

Contextualising theological education in Africa by doing theology in a missional hermeneutic

Author:H. Jurgens Hendriks¹**Affiliation:**¹Department of Practical Theology and Missiology, University of Stellenbosch, South Africa**Correspondence to:**

Jurgens Hendriks

Email:

hjh@sun.ac.za

Postal address:

Faculty of Theology, 171 Dorp Street, Stellenbosch 7600, South Africa

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This article originated at curriculum development workshops for seminaries at different venues in sub-Saharan Africa. Its goal was to provide guidelines towards finding a hermeneutic key to practising theology contextually as a response to a process of spiritual discernment which would lead to a contextualised, missional theological curriculum and training. It briefly described elements of the history and context of theological training in the Christendom paradigm. It has little faith in the future of this paradigm, and argued that the southern shift of the heartland of Christianity points us in a new direction. The article said: look at the changing context, the influence of globalisation and the information revolution and revisit key theological parameters in Scripture. Observe what is happening in missional congregations and let all of these developments guide us on a journey to discover a new hermeneutic to do and teach theology in Africa.

Kontekstualisering van teologiese opleiding in Afrika deur die gebruik van 'n missionale hermeneutiek. Die artikel se oorsprong lê in kurrikulumontwikkeling-werksinkels op verskillende plekke in Afrika suid van die Sahara. Die oogmerk was om riglyne te verskaf sodat 'n hermeneutiese sleutel gevind kan word om teologie kontekstueel te beoefen as 'n respons op 'n proses van spirituele onderskeiding. Dit sal lei tot 'n gekontekstualiseerde, missionale teologiese kurrikulum en opleiding. As sodanig het dit kortliks die elemente van die geskiedenis en konteks van teologiese opleiding in die Christendom beskryf as die put waaruit teologiese opleiding moet vrykom. Die artikel het geargumenteer dat die hartland van die Christelike geloof suid skuif; dat globalisering en die informasie-omwenteling die konteks verander. Ons moet per implikasie teologiese opleiding in die lig van die Skrif nuut konseptualiseer. In dié verband help dit om na prosesse in missionale gemeentes te kyk sodat hierdie ontwikkelings ons rig op 'n reis waarin nuwe hermeneutiek vir die praktiseer en onderrig van teologie ontdek kan word.

Introduction

Doing theology can take its cue from Mary, mother of Jesus. Theology is words about God; witnessing about an encounter with God. Theology comes at the second hour (Steuernagel 2003:103). