'Missio Dei' as embodiment of 'Passio Dei'.

The role of god-images in the mission-outreach and pastoral caregiving of the church – a hermeneutical approach

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Abstract

The following hermeneutical question is posed, namely whether the concept of 'mission' in missional activities should be interpreted in imperial or rather in pastoral categories? It is argued that the paradigmatic notion of imperialistic expansion runs the danger of interpreting the missio Dei in terms of powerful ecclesial categories that focuses more on denominational maintenance than on the sacrificial ethos of serving and caregiving within contexts of interculturality. Thus, the shift from omni- to passion-categories in a theology of missional engagement. It is hypothesised that, rather than the pantokrator-framework and power categories stemming from the Roman emperor cult and Egyptian mythology, sending actions in 'mission' should be based on the passio Dei. In the mission-outreach of the church, the theological concepts of ḥesed and oiktirmos can help the sending-ministry of the church to overcome skewed perceptions regarding 'traditional missiology' and its painful association with colonial imperialism. The theological argument for a more pastoral approach to the missio Dei is based on the following presupposition: the passio Dei defines 'practice' and 'mission' in practical theology as compassionate and hospitable being-with. Thus the imperative for an ecclesiology of home (xenodochia).

Keywords: Missiology, missio Dei, passio Dei, theology of compassion, ecclesiology of home, xenophobia,

1. Introduction

At stake in a theological reflection on the concept 'mission'[2] in missiology, is inter alia the notion of authority (in the name of…) and its connection to ecclesial categories (official stance and dominiumship) that focus more on denominational maintenance than on existential life issues within cultural diversity. Thus, the concern of David Bosch (2001:9) that missiology should not become a disinterested enterprise. It should look at the world from the perspective of commitment with

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[2]   "In popular imagination mission is often misconceived as Christians crossing national frontiers to spread the gospel. This view reflects a past age when Christians tended to divide the world neatly into Christian and non-Christian" (Kirk 1988:434).

the intention to focus on "all humanity". "*Missio Dei* enunciates the good news that God is a God-for-people" (Bosch 2001:10).

If Christianity is indeed by its very nature missionary (Bosch 2001:9), the quest for a kind of theological hermeneutics regarding the character of that authority immediately surfaces. In fact, authority is such a fundamental issue in missionary activities, that Van Kooten and Barrett (2004:139) argue that 'missional authority' should be incorporated and included in formal documents on missionary transformations. The reason is the following: "A church conditioned by Christendom is often tempted to begin with the concept of authority as defined by culture and then seeks to find whether the church has that kind of authority" (Van Kooten and Barrett 2004:139). Thus, my basic assumption that authority and its connection to the notions of the power and kingdom of God, should stem rather from theopaschitic categories than from categories and paradigms determined by imperialistic images. Thus, the focus on compassionate God-images and the attempt to research the dominating imperial categories during early Christianity that impacted on missionary activities and God-images.

It is indeed a challenge in an academic environment how to reflect theologically on the notion of commission[3], its connection to the apostolate (from *apostell*)[4] of the church (notion of spiritual vocation and conviction of 'being sent by God' - *missio Dei*), and overarching paradigm of the 'kingdom of God' (Müller 1975:131). In theory formation[5] for the discipline of missiology, it is indeed a question how to address the notion of the omnipotence of God and its connection to actions of proclaiming the gospel within different cultural environments. Specifically, religious contexts that are framed by non-Christian paradigms and informed by different interpretations regarding the divine realm of life.

With theory formation is then meant the basic, fundamental propositions and paradigms (patterns of thinking within processes of conceptualisation) that determine the scientific basis of a discipline, inform logic argumentation, direct decision-making and characterise praxis and contextualisation. In the discipline of mis-

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[3] The notion of the apostolate in the early church was originally not an office but a commission "in the sense of the authorization which is limited in time and space, and which is conditioned materially rather than personally, as in the Jewish concept of šālîa" (Müller 1975:131).

[4] "The LXX, following the Heb. Text, uses apostellō and its cognates to denote not the institutional appointment of someone to an office, but the authorization of him to fulfil a particular function or a task which is normally clearly defined" (Von Eicken and Lindner 1975:127).

[5] Although it is virtually impossible to provide a kind of formal description and definition of what is meant by mission in missiology, a disciplinary approach makes it imperative to reflect on a rational and logic manner on the basic confines of missionary/missional activities. "Ultimately, mission remains undefinable; it should never be incarcerated in the narrow confines of our own predilections. The most we can hope for is to formulate some approximations of what mission is all about" (Bosch 2001:9).

siology and its connection to praxis thinking and cross-cultural communication, it is indeed a challenge to investigate the mandate, and purpose of the Christian church's missionary work and its connection to methodology and epistemology.

According to David Bosch (2001), the connection between the 'missio Dei' and its theological roots, is fundamental for sound theory in the sending activities of the church. Bosch (2001:1) aptly points out that a theological synopsis of 'mission' as concept, has traditionally been used as (a) propagation of faith, (b) expansion of the reign of God, (c) conversion of the heathen, and (d) the founding of new churches. Behind the notion of being sent into the world, was the paradigmatic notion of power and authority. This notion of being sent, was always closely connected to the theological paradigm of the authority of God as illustrated by the theological, overarching concept of the *missio Dei*; "The *missio Dei* institutes the *missiones ecclesiae*" (Bosch 2001:370, 519).

In the traditional ecclesiocentric approach of Christendom, 'mission' often has been interpreted in terms of aggressive, evangelistic church campaigns exercised as 'church planting' activities within processes of civilisation. "Mission boards emerged in Western churches and understood themselves as sending churches, and they assumed their destination of their sending to be the pagan reaches of the world that needed both the gospel and 'the benefits of Western civilizations'" (Guder 1998:6). The 'new' challenge is to overcome cultural polarization and transcend established categories of empire, ethnicity, language, and social status (Carson 2008:viii). Rather than categories of imperialistic power, categories of compassionate caregiving should direct missional activities.

What then is meant by 'mission' as an authoritative category? Should authority be interpreted in *omni*-categories like in many imperialistic interpretations of the 'missio Dei', or, rather, in the *passio*-categories of theopaschitic theology?

The plight of refugees all over the globe[6] brings about severe theological questions regarding the mission of the church in this world. Within ecclesiology and missiology, the homelessness and displacement of refugees question the validity of the traditional understanding of the power of God (*pantokrator* – omnipotence), and its connection with the notion of the *missio Dei* within the paradigmatic framework of sending as an expansion of the gospel. Expansion, was most of times being interpreted as an anti-

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[6]   With reference to theory formation in theology, the assumption is that the current ecclesial and ministerial challenge is to see the migrant crisis as a sign of our time. The crisis should be viewed as the place and space for contextualising our theology (Migration als Ort der Theologie, Kessler 2014); faith seeking effectiveness (Bonino in Davies and Reimer 2015:306). The challenge is to perform practical theological reflection and ministerial engagement within the complexities of life itself rather than a sterile focus on internal ministerial and ecclesial issues (ecclesial maintenance).

position over against local cultures[7] and the so-called pagan religions. The mission-scenario was closely related to, and thus dominated by, political agendas regarding national and international power struggles, as embedded in culture.

The paradox between Christ and culture (Niebuhr in Carson 2008: 13-29), and the urge to converse people and transform cultures, were often primary driving factors in the mission activities of sending churches. Within the interaction and interplay between the gospel and its impact on culture, as well as its shaping impact on the conceptualisation of the confessions of the church, the question surfaces: what are the theological categories that determine the church's understanding of power, very specifically the power of God?

2. Quest for a new paradigm in the missional outreach of the church

There were indeed many attempts to replace mission by other concepts. For example, to connect diakonia with the notion of witness (*marturia*) (The Willingen Conference of 1952, in Bosch 2001:511). One can add *leitourgia* to the list as well; even supplement *theoria* (critical assessment) with *poiesis*: imaginative creation or representation of evocative images (Stackhouse in Bosch 2001:512). However, the theological question still prevails: what kind of God-image should direct the process of 'mission' and all its possible variants in order to steer away from imperialistic, ecclesial and clerical expansionism?

The term 'missional' refers to the fact that mission is not just a program of the church. Mission rather defines the essence of our being the church, as God's sent people. We are defined by mission: "Thus our challenge today is to move from church with mission to missional church" (Guder 1998:6)[8].

Furthermore, missional[9] is an attempt to deal with the tension in the notion of being sent by God in this world and the impact of culture and context on theological terminology and ecclesial epistemology. "The interaction between the gospel and

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[7] In general, one can say that culture refers to patterns of meanings embodied in symbols; a system of inherited and historical embedded conceptions as embodied in, for example, life views, belief systems, ideas and their connection to core values, and paradigmatic frameworks for socialising and human achievements/productive actions. For further discussion, see Carson 2008: 2-12.

[8] For Hobbs (2004:160), the core indicator of a missional church, is the spreading and proclaiming of the narrative of salvation.

[9] "Despite all this, I am still absolutely certain of my vocation as a missionary, despite all objective evidence of post-colonial history to the contrary. It is this conviction which has inspired me to call myself a "missionary-missiologist", studying the history of the missionary movement in Africa. For this reason I find it somewhat jarring to read books and articles which discuss "the missional church" and "missional theology" (e.g.Guder 1998; Ebeling & Meier 2009). (Saayman 2010:6The term missional as alternative to the old missionary is actually very new; it started appearing in the mid-1990s in articles and missiological discussions" (Saayman 2010:9).

all human cultures is a dynamic one, and it always lies at the heart of what it means to be the church'' (Guder 1998:14). On the one hand, the church understands that under the power of God, the gospel shapes the culture of a society – its assumptions, its perspectives, its choices. In the connection between gospel and power, mission became an indication of the church's transforming impact on its context (Guder 1998:14). "On the other hand, because the church is incarnational, it also knows that it will always be called to express the gospel with the terms, styles, and perspectives of its social context" (Guder 1998:14).

But is this shift towards 'missional' merely the artificiality of terminological word-play?

Saayman (2010:10) questions the shift from missiology to mission in order to free the sending of the church from its colonial baggage[10] and association with the Constantinian dispensation: "choosing between *missionary* and *missional* is like choosing between six of the one and half a dozen of the other[11]." The point is, a change in terminology not necessarily guarantees a change in paradigm and strategic positioning.

For many decades in the history of the mission-outreach of the church and ecclesial attempts to 'evangelise' non-Christian societies, the theological notion of the *missio Dei* was demarcated by two performative mission-movements:

• The *movement 'inside'*, namely how to establish the influential position of the church within different cultural contexts. The focus was how to maintain denominational interests, safeguard confessional and dogmatic truths and establish ecclesial power within political conflicts of national and international developments. There was a close connection between missiology and 'church

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[10] See the following remark by Womack (2011: 446): "Colonial administrators served as ‚super-objective' observers who used the methods and terminology of new sciences to define colonial reality without reference to the natives' point of view. European claims to superior rationality caused blindness to concrete human history and a type of selective vision that identified meaning only in the body's physical characteristics."

[11] "The whole debate is taken up by what the present, emerging postmodern church must look and be like to satisfy the present community of Western postmodern people. The debate is therefore about the church as work-in-progress for today, but with no anticipatory future dimension (????:159). Indeed, in Ebeling's words (:160), "The view forward ("Der Blick nach vorn"), the great vision, has been lost in the present-day church" (my translation). This lack of eschatological perspective is a result of the fact that the emerging church is essentially linked to the liberal-capitalist economical system with its meta-narrative of steady, limitless prosperity of self-regulating markets which has, however, been collapsing over the past two years (:157). In Ebeling's view (:161), therefore, missional theology as expressed especially in the growth of the emerging church, is too closely linked to a context in which the First World "still plays the first violin" [in the orchestra – my translation], and therefore still occupies the dominant position. It is perhaps for this reason that continental European theologians are placing such great emphasis on "transformation" in terms of the reign of God as central dimension of missional theology (Ebeling 2009 passim). (Saayman 2010:14-15).

planting' (ecclesial expansion). The mission-movement was associated with ecclesial polity and clerical power.

- The *movement 'outside'* was about applying 'apostolate thinking' (Hoe-kendijk1967) and 'evangelistic programs' as outreach to non-believers. The gospel should be preached (proclamation - the kerygma paradigm) in order to convert 'heathens' to the *corpus Christianum*[12]; heathens should be Christianised and baptised. By means of medical, hospital and educational facilities, the 'good news' should be spread and superstition should be combated. There was a close connection between missiology and diaconic actions of outreach. The mission-movement of the church was associated with processes of 'colonialisation' 'culturalisation'; the colonial expansion of the Western world into the so called 'Third World' (Bosch 2001:1).

In the light of the previous ecclesial movements and their connections to ecclesial authority as a kind of colonial imperialism, two brief case studies are presented. They could serve as illustrations of ecclesiocentric expansionism and how the interplay between *omni*-categories stemming from threat power (for example: omnipotence and its connection to authoritarian political struggles) often determined the quality and character of God-images in the history of the mission activities of the church.

2.1 The case of Cuzco (Peru): execution of Túpac Amaru13 in the name of God and the king of Spain

Túpac Amaru or Thupa Amaro (Quechua: *Thupaq Amaru*) (1545–1572) was the last indigenous monarch (Sapa Inca) of the Neo-Inca State, remnants of the Inca Empire in Vilcabamba, Peru. In 1571 he succeeded his brother Titu Cusi.[14] During the year 1572 he led a resistance group over against the Spanish invaders. He was captured and arrested in September and marched into Cuzco. He and other Inca generals were sentenced to death by hanging. While he was in prison, a priest came and visited him and fellow captives, indoctrinating them to be converted before their execution. They were to be baptised and Túpac Amaru received a 'Christian name', i.e. a Spanish name.

According to an eyewitness, Túpac Amaru was led through the streets of Cuzco between Father Alonso de Baranza and Father Molina, who instructed him for the benefit of his soul. Vega Laoiza has him riding a mule with hands tied behind his back and a rope around his neck (Jacobs 1998). A lot of Incas came into Cuzco to

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[12] "The cultures that resulted in Europe and later in North America are called Constantinian, or Christendom or technically the corpus Christianum" (Guder 1998:6).

[13] Tupac Amaru, The Life, Times, and Execution of the Last Inca © 1998 James Q. Jacobs http://www.jqjacobs.net/andes/tupac_amaru.html. Accessed: 05/05/2016

[14] Online: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/T%C3%BApac_Amaru. Accessed: 26/06/2016

support Túpac Amaru and to lament the loss of their leader. Reportedly 10,000 to 15,000 witnesses were present.

A scaffold had been erected on the central plain of Cuzco before the cathedral. Despite the mourning of the crowd, Túpac Amaru calmly raised his hand and summoned them not to grieve about his coming death. He referred to an event in his youth where he disobeyed and annoyed his mother. She then cursed him and forecasted a cruel and unnatural death. He was convinced that he should accept his coming death with courage and dignity. However, a priest stepped in and proclaimed that he is dying not according to the curse, but in the name of the King of Spain, Philip II, and God.

According to a report, Túpac Amaru renounced Incan religion and admitted to the crowd that he had become a Christian stating that everything the Incas had said about their relationship to the Sun was false. His last words were: "*Ccollanan Pachacamac ricuy auccacunac yahuarniy hichascancuta*" (Mother Earth, witness how my enemies shed my blood).[15]

2.2 The case of the Mau-Mau (Kenya; Agĩkũyũ-culture): church planting and the abuse of African hospitality

Josiah Murage (2011), in his research on *The Concept of Ũtugi within the HIV & AIDS Pandemic*, advocates for the connection between pastoral caregiving and the Christian tradition of hospitality within the cultural context of Kenya. The concept of *ũtigi* is related to the language of the Agĩkũyũ community in Kenya. It can be translated as hospitality and refer to what one can call the freedom of the guest (Murage 2011: 82). "It means the creation of a free space where the vulnerable people in the society are welcomed, not only as guests, but also as part of that community" (Murage 2011: 82). *Ũtugi* is an exposition of the cultural custom in African spirituality, namely to share love and affection to others and to put the idea of sharing into practice. The saying in Kenya-culture and Agĩkũyũ-tradition is that to live with others is to share and to have mercy on one another since only witchdoctors are allowed to live and eat alone (Murage 2011: 82).

According to Mutugi (2001: 4), "African hospitality is expressed in a loving way... when a visitor comes, you welcome him or her by ushering him or her to a seat, and then you give him or her something to eat or drink. Then you share or socialize, seek to know, politely the problems or issues or news that brought him or her".

The Agĩkũyũ community refers to a hospitable person as *Mũtugi*, which simply means a hospitable person who is also a gracious person (Muragi 2011: 84). The opposite of *ũtigi* (hospitality) is *ũkarĩ* (selfishness). Cares, charity, hospitality, communal sharing, all of them help to shape caregiving within the Agĩkũyũ-culture.

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15 Online:https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/T%C3%BApac_Amaru

The word "Ũtugi" thus means to the Agĩkũyũ and its association with gracious, generosity, accommodating, appreciating and loving person have been examined. In this manner, the Agĩkũyũ refer to Ngai (God) as Mũtugi. This perception is confirmed by Mbiti (1969:45) as he notes that God is also described as "gracious" among Africans. To be a Mũtugi (a hospitable person) is, therefore, to participate in Ngai's (God's) acts of Ũtugi (generosity, accommodativeness, appreciative love). It has an element of liberating humanity and nature; hence, it includes the process of improving the socio-economic and political well-being of those in need and those who are vulnerable within the society (Murage 2011: 85).

Mbiti (1971:92) observes that every community has a myth which explains how God gave the land to their ancestors to own and till. For instance, among the Agĩkũyũ, Meru, Aembu and Akamba, land is seen as a unifying factor among the descendants, the family, the clans and the communities. For the Agĩkũyũ, Meru, Aembu and Akamba, to be human is understood as owning land in a communal way (Kenyatta 1938:120)[16].

The Agĩkũyũ found themselves in overcrowded areas which were not fertile for farming and had little grazing land for their cattle. The Agĩkũyũ regard the land as the mother of the community because "it is the soil that feeds the people and at death the people are buried in the soil which nurses the spirit" (Kenyatta 1938:21). Therefore, the Mau-Mau people found life unbearable and they opted to fight back as a way of regaining their humanness (Murage 2011, 112-113).

With reference to the two case studies, I concur with Bosch (2001:367) that we need a fundamentally new and different model than the imperialistic expansion paradigm: "mission must be understood and undertaken in an imaginatively new manner today" (Bosch 2001:367). Thus, the argument that the *missio Dei*[17] (sending categories) should be founded and supplemented by the *passio Dei* (compassion categories) and not by *omni*-categories.

3. Christian imperialism (omni-categories): the impact of the 'Emperor Mystique'

More and more it is accepted that the Roman and Hellenistic paradigm of imperialistic thinking, had a huge impact on conceptualisation in Christian reflection. Michael Schaper, in the edition of Geo Epoche: *Die Kunst der Antike* (2014:1), points out that Christian faith and art, especially in the middle ages, were dominated by static Hellenistic paradigms that tried to glorify God in terms of imperialistic categories.

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[16] The colonial government forced the Agĩkũyũ into colonial camps and seized their land, thus, making the practice of Ũtugi impracticable (Wachanga 1978:24).

[17] According to Bosch (2001:390), the new image of mission, implies that mission is not primarily an activity of the church, but an attribute of God. "God is a missionary God" (Aagaard in Bosch 2001:390).

Divine images portrayed a static, powerful deity. Descriptions and confessions did not make space for human beings within their vulnerability and predicament of suffering.

One theory in the interpretation of early Christian thinking and iconic depictions of God, is called the theory of the "*Emperor Mystique*" (Mathews 1993:12).

The "*Emperor Mystique"*-approach refers to the theory in iconography accepted by art historians, namely that the images of Christ in Early Christian imagery, were derived from images of the Roman emperor. "Both the shape and the power of the images, according to this theory, come from reliance on imagery formerly used to present the emperor. I call this approach the 'Emperor Mystique'. It is a 'mystique' in so far as it involves a reverence bordering on cult for everything belonging to the emperor. To such historians dropping the word 'imperial' into a discussion represents an appeal to a kind of ultimate value beyond which one never look" (Mathews 1993: 12).

The Hellenistic and Roman background of icons should be acknowledged (Nyssen 1982:413). It is quite understandable that in their search for identity, the followers of Christ in the Roman era expressed their identities in terms and images that draw on widely shared cultural categories. The similarities are evident. However, Christians indeed reinterpreted such categories in a different and unique way. According to Harland (2009: 47), the letters of Ignatius of Antioch, which reflect group life in two central hubs of early Christianity – Western Asia Minor and Syrian Antioch – provide a case in point. In these writings Ignatius drew heavily on categories from the culture of Greco-Roman cities in order to build up the identity of the Christian communities.

It should be mentioned here that Byzantium art cannot be separated from the historical background when *basileia ton Rhomaion* was transformed to Byzantium and its Greek roots (Evans 2004: 15). In 1557 the name of the empire was replaced with the term Byzantium. Constantinople was seen as the place for the restoration of political and religious power (Evans 2004: 5).

The attempt to guard against pagan influences was predominant in the history of Christianity. It even led to theories that there is a close connection between the Isis cult and the development of private home altars (Weitzman 1982:5). It was believed that Serapis, with his shrine situated in Alexandria, united in himself the underworld powers of Osiris with the healing powers of Asclepius. His head was given the broad brow and copious hair of Jupiter. He wore a wreath of laurel and balanced a grain measure on his head. In 400 Ad an association between Serapis and Zeus developed (Mathews 1993: 184-185).

What should be reckoned with in iconography is that Byzantium icons represent a wedding of the pagan icon genre[18] to Roman secular portraiture[19]. Mathews

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[18] Velmans points out the influence of Greek thinking on the idealism of the early church fathers (Velmans 2007: 20); very specifically the impact of Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita (5 AD).

[19] Many of the pagan images were Christianised in order to serve a different purpose. See for example: On

(1998: 51) refers to the case of Bishop Gennadios of Constantinople (458-457 AD) and a painter, who dared to paint the savior in the likeness of Zeus. The story goes that he found his hand withered. The bishop healed him and instructed that Christ must have more short frizzy hair. However, in the later development of icons, the Zeus type won, because within the framework of the power issues[20] in Byzantium culture, the Zeus-depiction was more forceful (Mathews 1998: 51)[21]. The great male gods of antiquity – Asklepios, Serapis and even Suchos – "all assumed the broad forehead, long hair, and full beard that characterized Zeus, the father of the gods. Christ should hardly be seen as less powerful than they" (Mathews 1998: 51)[22]. In this regard, the blessing Christ from the monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai, should be rendered as a perfect example. "All the verist [?] tricks of Roman portraiture are added to convey the powerful presence of Christ" (Mathews 1998: 51).

The point is that icons and their impact on establishing God-images in the Christian tradition cannot be understood without the background of classical mythology. They played an important role in the worship of the godhead in the temple cult of Roman imagery. In this regard one can understand that here is indeed a close connection between Christian icons and the Isis cult in ancient Egypt (Weitzman 1998: 7).

Furthermore, one should bear in mind that iconography in the Christian tradition was very specifically influenced by the complex world of Roman culture of the period 200 – 400 AD. "The Romans were a matter-of-fact people, and cared less for fancy goods. Yet their pictorial methods of telling the deeds of the hero proved of great value to the religious which came into contact with their far-flung empire" (Gombrich 2006: 96).

Gabriele Kopp-Schmidt (2004:68-69) points out in her book *Ikonographie und Iconologie,* that it was during the fourth century AD that the Christianisation of Roman culture occurred. The Romans made use of examples from ancient Rome in their depiction of Christ and in their church architecture. Constantine and his family supported the "new movement". When Christianity became a state religion at the

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a statue of Dionysus was written just above the genitals Psalm 28: 3 (8-9 AD) (Zakssaya 2006: 50).

[20] For the further impact of power images in Byzantium icons, see the research of Helen Evans (2004: pp. 5-16).

[21] Early Christian art is permeated with symbolism. See in this regard the very early testimony of Eusebius concerning Orpheus as symbol of Christ, even Heracles. All act as bearers of the idea of salvation, of the victory of good over evil, of prosperity and well-being (Zakssaya 2006: 49).

[22] Christian's claims of historical authenticity for the icons are founded on faith more than fact. Icons in Christian traditions should therefore not be interpreted from the viewpoint of historical fact but from the viewpoint of spiritual experiences and faithful imaging. Byzantine art was indeed an attempt to portray Christ as superhuman, thus the reason for depictions larger than life scale (Mathews 1998: 51-52).

end of the fourth century AD, elements of the Caesar-cult were accommodated in the liturgy and priesthood. In order to gain power, it was for the clergy important to portray Christ in all images as a heavenly ruler and monarch.

According to the so-called emperor cult and Constantine paradigm, God's kingdom should be understood in terms of militant power. God reigns as a 'Caesar' and determines every sphere of life. Ever since, it has been a real danger to fashion God in the image of the 'cultural gods' - the imperial rulers of the Egyptian, Persian and Roman empires. The church gave unto God the attributes which belonged to Caesar. (See also Inbody 1997:139.) The church was indeed exposed to the danger of becoming merely a cultural institution with God as the official Head of a powerful establishment. A good example is the translation of the Hebrew concept of the power of God (*el Saddaj*) into God as *Pantokrator*[23]; the omnipotence of God.

Gradually in the history of the church, the connotation between God as *pantokrator* and the church as a political and imperialistic entity, overshadowed the *missio Dei*. Instead being merely a witnessing and incarnational presence, the *missio Dei* had been shaped as an ecclesiocentric enterprise; sending became expanding and territorial authority.

But should sending not be in essence a compassionate, caregiving activity rather than becoming in the first place denominational church planting with the danger of becoming merely an ecclesiocentric business and imperialistic endeavour?

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[23] In theology God's omnipotence has often been interpreted, not in soteriological and sacrificial terms, but in Hellenistic terms: pantokrator. The latter is the Greek version of the Hebrew phrase 'el Saddaj (Hieronymus used the Latin version deus omnipotens). It is a fact that God revealed Himself several times as the Almighty. Genesis 17:1: 'the Lord appeared to him [Abraham] and said "I am God Almighty."' (See Gn. 28:3, 35:11, 43:14, 49:25; Ex. 6:3.) However, the etymology of 'el Saddaj' is very complex and uncertain. From an exegetical viewpoint, eight possibilities exist (Louw 2000:67-68):

(a) Saddaj - the terrific and strong One;

(b) the sufficient One;

(c) a positive Being which could be linked to an Arab word for Lord;

(d) Saddaj could be seen in close connection with a Semitic word for breast, the name for a fertile god;

(e) it could be derived from a verb which means to throw/cast or pour out;

(f) a close link could also exist between Saddaj and an Accadian word for mountain - the One who comes from the high place, or from the mountain;

(g) a link could exist with a Sumerian word for God meaning: the one who knows your heart;

(h) several scholars suggest an Ugaritic connection with Astarte: somebody from the veld or the floor.

The only conclusion to be derived from the above exposition is that the phrase 'el Saddaj should be traced within the context of the various texts. In the meantime, it must be borne in mind that it represents the uniqueness and greatness of Yahweh who reveals Himself, in terms of the tribal and familial metaphor, as a Father and God of the covenant. However, it still remains a crucial question whether Hieronymus's translation (omnipotens) and the pantokrator conception which so deeply influenced the Western thought, was correct.

4. The passio Dei: towards the pastoral challenge in missional activities (compassionate caregiving)

Former Archbishop Desmond Tutu, put the following challenge on the table of praxis thinking: "We were involved in the struggle because we believed we would evolve a new kind of society. A caring compassionate society. At the moment many, too many, of our people live in gruelling demeaning, dehumanising poverty. We are sitting on a powder keg. We really must work like mad to eradicate poverty" (Tutu 2004:33).

The Christian poet Lactantius (in Davies 2001:235), who lived from the third to the fourth century, combined the concept of compassion, *misericordia*, to the notion of *humanitas*. He viewed compassion as a corporate strength granted by God (*hunc pietatis adfectum*) in order that humankind can show kindness to others, love them and cherish them, protecting them from all dangers and coming to their aid (Lactantius in Davies 2001:35). Compassion thus creates a bond of human society and displays human dignity. "*Humanitas* is to be displayed to those who are 'suitable 'and 'unsuitable' alike, and 'this is done humanely (*humane*) when it is done without hope on reward'" (Lactantius in Davies 2001:35).

Within the Hebrew tradition the scriptural narrative as displayed in Exodus 3:14 founds the priority of compassion: the act of "divine presencing which is a boundless and unending being-with" (Davies 2001:20). The notion 'I am who I am' is one of the most profound statements regarding the being and essence of God. The Hebrew refers to a fundamental promise and expression of the faithfulness of God. In fact, it can be translated and paraphrased that God is a unique kind of deity, namely that God will always be there where his people are. Exodus 3:14 can be viewed as the foundation of a spirituality of hope and precensing compassion; it founds the future dimension of hope guaranteed by the faithfulness of God. In a Christian hermeneutics, an ontology of hope (hope as the structure of being and a new state of mind) is essentially an expression of a theology of hope and a divine promise: I will be your God!

The pneumatic and incarnational 'in' of God in both the *missio Dei* and the *passio Dei* should be interpreted in verbal categories and the infinitive tense rather than in substantial power categories and a fixed past participle. In this regard, the use of 'gerunds' should be considered. In English, "gerunds are words that end with -*ing* and look like verbs but function as nouns. That is, they are nouns (words that name persons, places, ideas, etc.) that contain action; they are verbs used as nouns" (Miller-McLemore 2012:8).

