogue with their respective context, and confront injustices that occur on a daily basis. (p. 8)

The foregoing has both the elements of prophetic witness and dialogue, and both elements are integral in the prophetic involvement of the church in the *missio Dei* and society. The church is called to stand where God stands in mediating not only issues of salvation but also socio-economic, political and ecological justice. This is a prophetic presence as we participate in the *missio Dei*, in driving societal transformation and renewal. Standing where God stands is a missional way of participating in the *missio Dei* and experiencing transformative encounters by 'standing for God', 'standing for the truth', 'standing beyond known borders', 'standing in solidarity with those in the margins', and 'standing for justice' (Mashau 2018a:138–140).

### Missional as service in the advancement of the kingdom of God

The purpose of the foregoing discussion around empowerment is service. Accordingly, 'the primary task of the servant leader is to equip others for service' (Lotter & Van Aarde 2017:3). The missional agenda of a missional church is to serve a triad of the missionary God – serving God, one another and the entire creation of God. This is facilitated or made possible by the gifts that Jesus Christ gave to all the members of his church. In asserting this view, Lotter and Timothy (2017) opine:

The church structure in Ephesians is presented as a missional church structure and in the missional church model the saints are to be equipped by the gifted ones for the work of the ministry (Eph 4:12). (p. 3)

It is for this reason that God's people from the vast conglomeration of nationalities should stand as servants of Christ. They must submit to the Holy Spirit and advance the Lordship of Christ in this world. While service inside the

church remains their responsibility and priority in demonstrating the unity of the body of Christ, believers are expected to serve their neighbours of other faiths and religions, other worldviews, and other ideologies (Gl 6:10). This can be achieved by an ecclesiology and ecclesial praxis that seeks to strike the balance between words and deeds in the preaching of the gospel. The church, therefore, becomes missional with its incarnational and active presence in reaching out to its neighbourhood in the service of the *missio Dei*, as succinctly explained by Van Aarde (2017:2).

Following the foregoing discussion, it should be noted that missional service is in the service of the *missio Dei* for the advancement of the kingdom of God. Costas (1979:6) opines: 'The Kingdom of God is an indication of God's transforming presence in history'. Therefore, the life-affirming and giving kingdom of God should be proclaimed by a missional church. Pillay (2023) asserts:

The church is a community in response to the *missio Dei*, bearing witness to God's activity in the world by its communication of the good news of Jesus Christ in word and deed, proclamation and praxis. (p. 364)

Therefore, one of the radical demands of the kingdom, as the gospel is preached to the nations, is the need to commit to a holistic lifestyle mission, which is captured in the following words of Du Toit (2000):

[T]heir credibility would only be restored by a really convincing life-style which exhibits the exceeding righteousness, the essence of which is the manifestation of the boundless love of God in all spheres of life. (p. 562)

### Mission as eschatological

Mashau (2007:326) notes that '[t]heologians like O. Cullman, W. Freytag and K. Hartenstein developed the theological foundation of missiology from an eschatological perspective', thereby setting the tone or foundation for the mission as eschatological. The advancement of the kingdom of God will be fully realised in the eschaton with the glorification of God and the renewal of humanity and the creation as the goal.

## Action plans for a Reformed missional ecclesiology in Africa today

The reorientation of the mission above has direct implications for a Reformed missional ecclesiology and praxis in Africa today. From a Reformed missional perspective, the following missional principles and practical guidelines can be drawn:

- There should be a paradigm shift in the defining and understanding of mission in the 21st century. The *missio Dei* should always be at the heart of the Reformed missional ecclesiology. The Triune God is the source and subject of the church's missionary activities in the world. Consequently, God urged the church and mission to be fulfilled in the world, using those that God sends, God's missionary people (Jn 20:21).

- The agency of the church in the *missio Dei* is that of being an active participant in the proclamation of the gospel of Christ through words and deeds. It is in this instance that the agency of all believers should be emphasised over and against the exclusive approach of 'ordained missionaries'. Mission commissions of like-minded people with the love and passion for mission are often appointed to support the missionary and approved mission projects through prayers, fundraisings, and planned visits to the mission sight. Instead of professionalising the mission, there is a need to empower the saints or every confessing member of the church to witness to the Lordship of Christ, wherever they go in the world. The entire body of Christ must be mobilised to use their gifts and serve as the eyes, ears, hands and feet of Christ in Africa. This approach seeks to rediscover the office of the believers in mission (Mashau 2008:95).
- The above-mentioned missional approach will go a long way in discarding the Sunday cult syndrome, dualism and syncretism in the practice of the Christian faith. Members of the church will, in this paradigm of doing mission, be encouraged to be church wherever they find themselves in the world, and in whatever they say and do. Individual members of the church of Christ should draw sinners to Christ through their lifestyles, while at the same time, they are expected to be true ambassadors of the cross daily. God's compassionate love and our participation in the *missio Dei* calls for a missionary dimension in whatever Christians do, be it preaching [*kerygma*], worship [*leitourgia*], fellowship [*koinonia*], or service [*diakonia*]. Saayman (1994) concludes:
 

We proclaim not because we know better; we serve not because we are more privileged; we have fellowship not in order to patronize; we do all this – gladly – because the greatness of God's love leaves us no other option. (p. 38)
- Mashau (2008:95) opines that the foregoing suggests that 'the church can only be the true church of God if it does not neglect its missionary calling'. The church cannot afford the luxury of inward looking and becomes an ingrown church. It must participate fully, as an obedient servant of the missionary God, in God's mission on earth.
- The agenda of Christian mission in Africa, as propelled by the Reformed missional ecclesiology and praxis, should be transformative. This speaks to the spiritual transformation but also to social transformation where issues of social justice and the felt needs of African people are addressed. This is demonstrated in Luke 4:14–21 where Christ's missionary agenda is set to include not only the proclamation of the gospel, but also addressing societal challenges such as imprisonment, physical and spiritual blindness, and oppression among others. The pressing and most clarion call to address issues such as poverty and unemployment is addressed in Matthew 25:31–46 where some are denied access to the kingdom of God because they failed to look after foreigners, the hungry and naked people in their immediate contexts.

The humanising dimension of the Christian mission cannot be ignored or postponed any longer in the dehumanising African context where most people remain vulnerable to many social ills in the continent.

- While evangelism remains the core of God's missionary activities in the world through the participation of the church, mission boundaries cut beyond the traditional geographical understanding. As in the case of the encounter between Jesus Christ and the Samaritan woman in John 4, issues around religious and belief systems, convictions, gender, race, poverty, homelessness, hunger, sickness, and nakedness are issues that must be addressed in the efforts to mediate the proclamation of the gospel. For these reasons and many more, mission in such a time as this can no longer be viewed in terms of the church sending missionaries overseas or to another culture, but as something that can also be done in one's backyard, among one's people (Kirk 1999:24), and the masses of diverse people from the world (Greenway & Mashau 2007:10). The church must be alert to new frontiers in mission, such as urbanisation and multicultural ministry (Greenway 1991:553, 1999:6).
- While engaging in missiological dialogue with people of other faith formations and at times partnering with them in the fight against social injustices in Africa, Reformed missional ecclesiology also emphasises the primacy of Scripture in mission (Mashau 2008:95), and the supremacy of Christ. The verbal proclamation of the Word, with the uniqueness of salvation in and through Jesus Christ as the central message, must be communicated by the church in mission. Five considerations regarding Jesus Christ must be proclaimed in the mission, namely: (1) Christ is unique as the only Saviour and reconciler; (2) Christ is unique as the peacemaker between races, tribes, and peoples; (3) Christ is unique as the teacher and manifestation of truth and righteousness; (4) Christ is unique as the only victor over Satan and sin; and (5) Christ is unique as the only one who offers resurrection and eternal life (Greenway & Mashau 2007:150–152).

While emphasising the need to remain true to the Scriptures, Tuit (2006) rightly concluded that:

Whatever else missionaries may do, be it as church planters, church developers, theological educators, mentors, or whatever else, [they] find [their] basis and direction in the fact that they are ministers of the Word of God. (p. 125)

- The reorientation of the mission above suggests a Reformed missional ecclesiology that is contextual. The decolonisation and Africanisation of the Christian mission remain imperative in this instance. Christian mission must participate in the mission of God by addressing African issues such as issues of poverty, unemployment, neo-colonialism, consumerism, global pandemics, wars, and other social and health issues confronting African people, and by implication global communities.

- As the church seeks to be contextual in its approach to mission, without compromising the gospel promises and demands, it should embrace the hope-giving eschatological vision of a missional church. This approach should guide the church to be actively involved in the renewal of the earth, and therefore actively address issues of ecological degradation, earth keeping and sustainable development. The mission of the church and the advancement of the kingdom of God here on earth will continue until the *eschaton*. The mission of the church will only become irrelevant when Christ appears for the second time in glory. The future appearance of the glory of God becomes a missionary motif for the church today. 'Missions will come to an end only when the new heaven and the new earth with a new humanity is revealed' (Tuit 2006:134).

## Conclusion

The foregoing discussion reminds us that the reorientation of the mission is an exercise that remains relevant to the church of every age. It also calls for a Reformed missional ecclesiology that is biblical, ecclesiastical, contextual, eschatological and practical. It calls for the active participation of the members of the body of Christ in the *missio Dei*. It seeks to acknowledge and speak of God as a missionary God. It seeks to assist ingrown churches to embrace a missional ecclesiology and ecclesial praxis that will facilitate a turn-around strategy, leading to mission consciousness, but also active participation in the *missio Dei* through words and deeds.

## Acknowledgements

### Competing interests

The author declares that he has no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced him in writing this article.

### Author's contribution

T.D.M. is the sole author of this research article.

### Ethical considerations

An application for full ethical approval was made to the College of Human Sciences\_CREC UNISA and ethics consent was received on 22 August 2024. The ethics approval number is 5078.

### Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

### Data availability

Data sharing does not apply to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this research.

## Disclaimer

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