

Reimagining mission and missiology amid global ecological crisis

An oikomissiological theoretical and conceptual framework for building a sustainable world.

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Abstract

In this article, the researcher presents a conceptual and theoretical framework for his oikomissiology – an ecological dimension of mission. He locates it in the triad: *Theos – Anthropos – Cosmos* as axis for mission and missiology which opens mission praxis towards multi and trans disciplinarity in the project of giving and sustaining life to the full for all the inhabitants of the earth. This oikomissiology is foregrounded in the moral motif of the Lingala proverb: “*mabele ezali lokola ndako ya nzoi, bango tokotaka na nzela moko kasi to vandaka bisika bikeseni*”, meaning “*The earth is like a beehive, we all enter by the same door but live in different cells*”. The beehive is a powerful metaphor for the interconnectedness of all living things which implies solidarity, complementarity, interdependence, coexistence, and communal sustainability. This article is essentially a call to missiologists and mission practitioners to reimagine mission and missiology from the oikos perspective amid global ecological crisis. Hence, the researcher argues for the mainstreaming of the *Oikos* concept as this will reshape mission and missiology to work towards sustaining the whole web of life on earth emulating the cosmic Christ. To support this central argument, the researcher sufficiently demonstrated and articulated that *missio Dei* including theological themes such as shalom, covenant, incarnation and God’s option for the poor could be expanded to include an ecological dimension so that mission and missiology participate towards the realization of a sustainable world.

Key terms: Oikos, oikomissiology, missiology, mission, ecological crisis

1. Introduction

The context of mission is the whole world – the whole inhabited world referred to as the *oikoumene* in Ancient Greek. Commonly called the earth in English. *Mokili mobimba* in Lingala. *Lefathse* in Sesotho. The biblical view of this inhabited world consists of both humans and non-humans, that is, the whole creation (Wright 2010:27). Then, it must be understood that the whole inhabited world is a complex

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reality and many of its inhabitants have different shapes and forms, and all live off the earth. Intrinsic to this understanding is that the earth – *mokili mobimba*, *Lefathse* – is home (*oikos*) for all its inhabitants.

This understanding has profound implications regarding the goal, scope, arena of mission, and ecclesial mission praxis on the one hand and the science of mission or missiology on the other. Thus, in this contribution, I propose the *oikos* as a hermeneutic lens and tool in my reflection regarding mission and missiology in a time of global ecological crisis. I also contend for the *oikos* to be mainstreamed in mission and missiology as this will correct misperception, misunderstanding, and misrepresentation, which will be highlighted later in this contribution. Why is it important to mainstream the *oikos* concept in mission and missiology in a time of global ecological crisis?

A lot is at stake if we do not, as would be articulated in this contribution. To begin, blind spots, human-made boundaries, biases, and preferences in mission and missiology will be exposed in terms of their short-sightedness. Then, an argument will be advanced to propose the abandonment of human-made boundaries, biases, and preferences so that our mission, including its praxis, will be in tandem with *missio* Dei. Further, as I argued elsewhere, a theoretical conceptual framework would be put forward on how our mission and missiology could be reimagined to include an ecological dimension (Mangayi 2016). The *oikos* concept offers us insights and hints into the process of this reimagination. Chief among these insights is the notion that the earth (*oikos*) is our common home.

This notion is captured by this African proverb in Lingala, “*Mabele ezali lokola ndako ya nzoi, bango tokotaka na nzela moko kasi towandaka bisika bikeseni,*” meaning “*The earth is like a beehive, we all enter by the same door but live in different cells.*”

It is known that the beehive is the very definition of industriousness; however, it is also about co-operation. The bees work together. The beehive is also a powerful metaphor for the interconnectedness of all living things. Further, this interconnectedness implies solidarity, complementarity, interdependence, coexistence, and communal sustainability. This is how inhabitants of ‘*mabele*’ or ‘*lefatshe*’ or *oikos* were purposefully created right from the beginning, as biblical narrative depicts in the book of Genesis (1-2). One form of life harmoniously depends on another and vice versa under the Lord Creator and owner as captured by the Psalmist; the “earth is the Lord’s and the fulness thereof” (Psalms 24:1). Meaning that the whole of creation, that is, human and non-human beings including the environment that fills the earth was created and belonged to the Creator God – the missionary God.

Therefore, in its involvement in *missio Dei*, the church should demonstrate God’s kingdom in the world by feeding the hungry, speaking up for the poor and

needy, protecting widows, caring for orphans, visiting prisoners, clothing the destitute, giving to the poor, housing homeless people, looking after aliens and refugees, as well as protecting all the other non-human beings who also inhabit the earth from human destruction so that there will be collective well-being and shared prosperity in the whole of creation.

What we need for the moment is a theoretical articulation of a theological/missiological *oikos* framework, which should inform praxis and missiology. This is done in two intertwined and aligned argument threads in this article. I have first argued to reimagine mission/missiology fundamentally, which is, in essence, a radical proposal requiring a fundamental rethink of everything in mission/missiology – from an *oikos* angle. Secondly, I have argued to broaden the agenda of missiology to include oikomissiology, which is a liberal proposal in the sense that it keeps what is there and only adds the dimension of oikomissiology to the existing dimensions of mission/missiology (such as “spiritual and faith matters,” but also “economic, social and political” as highlighted in the following section). This proposal is not new in missiology. Bosch (1991) contended for the notion of “moving beyond” merely spiritual concerns, and this is a consensus in contemporary missiology. This moving beyond encapsulates the multi-dimensionality of God’s mission. In the case of this article, it is moving beyond to include the collective well-being of all inhabitants (humans and non-humans) in harmony with the earth. This is what I have termed ‘oikomissiology.’

Admittedly, the bulk of the article focuses on sharing insights on how to broaden the agenda of missiology to include oikomissiology. For me, this oikomissiology should become the defining centre from which everything else in mission/missiology should be viewed and judged.

As part of empirical research, Mangayi (2016) had theological reflection based on the *oikos* concept with Soshanguve and Hammanskraal township church leaders to discuss how faith communities could contribute towards a reimagination of an alternative sustainable economy in Tshwane. That research is the springboard for this contribution.

1.1 The *oikos* metaphor, including oikoumene, broadens the missiological agenda and its context

The *oikos* metaphor provides insights into sustaining the whole community of life – an interdependent and interrelated web which signifies “*botho*” in the community of life. Thus, working with the whole community of life means that Christians need to broaden the missiological agenda of the church beyond anthropocentric concerns to include all living beings and systems on the earth, which is part of this whole community of life. This all-inclusive nature of the *oikos*, as the household of God which consists of all living beings and living systems and which concerns the well-being or

shalom of all living beings, radically challenges missiologists to contribute to the vision for a sustainable future in the world based on social and ecological wealth and in the final instance, on the ecological foundation of the economy of the world.

This implies that missiology should not focus solely on spiritual and faith matters, but it should also contribute toward the realisation of sustainability in different spheres of life in an integrated manner – environmental, social, economic, and urban-territorial. It could also provide a new ambit and scope for missiologists and practitioners to take their understanding of mission beyond just the salvation of human beings towards a vision of the redemption and re-birth of the whole of creation as alluded to in Rom. 8:19-23.

Moreover, theology must acquaint itself with insights from sustainability science about how to respond to sustainable development priorities of the world within complex human-environment relationships, which can also be understood in terms of transdisciplinary hermeneutics (Burns & Weaver 2008:10-12). Hence, I believe the *oikos* concept captures the complexity of human–environment relationships as interdependent, interrelated and belonging together. Humans are part of the environment and vice versa under God, the Creator. The “new” church and its theological enterprise, being inspired by God’s mission, goes in the Name of Christ – Creator – Sustainer – Telos – Reconciler – to seek the welfare and well-being of not only humans but also the rest of the environment or *oikos* as presented in Col. 1:15-23. I will return to this biblical text shortly to elaborate on the Christological basis for oikomissiology.

It is worth noting that there is an emerging body of theological knowledge regarding the *oikos*. Various ecclesial persuasions, including eminent missiologists and theologians, have converged regarding the notion of the whole of creation as the paramount context of mission. For example, Wright (2010:26), arguing about the mission of God’s people, contends, “Our mission flows from God’s mission, and God’s mission is for the sake of his whole world – indeed his whole creation.” Thus, the whole world as the scope of mission comprises “geographical (all the earth), but it is also ecological, economic, social and political” (Wright 2010:26).

Sociologist such as Jacklyn Cock’s articulation regarding understanding nature (environment or *oikos*) is helpful in framing what the whole world is. Cock (2007:28-44) elucidates by highlighting that: 1) nature is a divine presence; hence there is no place for a strand of Judeo-Christian ethic for putting humans above nature; 2) nature is a repository of indigenous tradition – initiation and other rites of passage in Africa are carried in nature; 3) nature is a source of identity – that is why the Bantu philosophy does not agree with the notion of private ownership of land; 4) nature is a vehicle of liberation – people who feel enslaved would be at ease in nature as it gives them a sense of freedom; 5) nature is a store of biodiversity – the world’s diversity of plant and animal species should be protected and respected;

and 6) nature is a source of natural resources – this does not imply that it should be indiscriminately exploited to benefit humans nor seen as a commodity; not even become a subject of scientific manipulation.

Intrinsic to the *oikos* or nature are values and principles which are at work to maintain balance and harmony of all webs of life on earth, as depicted in the Lingala proverb, “*Mabele ezali lokola ndako ya nzoi, banso tokotaka na nzela moko kasi tovandaka bisika bikeseni.*” These principles and theological resources such as the scripture and academic publications should guide missiological reflections in this time of ecological crisis so that the dream of a sustainable society is realised. Since working towards a sustainable society is a transdisciplinary project, that is, it involves or relates to two or more different areas of study, oikomissiology should be a transdisciplinary collaboration between scientists.

The following section gives an overview of the principles of a sustainable society and *oikos* to bear in mind as we participate in this transdisciplinary collaboration. It is unfortunate that these principles are summarily presented without elaboration in this article on how they are informed by theological perspectives. Regardless, they reinforce the notion that the earth – portrayed in this article as the context of mission – is a common home. Missions or any other endeavour are to be done in harmony with the earth for the collective well-being of its inhabitants.

2. Principles for sustainable society and *oikos*

Insights regarding principles for sustainable societies formulated by Woods (1992) and Gardner (2003) state the following:

Principle 1: Everything connects

The earth and its biosphere are a single entity, “The totality constituting a feedback or cybernetic system which seeks an optimal physical and chemical environment for life on this planet” (Woods 1992:4). We should, therefore, work towards restoring harmony. Suderman (1998:17) put it this way:

...harmony among human beings, harmony between the human and nature; harmony between the human and God, harmony between nature and God, ecological harmony, psychological harmony (...); the abundance of peace, the absence of suffering; the absence of evils, the absence of tears and sadness, the purpose is life in abundance.

Principle 2: Beauty

Beauty, of both the natural and the civilised world, is an essential element in achieving and maintaining a sustainable society. It encourages creativity in how we live and produce our “bread.”

Principle 3: Choosing an economy.

Choosing an economy, therefore, is not limited to choosing between socialism and capitalism, but entails selecting the features of each and adding a few new ideas to create something quite different from either. It also means evaluating the performance of the economy in terms of the long-term well-being of both human and other-than-human beings living in it, and not by abstract measures such as the growth rate of the Gross Domestic Product or the strength of the Rand.

Principle 4: The economy as an organic process

The economy must be seen as a system of organic functions which is not only influenced from the outside but, in the first place, must also be formed from the inside, through the actions of each one of us, to the benefit of all within a local economic system – especially the vulnerable and marginalised such as women and children. It is not the economy per se which should be our concern, but those who suffer economically because of events beyond their control and who need assistance in regaining their economic equilibrium (Woods 1992:7)

Principle 5: Work

The cornerstone of an economy is work, not the fluctuation of financial markets. A local economy which does not provide meaningful jobs for the people, as is currently the case in many parts of the world, is unfit for purpose and undesirable. An economy based on sound work ethics and aimed at job creation brings about self-worth and self-development in people.

Principle 6: Co-operation

In a sustainable economy focussed on the organic nature of the local economy and society, co-operation would be emphasised over competition. The latter often wastes resources by trivialising human needs and does not care for the whole organic “body” of society. We must operate on sustainable values to evolve a sustainable society for pragmatic reasons. Mission and missiology must address our civilisation’s challenge, which is, as Gardner (2003:153) puts it, “to reintegrate our societal heart and head, to re-establish spirituality as a partner in dialogue with science.” I believe that the Christian church would do well to forge partnerships with other agents of change as it seeks to be a catalyst for a sustainable society.

The oikomissiology I subscribe to in this contribution is embedded in these life-giving and life-sustaining principles. The current global crisis results from society’s failure to live by these principles. All sorts and forms of life are, therefore, under threat.

3. Ecological crisis as an interpellation²

The current global ecological crisis must be seen as an interpellation – collapse of ecosystems, threats to biodiversity, climate change; the list goes on to convey a clear message that we must stop destroying our common home – the *oikos*. Most current socio-economic and political systems represent disconnection and disharmony between Creator – Humans – and nature in the *oikos*. A close look at the description provided by Cock in the foregoing will reveal that the global ecological crisis is most likely associated with the abuse of the notion of nature as a source of natural resources. This has given rise to institutionalised and indiscriminate exploitation of natural resources and scientific manipulation of nature to benefit humans. This is what oikomissiology should aim to address. However, before we do so, missiologists must sharpen their skills to read, analyse, reflect, and develop appropriate missional actions that will forge sustainability. They need to develop multi and transdisciplinary capacity for this task.

The global ecological crisis makes a desperate call to science, including missiology to interrogate and reform some of their old knowledge and learn new insights. *Missio Dei* inspires Christians to engage in hopeful action as being sent by God (Genesis 45:7; Exodus 3:10; 1 Kings 19:15-18; Jeremiah 1:7; Luke 4:16-19; Matthew 10:5-8; Matthew 28:18-20; John 17:18; 20:21; Acts 13:1-3; 2 Corinthians 8:16-24 and so on). From the *oikos* perspective, this action aims at a holistic salvation/restoration of all fundamental relations to ensure shared prosperity amongst all the inhabitants (humans and non-humans) of the world. Therefore, connections between environmental concerns and shared prosperity should be constantly made. A missiology based on the *oikos* metaphor makes this connection possible (cf. Warmback 2005:166). The church is supposed to be an instrument of this oikomissiology. But first, the church must undergo a radical transformation that challenges its traditions so that it gives way to or allows itself to be reformed, remade new, and engaged in a “hopeful action” response.

4. Constructing and presenting Oikomissiology

The oikomissiology I articulate here has a Christology basis as its starting point. The rest of the construction elements gravitate towards this basis and, in turn, receive impetus for mission from it.

4.1 Christological basis for Oikomissiology

From the onset, it is necessary to map out the theological insights considered crucial in systematically presenting a God-centred *oikomissiology*. Cairns (1998:365, 366) con-

² According to Cambridge Dictionary, Interpellation is an occasion when questions are formally asked of a government minister in parliament. I use this word here to mean that ecological crisis is an occasion when humans should ask themselves questions regarding their future and that of the entire earth.

tends that a systematic approach to theology should be thoroughly biblical and God-centred, and the Christological hermeneutical starting point should be adopted (Shepherd 2009:3). He also points out, “The Trinity is our starting point and Scripture our data” (p365). Further, he argues that a “systematic approach to theology finds its highest expression in the Christological method, because it starts off with the open acknowledgement of the light of the complete Biblical revelation – and of course that complete revelation is aglow with the centrality of the Redeemer and His work” (p366).

Based on biblical texts, particularly Col. 1:15-23, Shepherd (2009:3) contends that any Christian response to the “ecological crisis” and an account of Christian ecological and economic ethics must be grounded upon Christological and eschatological affirmations. Insights from Shepherd help make connections between Christology, eschatology, and creation in my understanding of *oikomisology*.

Paul, in Col. 1:15-23 text, vividly depicts these affirmations, it reads:

- 15 He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation.*
16 For in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities--all things were created through him and for him.
17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.
18 He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, that in everything he might be pre-eminent.
19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,
20 And through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.
21 And you, who once were estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds,
22 He has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him,
23 Provided that you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which has been preached to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.
 (Revised Standard Version Bible)

Based on this text, Shepherd (2009:3-10) developed a Christological hermeneutic on creation, which I endorse focussed on the cosmic Christ as the theme expressed in four affirmations:

4.1.1 Christ is the Creator of *all* creation (cf Ps.24:1):

Such an understanding that ‘all things’ have been created through Christ has an important implication regarding the nature of creation. Therefore, earth, and life itself, is not a random chance occurring in a meaningless cosmos. Rather, the whole cosmos

is a planned and ordered marvel – a miraculous gift of love and joy stemming from the creative overflow of love shared between Father, Son, and Spirit (p6).

4.1.2 Christ is the “Sustainer”

... Orthodox biblical Christianity asserts that creation is *other* than God but still depends on God for its ongoing existence (p7).

4.1.3 Christ is the Telos/the Consummation of Creation

... In Christian thought, creation does not exist for humanity, but rather, creation is from Christ and is for Christ Creation, therefore, is not some obsolescent stage-backdrop from the early part of a drama that, once used, will be discarded, but rather is part and parcel of the whole salvation-drama. God is not in the business of destroying the world, but of perfecting it and bringing it to its fullness in Christ (p8-9).

4.1.4 Christ is the Reconciler

Creation has a future! ... The cycle of death, which seems part and parcel of creation has, in Christ, been triumphed over. For Paul, this is the “hope held out in the gospel” and accordingly is to be “proclaimed to every creature under heaven” [Col 1:23]. For Paul, the gospel provides ecological hope! (p10)

I use these affirmations to systematically construct my *oikomissiology* in that the ecological dimension consists of glorifying God, sustaining the whole of creation, engaging in salvific action, which includes the whole of creation and co-working with Christ to restore harmony in relation (God – humanity and non-humans – earth) in the here and now as well as eschatologically. It is, therefore, significant that Christology frames oikomissiology as central to the building and advancing of the kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven to achieve *shalom*.

Further, I must admit that my oikomissiology builds and expands on the works of south African scholars who wrote on Eco-theology, such as Warmback (2005), *the Oikos Journey Study Group* (1996), Conradie (2010), and van Schalkwyk (2012). I expanded insights gained through their works in relation to missiology to include an ecological dimension to *missio Dei*. The basis for this is a need for a consistent “new” theology and missiology in this Christological method of searching for this “new theology,” which is in tandem with the *missio Dei* which, according to Bosch (1991:370), affirms that mission is God’s sending forth to include the participation of the church in the divine mission.

In this contribution, I call the church to participate in the divine mission in this world, which includes sustainability from the perspective of the *oikos* concept. *Missio Dei* “reframed mission from being church-centric to becoming theocentric”

(Niemandt 2012:2). God-centred *oikomissiology*, therefore, resonates with such a Christological method and enables us to explore even the most extreme consequences of what a Christological theology would entail for the salvation and welfare of this earth and the whole cosmos. Thus, an ecologically understood *missio Dei* “stretches” even a broad-minded Christological theology further and further, which would undoubtedly sustain the “new” church’s revised and revived missiological engagement in sustainable economic activities. This is the goal of this contribution.

4.2 Getting started in the task of constructing oikomissiology

The backbone of oikomissiology is oikothology. Warmback (2005:172) contends, “contemporary theologies (that is: ecofeminist, African and liberation theologies)” stimulated the construction of an *oikothology*. Ecofeminist theologies “offer us useful resources to help us to see the interconnectedness of life and promote the empowerment of women” (Warmback 2005:172; cf. Van Schalkwyk 2008 & 2012; see also Rakoczy 2004:315-322). Other South African *oikos* theologians such as Conradie, de Gruchy and *The Oikos Journey* network’s writings aid in broadening faith-based welfare and community development work to include the well-being of the whole earth community – which is the fundamental aim of *oikomissiology*.

This contribution adds to these writings in reference to building a sustainable world. For example, in the presence of prevailing, “marginalisation of women in the ownership of and access to land (Moyo 2014:26)” in southern Africa, “*oikomissiology* must ensure that equity and access to land are guaranteed by drawing insights from disciplines such as social policy, development, human rights, economics and so forth” (Mangayi 2016:345).

Insights from African theology which make a connection between the context of poverty and the struggle for life are helpful in constructing an *oikomissiology* to promote *ubuntu* in the quest for the fullness of life and the affirmation of the integrity of creation, wholeness, and well-being, as LenkaBula (2008:376) contended, and for the strengthening of community (Warmback 2005:174). While van Schalkwyk (2012) expanded the notion of [societal] well-being to include ecological well-being and highlighted that the failure of faith communities to address ecological concerns is a grave shortcoming which weakens their witnessing. Further, the contribution of African theology to oikomissiology stands out given the fact that, as Asante (1985:289-293) puts it, “African sees ontological relationships among all things (...) He does not see himself in isolation from the other creatures, nor does he see other creatures in isolation from him” (see also Visser & Bediako 2004:xvii; Pobee & Ositelu 1998:28).

Insights from liberation theology are also helpful in *oikomissiology*. Boff (1997:7-8) expressed a critique of some popular Christian theologies that are violent against the earth and unjust against the poor by pointing out that the logic

which exploits classes and subjects peoples to furthering the interest of a few rich and powerful countries and individuals is the same as the logic that devastates the earth and plunders its wealth, showing no solidarity with the rest of humanity and future generations. Such logic is shattering to the fragile balance of the universe. It has broken humankind's covenant of kinship with the earth and destroyed its sense of connectedness with everything. Thus, I concur with Warmback (2005:175) that "The integration of ecological concerns into liberation theology offers particularly helpful resources for constructing an *oikotheology*" and oikomissiology.