For the rabbis in the Jewish tradition the compassion and creativity of God were modalities of the divine presence in the world (Davies 2001:243). Compassion displayed an active and historical presence with and for Israel, serving in the formation of a holy fellowship of people who would be mindful of the covenant and reverently honour his

name and faithful promises. "As the signifier of a divine quality which can apply also to human relationships, the root *rḥm* has much in common with the noun *ḥesed*, which denotes the fundamental orientation of God towards his people that grounds his compassion action. As 'loving-kindness' which is 'active, social and enduring', *ḥesed* is Israel's assurance of God's unfailing benevolence" (Davies 2001:243). *ḥesed* is thus the core theological principle in defining the *missio Dei* as *passio Dei*.

The *passio dei*, in its connection to the praxis of God, defines 'practice' in theology and missiology to compassion (*rḥm* in close connection to the root *ḥnn*, which means to be gracious). Together with *oiktirmos* and *praxis,* the *passio dei* expresses the being quality of God as connected to human vulnerability and suffering (H.-H. Esser 1976:598). The verb *splanchnizomai* is used to make the unbounded mercy of God visible by means of the unqualified praxis of hospitality and *diakonia*.

In this regard, a theology of the intestines as connected to theology of the cross comes into play. Thus the emphasis on theopachitic thinking as overall paradigm for a theology of compassion.

The value of theopaschitic thinking for the praxis of God is that it proposes a shift from the substantial approach to the relational and encounter paradigm (Berkhof 1979:32-33). The switch is then from the attempt of orthodoxy to uphold ecclesial triumphantilism (Hall 1993:100-101) and a theology of glory (*theologia gloriae*) and omnipotence (powerful force)[24], to a *theologia crucis*[25] of weakness, suffering and passion.

Compassion in a Christian understanding of a theology of compassion (Louw 2016) is essentially determined by Christ's vicarious suffering (Gärtner 1978:724). His vicarious suffering took place *ephapax*, once for all (Heb. 7:27). In the Synoptic gospels, *paschō* is used within the framework of the passion of Christ. Our sympathy and compassion is determined by the fact that Christ exercises compassion (Gärtner 1978:722). Instead of the emotional interpretation of compassion by the Stoics and their emphasis on the fact that passion (*pathē*) should be overcome in order that the ideal of 'dispassionateness' (*apatheia*) may be attained, active and practical compassion (*sympaschō*) is an issue of faith in Christ (1 Cor. 12;26; Heb. 10:34). (Gärtner 1978:724). In this regard compassion should be connected to a ministry of serving (*diakoneō*) (Gärtner 1978:724).

This kind of ministry should be a mode of interpenetration and infiltration within the antinomy and paradox of fear and compassion without the selective morality

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[24] See in this regard the remark of Hall 1993:108): "Powerful people demand powerful deities – and get them!"; "Power – and precisely power understood in the usual sense – is of the essence of divinity shaped by empire" (1993:107).

[25] "Greek epistemology could not take account of the surprise needed to recognize God on the cross …It did not envision suffering as a source of knowledge". Jon Sobrino in Hall 1993: note 8, p105.

to side only with the victim without negotiating and encountering the perpetrator. This kind of *perichoresis*[26] of unconditional love is what *cura animarum* (care and cure of human souls) is about.

Cura animarum does what Bajekal (2015:75) in an article in *Time* (*The Welcome. Germans open their Homes to Refugees*) pointed out as an alternative to xenophobia: to be part of a grassroots movement that keeps the welcoming machine[27] running for the estimated 1 million asylum seekers the country will reportedly receive during 2015. "Ordinary Germans have opened their homes to strangers fleeing violence far beyond Europe's borders" (Bajekal 2015:73).

Instead of *xenophobia*, the metaphors of host and hospitality (as exponents of a theology of compassion), exchange fear for the stranger into *philoxenia*: the mutuality of 'brotherly' love. Within the intercultural framework of community and civil issues, the challenge to a mission-ministry is to provide 'hospitals' (*xenodochia*), safe havens (monasteries of hope, places of refuge) where threatened people can become whole again. "To be moral is to be hospitable to the stranger" (Ogletree 1985:1).

One should acknowledge that it is difficult to translate Christian hospitality into terminology of our contemporary society wherein hospitality is often identified with the civic services and domestic spheres of social welfare. Hospitality is often robbed from its sacramental character of caritas and has become diminished to, mostly, an ordinary secularised expression of human wellbeing. However, Derrida (2001:16-17) asserts: "Hospitality is culture itself and not simply one ethic among others. Insofar as it has to do with the ethos, that is, the residence, one's at home, the familiar place of dwelling, as much as the manner of being there, the manner in which we relate to ourselves and to others, to others as our own or as foreigners, ethics is hospitality; ethics is entirely coextensive with the experience of hospitality, whichever way one expands or limits that". To a certain extent, hospitality reintroduces a kind of social paradox: unconditional loves becomes conditional; it focuses conditionally on the outsider in

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[26] The word *perichoresis* comes from two Greek words, peri, which means "around," and chorein, which means "to give way" or "to make room (from Greek: περιχώρησις perikhōrēsis, "rotation"); it describes the relationship between each person of the triune God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit).

