

Missionalia

Southern African Journal for Missiology

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Editorial

Reformation in relation to African Christianity, influence of the empire on mission endeavours, mission and transnational network for the global ministry, unification and reconciliation, poverty alleviation and Diakonia ministry are the issues that have received attention in this issue of Volume 48 of *Missionalia* - Southern African Journal of Missiology.

With reference to reformation in relation to African Christianity, Matthew Michael in his contribution describes the significant movement of African Christianity from the margins of the reformation to the centre of global Christianity as well as the attending cultural politics, which invigorate this important missionary enterprise. Similarly, he underscores the missionary quest of the reformers to contextualise Christianity within their different cultural domains, and the importance of this missiological endeavour for modern African Christianity. As a result, in this article he reiterates the emerging patterns in the praxis of African Christianity, which resonate with the specific trends and trajectories of reformation and its indebtedness to this important religious heritage. He argues therefore that insights from this heritage and legacy must inspire the African church to stand against perennial factors that continue to breed social injustices, inequality, racism, ethnicity, corruption, and oppressive regimes, whether within the ecclesiastical hierarchies or in the larger society. So that most African people could stand a chance to live a dignified life as Christians and God's own people.

Regarding the influence of the empire on mission endeavours, Ken Bieber and Jaco Beyers in their article employ the new discipline of comparative missiology to examine the relationship between missionary religions, specifically Buddhism and Christianity, and empire. They contend, Buddhism and Christianity parallel one another as two global religions that have spread beyond their communities of origin due to the sending of proselytisers or missionaries, who have relied on the frameworks, features, and power dynamics of empire, whether intentionally or not. They also discovered that both the missionary religions of Buddhism and Christianity have not only entangled themselves in the systems of empire but also interacted with and relied on the frameworks, features, and dynamics of empire, and the power of the emperor himself in the cases of Ashoka and Constantine, to move from one context to another. These entanglements between religious figures and imperial powers are not limited to the early centuries of the religions' origins but is a process that has continued through subsequent centuries into modern times, as

demonstrated with the case of China's propulsion of the Dalai Lama as a missionary on the world stage.

In his contribution, Thinandavha D Mashau revisits issues of empire and African Christianity in a way which seeks to provide a missiological deconstruction of empire and Christianity in Africa, and to draw some missiological lessons that can help shape the agenda of Christianity in Africa moving to the future. He concludes that while the empire uses the hermeneutics of dominance to capture, dominate, enslave, manipulate and destroy to advance its cause, Christianity in Africa could be liberated by choosing to identify the empire, its tracks and operations in Africa. He therefore argues that the Church in Africa has a missiological task not only to liberate African people, but the rest of the world, and Western Christianity with all the myth around the Bible and Christianity as Western products. He contends that there is a need to have the correct optics and contextually relevant theology of ubuntu as life-giving, life-affirming and life-transforming, so that this liberation of humanity and Christianity can be achieved.

Christianity is undoubtedly a worldwide phenomenon, this has happened in many ways as propelled by the empire and through mission projects and transnational networks for the global ministry. In relation to the latter, Hans Ulrich Reifler and Christof Sauer, in their article, highlight the relevance of transnational networking for the global ministry of Franson. Starting with a short overview on Franson's life and work, they show the influence of transnational political and economic developments, transnational trade routes and the importance of the transnational networks of the *Evangelical Alliance*, the *Holiness Movement*, the *Sunday School Union*, and the faith missions for the founding of new missionary societies and church federations by Franson.

Another issue that is important for ecclesial mission identity particularly in Southern Africa is unification and reconciliation. Eugene Baron discusses this issue in relation to the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa in his contribution. We concur that reconciliation remains an important missiological issue because "A divided Church has no message for a divided world. Our failure to live in reconciled unity is a major obstacle to authenticity and effectiveness in mission" (CT Commitment 2010:44). Baron presents personal perspectives and sentiments on the 'stumbling blocks' experienced, particularly during the informal conversations and discussions that were mostly written in the Church's newspaper (*Die Ligdraer/Ligstraal*). He focuses specifically on the 1990-1997 period of the Church and limits the discourse to go as far as unearthing the discussions and voices of members of the church at the grassroots as well as ministers to reflect on the 'sacrifices', compromises, accommodation and mutual trust that was at play and the strategies of the leadership of these Churches to facilitate reconciliation. He also demonstrates

in his article that the reconciliation process in the URCSA was and still is God's tangible mission present within the Church and God's own work of reconciliation in the form of internal unity. Essentially, he argues that the Church should continue to allow God to work and produce reconciliation of a Church that is still fragile, to build bridges, and embrace each other irrespective of the concrete realities and apparent obstacles.

There is also the perennial issue of poverty which remains a missiological challenge for the church in the majority world. Poverty alleviation and eradication, albeit its complexity and challenges, must remain one of the priorities of Bible-centred mission in this context. Because, as

We embrace the witness of the whole Bible, as it shows us God's desire both for systemic economic justice and for personal compassion, respect and generosity towards the poor and needy. We rejoice that this extensive biblical teaching has become more integrated into our mission strategy and practice, as it was for the early Church and the Apostle Paul. (Acts 4:32-37; Galatians 2:9-10; Romans 15:23-29; 2 Corinthians 8-9). ((CT Commitment 2010: 29)

Frederick Kakwata's article makes a contribution in this regard about the church and poverty alleviation in relation to Congo Evangelistic Mission (CEM). His empirical study revealed that the CEM's ability to respond to poverty problems in Lubumbashi holistically is hampered for the most part by individualistic, structural and fatalistic perspectives that inform perceptions of the causes of poverty which shape the mind of the people. He contends therefore that CEM must develop a theology of mission that should guide it to understand its role and responsibility in society. By doing so, the CEM will be able to devise new strategies to accomplish its missional function in complex situations.

Finally, questions and reflections on the Church as servant of communities has once again come to the fore during this time when the world faces a multi-faceted crisis because of Covid-19 pandemic. John S Klaasen is on course to investigate the gap in the church as liturgical movement and service oriented in his contribution as he wrestles with the questions: what is the church in times of crisis? one hand and on the other: What kind of diaconal ecclesia is suited for times of crisis, like the Coronavirus pandemic in South Africa? His analysis of the two dominant and earliest perspectives of service and liturgy through the lens of wholemaking reveal the existence of several limitations, such as binaries, static theological anthropologies, exclusivity, domination, and alienation which hamper the diaconal ministry of the Church in times of crisis. To solve this impasse, a new way of diaconal ecclesiology was thus constructed. The pillars of such a diaconal ecclesiology for a time of crisis

are God's salvation for the whole of creation, the affirmation of the *diakonia* of the laypersons, and the continuum between liturgy and service.

In closure, I commend the contributors as well as reviewers who made this issue possible. I am grateful to Mrs S Coleman and Dr E Baron for administrative support and for online publication respectively. Thank you to all subscribers for your loyal commitment.

Prof C L Mangayi

Editor - Southern African Journal of Missiology.

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