4.3 Shalom for the whole community of life as the aim of oikomissiology

Oikomissiology aims at *shalom* for the whole community of life. *Shalom* may be described as the fullness of God's salvation, which means peace in society, well-being, enough access to life's needs and necessities, welfare, health, happiness, security, hope for the future, and justice (cf. Van Schalkwyk 1999:8). Chu Ilo (2011:98) expands, "It involves justice amongst people [as well as all other living beings] as a result of integral development" and the breaking-off of all kinds of shackles that still hold many marginalised and vulnerable groups in the world."

Based on the *oikos*, the "new" church, that is, the reimagined church, should work for shalom in ways that sustain the whole community of life in the world, adding to the project of building sustainable communities. Addressing poverty through food production, for example, has a strong link to the environment regarding the wise use of the land. This implies that an ecologically understood *missio Dei* will certainly contribute to the realisation of *shalom* in the world. *Missio Dei* and *oikomissiology* collaborate for *shalom*. Further, the involvement of the church in *missio Dei* should inescapably also be about care, protection, and preservation of the earth.

4.4 Church's assets for oikomissiology and sustainable society

The prevailing attitude, whereby the church's assets are mobilised with an inward intention to benefit humans only, should be reformed and abandoned. The "new" church and its ministries should ensure that all the assets it possesses are invested in giving, maintaining, and propagating life holistically in such a manner as to benefit all the inhabitants of the *oikos*. Further, I contend that the "new" church's engagement will mean that it must move beyond: 1) a spiritual concept of salvation which neglects social and ecological concerns; 2) an inflexible orthodoxy which simply spiritualises human needs and neglects the needs of other inhabitants of the earth and offers stereotyped spiritual recipes; and 3) a tendency to withdraw into cosy and homogenous in-groups which shun challenges and conflicts.

Rooted in the *oikos* concept, this "new" church will develop a holistic concept of salvation, including spiritual, social, political, economic, and ecological con-

cerns. It should also include the needs of all the inhabitants of the world and their needs for living life to the full in relation to the pronouncement of Jesus Christ (John 10:10) as God intended in harmony with the earth. Living life to the full as God intended is *shalom*. Moreover, it should act in the public sphere using all its assets as one of the viable co-workers with others, such as sustainability scientists, sustainable development experts practitioners, to champion the vision of building sustainable communities and sustainable local economies.

4.5 Biblical impulses and the scope of the church's involvement in oikomiology and sustainability in the world

Oikomiology broadens the application of many cherished biblical and theological concepts we work with in mission and missiology. It must be acknowledged that theological concepts/themes such as God's presence with the poor, incarnation, witness in the public sphere, transformation and liberation, Christian social ethics, and the church as an alternative community encourage the church to be involved in societal development. Nevertheless, there are difficulties and shortcomings whenever these impulses and concepts are embedded in anthropocentrism, as has been the case with the work of many faith-based communities the world over. Fortunately, in oikomiology, these themes are re-interpreted from the *oikos* perspective to realise shalom for the whole of creation.

Themes such as creation, covenant, Jesus, and ecclesiastical traditions must be interrogated to provide a more comprehensive approach to the environment.

In relation to creation, we must understand that all that has been created by God implies a sense of specialness, of sacredness. This helps us see the need to value and preserve all aspects of our world. Therefore, "the tendency in theological thinking [which] has been to associate God's concern for the world only with human beings" (Warmback 205:171) must be abandoned so that a holistic *oikomiology* could emerge. In relation to covenant, God's covenant in Genesis 9 is a covenant with all creation. This helps show "God's strong concern for all elements of life; and helps reinforce the lasting value of all of creation" (p171, see also Romans 8). With reference to the Lord Jesus, we see him praying on the hills, teaching on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, and on a mountainside to show intimacy and familiarity with a variety of God's creatures and the processes of nature. This is Jesus' sense of an all-encompassing *Ubuntu* – the covenant of living in justice and peace with all of creation. This proves that the focus on anthropocentric progress and concerns alone is to the detriment of sustainability and its concerns for collective well-being and shared prosperity (i.e., *shalom*).

From the foregoing, I deduce that an *oikos*-based missiology has the potential to "usher in" sustainable communities by reinforcing partnership, interdependency, and co-operation between all the inhabitants of the *oikos*. A "new" or "renewed"

church is needed for this project. The “new” church will advance the kingdom of God – or the household of God (*oikos*) – to include ecology.

4.6 Kingdom-advancing churches or going missional and oikos

More is required for these churches than just being mission-minded churches. Kingdom-advancing churches are required for God’s mission (Miller & Allen 2008:3). They should work for the shalom of the whole of society, including its ecology. They are called to implement the “whole will of God” (Acts 20:27; Wright 2010:24). They are also referred to as missional churches (McNeil 2009:xvi; Mashau 2014:4). According to McNeil (2009:xvi), going missional requires of a person or a group to make three shifts, both in their thinking and their behaviour: (1) from internal to external in terms of ministry focus; (2) from programme development to people development in terms of core activity; and (3) from church-based to kingdom-based in terms of leadership agenda (see also Mashau 2014:4). Central to going missional or kingdom-advancing is the fact that the individual and the community of believers cannot be comfortable with a privatised spirituality. That may explain the widespread dilemma that the church is growing strongly in Africa, but with “little impact on the urgent questions of the continent, such as poverty, violence, and corruption” (Van Niekerk 2014:3) and including the environmental crisis (Adeyemi et al. 2015).