The word perichoresis could be translated as "rotation" or "a going around." Perichoresis is not found in the Greek New Testament but is a theological term used in three different contexts. In the first, perichoresis refers to the two natures of Christ in perfect union within the same Person. In the second context, perichoresis refers to the omnipresence of God as He "intersects" with all creation (see Acts 17:28). In the third context, it refers to the mutual intersecting or "interpenetration" of the three Persons of the Godhead and may help clarify the concept of the Trinity. It is a term that expresses intimacy and reciprocity among the Persons of the Godhead. A synonym for perichoresis is circumincession. Online at http://www.gotquestions.org/perichoresis.html. Accessed on 17/11/2015.

[27] "To be welcoming. To be unafraid. To believe that great civilizations build bridges not walls, and that wars are won both on and off the battlefield (Gibbs 2015:24)."

order to make outsiders insiders even beyond the categories of juridical equality; it functions outside of right, above what is juridical (Derrida 2001).

Instead of *xenophobia*, the metaphors of host and hospitality in pastoral caregiving, exchange fear for the stranger into *philoxenia*: the mutuality of 'brotherly' love. The praxis of hope presupposes the 'office of deacon' and the virtue of hospitality in order to establish caregiving as an exponent of *diakonia*. Christian hospitality counteracts the social stratification of the larger society by providing an alternative based on the principle of equality; everyone is welcome regardless of background, status, gender or race. Within the intercultural framework of community care, the challenge to the pastoral ministry is to provide 'hospitals' (*xenodochia*), safe havens (monasteries of hope, places of refuge) where threatened people can become whole again. "To be moral is to be hospitable to the stranger" (Ogletree 1985:1). Thus, the argument of Bosch (2001:373) that the missionary dimension of a local church's life manifests itself inter alia when "it is able to welcome outsiders and make them feel at home."

The metaphor of the host communicates sharing, welcoming, embracement, inclusive communality (the church as the *hospitium* of God). Compassion should then be interpreted not merely as empathy and some sympathetic emotional feelings with the other or a rational accommodation of a foreign cultural context[28], but rather as a new mode of being stemming from a sound theological basis. It consists of a new and different ecclesiology.

A compassionate community is about the challenge to provide 'hospitals' (*xenodochia*), safe havens (monasteries of hope, places of refuge) where threatened people can become whole again. Hospitality is actually about a public virtue: *hospitium publicum*.

5. Conclusion

A theology of compassion reminds Christians of the fact that we are not totally citizens of this world. We are pilgrims (*homo viator*): refugees with a destiny and hopeful future[29]. It compels traditional ecclesial frameworks and paradigms to shift from power categories that link spiritual authority with imperialistic ideologies, to spiritual authority as embodiment of compassionate being-with. Caregiving and compassion imply the art of being-with; of pity as exhibition of divine mercy, sacri-

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[28] "Missiologists concerned with the cultural translatability of the gospel might also take seriously Said's insistence that sympathy and understanding of foreign cultures is not sufficient to eliminate subtle imperialist biases" (Womack 2011:459).

[29] "Wer Christentum sagt, der sagt auch homo viator, wie der Lateiner im Mittelalter den nach der Ewigkeit wandernden Christen nannte Die Pilgerschaft ist unablöslich mit der christlichen Botschaft verbunden. Der Menschensohn verkörpert auch in dieser Haltung das für den Christen normative Vorbild. Jesus, als Pilger gesehen, ersschliesst neue perspektive" (Nigg 1965:83).

ficial exchange and replacement (substitution). The direct impact on God-images, is a paradigmatic reframing. In theological theory formation, a theopaschitic rather than an imperialistic hermeneutics is proposed.

The current paranoia of xenophobia in Christian circles should be replaced by the spirituality of *xenodochia*; the church as home and safe haven for the homeless: 'sending' is becoming 'receiving'.

In a mission-outreach, it is imperative to found the *missio Dei* (divine act of sending and mission) on the *passio Dei* (divine act of compassionate being-with and incarnate interpenetration).

In this regard, the Christian spiritual notion of being a pilgrim becomes most relevant: the pilgrim as metaphor for meaningful mobility into a significant and hope-inspired future (Grethlein 2012:177).

Within the refugee crisis, compassion displays the hope of unconditional love and pity. Compassion in Christian spirituality is not merely about a fleeting emotion and psychological empathy; it is about a new state of being and ethos of sacrificial love; it displays the ontological mind-set of Christ's vicarious suffering on behalf of the other. As an expression of *koinonia*, compassion exemplifies a hospitable place and space for displaced human beings – even for dislocated perpetrators.

Authority in a theology of compassion resides in the image of a 'co-suffering God'. The implication of the *passio Dei* in theory formation for missiology is that authority and power-related images should express vulnerability rather than control and authoritarian dominance (threat power and expansionism). Van Kooten and Barrett (2004:141) relate authority to 'ministry' (service, *diakonian*) and the lordship of Christ. They refer to several aspects of 'missional church authority': "a community of multiple leaders, leaders who focus on missional vocation, and leaders who foster missional practices, both new and from tradition" (Van Kooten and Barrett 2004:141-142). However, in order to prevent leadership from becoming ecclesiocentric stewardship, mission-outreach should in the first place be embodiment of theopaschitic caring and divine compassion (*passio Dei*).

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