Therefore, based on the above, an *oikos*-based kingdom-advancing agenda is suitable for the church in the world. Environmental aspects related to matters such as mining, agriculture, unpolluted water, redistribution of land, and the like become theological/missiological issues that churches, individually and collectively, in the world will have to wrestle with in their involvement in *missio Dei*. The *oikos* metaphor provides us with awareness of how the ecological and social problems and opportunities of communities can operate in relation to each other in the search for a just and sustainable way of life in our society. For example, in the quest for sustainable human settlement in South Africa, we should prioritise sustainable development. The whole community of life is integrated, including all natural resources, to establish a sustainable human settlement. It should be recognised, suggests Huyssteen and Oranje (2008:528), that “planning and sustainability [should] share the same aim which is to promote the sustainability of social-ecological systems.”

4.7 Covenant, kingdom advancing churches’ practical approach, and oikomisiology

For a Christian contribution to the manifestation of the household of God or the kingdom of God, the church must become a lived-out expression of what a sustainable society could look like in this world. In covenant with God, churches must imagine a theology of mission befitting their immediate contexts as they “are com-

missioned to spread the blessing of Abraham” (Wright 2010:72, cf. Genesis 12:2) in their communities by also drawing on the ecological wealth and opportunities which exist in their contexts. The praxis matrix, “a Missiological approach that discerns contextual priorities by consciously integrating the theology and practice of mission” (Kritzinger 2013:37), is recommended in this regard.

This approach, as stated elsewhere (Mangayi 2016:400), should receive its life-giving “breath” and spirit (and wings) from the *missio Dei* and its “roots” in the *oikos* values, to lead the churches to contribute to a sustainable society which gives and sustains life, prosperity, and the like for all humans and non-humans of the world. It implies that the church must embrace and participate in the planetary or *oikos* agenda as articulated by McFague (1993:8-12, see also Rasmussen 1996:107) as part of its endeavour to incarnate God’s mission in the world.

4.8 God’s presence with the poor, oikomissiology, and sustainable society

The theological concept of God’s presence with the poor, which has shaped contextual theologies of mission and development, should be expanded in relation to the *oikos*. I argue that we can only be fully human if we identify entirely with God’s reflection in ourselves – God’s presence in creation – the rest of the *oikos* on which we depend for life. *Oikomissiology* expands the notion of “poor” to include humans and other living beings of the earth (Boff 1997); it consists of the liberation of all other poor living beings of the household of God.

4.9 Incarnation, oikomissiology, and sustainable society

Any development project or life-giving enterprise designed after God’s model of incarnation is, among other features, about giving recognition to sweating and bleeding with the victims of oppression. Within the *oikos* framework, society could be modelled after incarnation and creation to facilitate the shared prosperity that the *oikos* promotes. Therefore, the church in the world should initiate hopeful actions to address the misery of both human and non-human oppression victims in the prevailing economic system so that sustainable development is realised. This incarnation has to be contextualised, especially in current urban community settings the world over, where the poverty of the marginalised is often associated with ecological challenges.

4.10 Urban context, sustainability and the *oikos*

The church is increasingly becoming urban; the mission focus can only become urban. In fact, “The milestone was passed around 2008 where over half the world’s population was [for the first time] urban” (Hildreth 2014:3; see also Pier 2013). The “arrival of people in a city often accelerates the growth of informal settlements”

(Keith 2013:4), which is being experienced on the outskirts of many African cities and could add to ecological crises. For example, with reference to Tshwane, Adeyemi et al. (2015:351-365) indicate that the urban sprawl in Tshwane has led to the conversion of natural lands into large human-made landscapes, i.e., an increase in impervious surfaces and a decrease in vegetation cover. These land cover changes are thought to have a correlation with the heat waves Tshwane experienced in 2013 and 2014. If the trend continues, it might drastically affect agricultural production, animal and human health, rivers, vegetation, land, etc. Therefore, I suggest that the church in these rapidly expanded urban areas of Tshwane must offer a vision for a sustainable future based on the *oikos* to promote and support life, work, shared prosperity, nature conservation and human settlement in harmony with the earth. This suggestion is pertinent for transformative *oikomissiology* in peripheral communities of Tshwane.

Furthermore, it has been established that “the great 21st-century migration into cities will present both a great challenge for humanity and a significant opportunity for global economic growth” (Keith 2013:2) and for mission. Therefore, as rightly articulated by *The Cape Town Commitment* of the Lausanne Movement, “Cities ought to lie at the heart of any 21st century strategy for global mission” (Hildreth 2014:2). Hence, it is illogical, as Mashau (2014:4) put it, to “imagine a church [in the city] that does not take seriously its calling to engage urban principalities and powers that harm or destroy people’s lives; such a church will never make any serious inroads in terms of impacting and transforming the community that it serves.” The church in the city must learn from Apostle Paul, the urban evangelist and missionary, about doing mission to the metropolises (Bosch 1991:129-131). I add that this mission should go beyond anthropocentric concerns to include ecological concerns – i.e., *oikomissiology*.

This requires the church to undertake social and ecclesial analyses as these are crucial lenses through which to “read” the public sphere. These analyses will ultimately unearth insights, stories, opportunities, difficulties, and the like which are useful for strategy.

It is evident from the foregoing that a transformative urban *oikomissiology* agenda for a sustainable society must be broad and holistic enough to include social and political ecology issues, for example. Urban churches must wrestle with analysis of complex public issues related to economy, anthropology, ecology, sociology, history, geography, development studies, education and the like as they endeavour to participate in *missio Dei*. Given this complexity, prescriptions from uni-disciplinary research must be resisted (Burns & Weaver 2008:12). The focus, as it is in social ecology, should be on the centrality of context in understanding the different and persistent ills that the world is faced with in various regions and countries.

4.11 Transformation and liberation in relation to oikomissiology and sustainable world

In many regions of the world, such as Tshwane, where vegetation cover and surface areas are becoming impoverished because of the conversion of natural lands into large human-made landscapes in terms of poorly planned human settlements (cf. Adeyemi et al. 2015), missiology/theology must admit that God's creation is being stripped of its beauty, value, and integrity. God's presence in creation is, therefore, hurting because the natural resources are being rendered poor to meet the needs of humans. Missiology must also admit that the whole of creation is sacred and good (Genesis 1-2) and that it is all part of God's household.

Therefore, the church should defend the human and non-human poor and advocate that the bounty of the earth must be enjoyed sustainably or in harmony with the earth. For example, it must protect the rivers from pollution and contamination and the nature reserves and ecosystems from deforestation so that these natural resources continue to provide homes, materials, and food to fauna, flora, and humans. This could be one of the most practical ways the church could contribute to safeguarding life on the earth. Cundill and Fabricus (2008:537-567) suggest co-management of ecosystems under resource-poor conditions, "Co-management of ecosystems relies on several stakeholders or organisations working together to manage natural assets" (p 537). The church should be one of these organisations on the ground.

In relation to the *oikos*, transformation and liberation must go beyond the anthropocentric concern that preoccupied the prevailing development agenda to include the whole community of life in the *oikos*. Transformation and liberation should aim at transforming structures of oppression and building a world of justice and dignity for all the inhabitants of the *oikos* in a sustainable manner in the world. The *oikos* values, goals, and framework provide us with clues on how this transformed and liberating reality will look when sustainability becomes the central goal of life in communities. Butkus and Kolmes (2011:171-172) state that key social and economic points which correspond with a vision for a sustainable future must include: 1) restraint in consumption; 2) efficiency in resource utilisation; 3) option for the poor and authentic development; and 4) personal liberation and social-institutional transformation. These points dovetail with the *oikos* values.

5. Challenges to anticipate in imagining a "new" church, mission, and sustainability agenda based on *oikos* in the world

The process on this new road starts by reimagining how the church can be involved in God's mission during a global ecological crisis in ways that lead to actions whereby whole communities of life flourish in harmony.

For these actions to have any significance, the church must accept and embrace the death of some of its traditions and practices, which could stand in the way of becoming a church that undertakes mission, which includes an ecological dimension. A Christian response to the current ecological crisis is consequential – “allowing the voices of death” – to be heard in many aspects of church and faith-based ministries. The consequences have a substantial effect on methodology. This implies that the church, amidst ecological crisis must, consent to “die” (stop doing, or reform, some of the activities that currently preoccupy her life) to gain a “new lease on life.” Without this, I contend, it is impossible for these churches to become strategically connected to God’s mission (*missio Dei*) practically and effectively.

The churches, for example, must embrace knowledge instead of ignorance, empathy instead of apathy, intellectual creativity instead of intellectual captivity, and foster the ability to transcend the hopeless ecological reality surrounding them by offering a clear vision for holistic transformation and sustainability. I contend in this contribution that they must refocus their mission orientations, strengths and resources and their potential for community building so that they become agents and prophets of holistic collective well-being and sustainability through their actions and ways of “doing church” in the world.

Nevertheless, churches face several challenges in relation to their response to the ecological crisis, which must be borne in mind. In his research, Warmback (2005:168-198), amongst other issues, highlights the following: 1) the struggle to make the earth our home because of Christianity’s established “dualism of man and nature and insistence that it is God’s will that man exploit nature for his proper ends” (White 1967:43); 2) Traditional theological resources on themes such as creation, covenant, Jesus and ecclesiastical traditions have tended to undervalue the ecological dimension of the environment, and in this respect contribute little towards the construction of eco-friendly theologies. Other challenges that Warmback mentions include: 1) interrogating hermeneutic traditions to embrace an eco-hermeneutics which will nurture an eco-friendly praxis; 2) an understanding of the place and role of humans in creation; and 3) the absence of the notion of community as central to good economics. These are all challenges which obstruct the emergence of a sound *oikothology*.

6. The triad of Theos – Anthropos – Cosmos as the axis for mission and missiology

Based on the *oikos* concept, which assisted me in articulating my oikomissiology presented in this contribution, I have come to rediscover that the triad of Theos – Anthropos and Cosmos –as the axis for missiology and mission praxis. This provides one with plenty of space for innovation and deep insights. From the standpoint

of this axis, I have learned these deep insights, which I will share in the following sections.

6.1 The *oikos* framework goes against the prevailing anthropocentric concern. According to White (1967), Christianity in its Western form is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen. The *oikos* framework goes against this prevailing anthropocentric focus of development in the current neoliberal capitalistic system and calls for a religious reformation of some sort. Oikomissiology will help us correct this tendency by seeking to integrate and highlight interdependency related to creation, liberation, reconstruction, or rebuilding, and working to produce and distribute the bounty of the land to all its inhabitants. This causes it to stand out for me as a viable alternative value framework for missiology because, in this framework, a better holistic life for all inhabitants, meaningful work, optimal production, rest, and shared prosperity are real possibilities without harming the ecosystem. Thus, oikomissiology motivates one to reform existing praxis frameworks used by churches, which place more emphasis on the word and less on community involvement. Embracing the *oikos* values will amount to considering the death of many aspects of the current church's praxis for this oikomissiology framework to emerge.

Christian reflection on the urban challenge has often jumped far too quickly to the practice of mission within the city and so has lacked adequate research and understanding of the nature of the urban context (Hildreth 2014:3). Oikomissiology corrects this shortcoming by giving Christian praxis hints for a broader reflection on the challenges facing communities. This reflection must bring into focus, in an integrated manner, issues pertaining to creation, liberation, reconstruction and rebuilding, and production and equitable distribution of the bounty of the land to all its inhabitants under the "Lordship of the Incarnate Christ." The envisaged oikomissiology will help us to achieve that integration.

6.2 Oikomissiology, the kingdom of God, and the incarnate Christ

De Gruchy (2007:7) contends:

God's incarnation in Jesus is a powerful proclamation of his continuing commitment to God's economy of freedom. The Kingdom of God deepens and broadens the idea of the Promised Land so that it relates not just to a small geographic space in the Middle East, but to the earth as a whole. That is why Jesus taught us to pray, "Thy Kingdom come on earth ..."

An alternative *oikos*-based model is inevitably transformative and kingdom-based, encompassing the whole household of God or the whole earth. Thus, the *oikos* is

embedded in the call for integral theology of mission (Wright 2010:26-27). The whole of creation is embraced, including ecosystems like cities and the bushveld – bearing in mind that creation is at the heart of God, that God cares very deeply for the whole of creation, and that God is both in creation and holding it. This is even more so, in a sense, for human beings who play such a special role as caregivers to ecology. Therefore, the Creator has likely lavished human beings with extra love and attention – and salvation – so that they can learn how to take care of creation and save it from degradation. Since, as Butkus and Kolmes (2011:165) contend, “eschatological redemption incorporates the hope of a new creation” (see Revelation 21:5, Isaiah 65:17). Oikomiology can help us to start working in anticipation of this new creation in the world.

Missio Dei resonates with the *oikos* paradigm; God’s mission includes the whole of creation (Bookless 2008:97). The *oikos* paradigm provides us with the rules which should govern God’s creation, the *oikos*. McFague’s metaphorical yet practical theology of the body of God speaks to this intricate maze between God’s mission and care of creation (McFague 1993), whereby “God is incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth” (Butkus & Kolmes 2011:156), as declares John 1:14. Therefore, I concur with Conradie (2010:386) that “all forms of missionary engagement should include an ecological dimension – as it would include a financial, gendered or developmental dimension.”

The church incarnate should be an example of the message of the incarnate Christ as far as taking care of creation is concerned. In relation to the purpose of Pentecost, Oswald Chambers (1992) contends in a devotional that “the purpose [of Pentecost] was to make them [disciples] the incarnation of what they preached so that that they would literally become God’s message in the flesh.” Oikomiology and the guidelines derived from the *oikos* framework give the church in the world hints on how to become such a message amid the global ecological crisis.

6.3 Oikomiology, economic development, and Christian social ethics in the world

In the presence of the current economy, which breeds poverty and marginalisation of weaker members of society, including non-humans, the *oikos* inspires us to embrace a Christian social ethic associated with economic development, which should work towards “what ought to be,” that is, harmony in our relationship with God – fellow humans – the rest of creation. Butkus and Kolmes (2011:165) suggest that utilising an ecological hermeneutic and interpreting the biblical narrative through the lens of our ecological crisis is not only what ought to be done, but also allows us to “reappropriate the ecological motif of God’s design for redemption.” This is one of the important contributions that oikomiology makes to the theology of mission.

Economic activity is profoundly an ethical issue as it relates to the use of natural resources. Work to produce bread should be performed sustainably. The bounty of the earth has to sustain all the inhabitants of the earth. Christian social ethics viewed through an ecological lens should guide us in considering the right thing to do in relation to both economic and ecological concerns.

Other roles communities expect the church to play include upholding ethics and morals in relation to the *oikos*. Although it is not the task of churches to interfere in the sphere of the authority of government, the churches have a public role to play. Christians and the church are called as public witnesses (Smit, 2007:153; see also Koopman & Smit, 2007:269). As the people of God's Kingdom, the main task of the church regarding social problems lies within the domain of ethics (Vorster 2012:140).

Drawing from the *oikos* values, *oikomissiology* will help us foster an ethical, value-based response to the socio-economic-ecological concerns of the world.

6.4 Church as an alternative community, oikomissiology, and sustainable world

"The primary alternative community is the church (both in its local and broader senses)" (Gill 2006:634). The work by the church has aimed, amongst other things, to point to alternatives resulting from processes of discernment, which should hopefully lead to "another way" of dealing with complex socio-economic issues facing humanity today. As an alternative community for *oikos*-based progress in the world, I add that the church must lead the way towards sustainability. *Oikomissiology* will help the church bolster its identity as an alternative community which promotes sustainability through missiological education and by insisting on repentance from sin associated with the current economic system of marginalisation, exploitation, and exclusion, which has plunged us into an ecological crisis.

7. Conclusion

Why it is important to mainstream the *oikos* concept in mission and missiology in a time of global ecological crisis is the question this contribution intended to provide answers for. In-depth points have been shared along the trajectory of the discourse covered in this contribution. Chief among these is the call and the how to reimagine mission and missiology from the *oikos* perspective. The starting point is that mission and missiology must work to sustain the whole web of life on earth, emulating the cosmic Christ. I have sufficiently demonstrated and articulated that *missio Dei*, including theological themes enumerated in the foregone, could be expanded to include an ecological dimension so that mission and missiology participate towards the realisation of a sustainable world.

Oikomissiology, having embraced the triad: Theos – Anthropos – Cosmos as an axis for mission and missiology opens mission praxis towards multi and trans-disciplinarity in the project of giving and sustaining life to the full for all the inhabitants of the earth. This will uphold the moral motif of the Lingala proverb, “*Mabele ezali lokola ndako ya nzoi, banso tokotaka na nzela moko kasi tovandaka bisika bikeseni,*” meaning “*The earth is a beehive, we all enter by the same door but live in different cells.*”

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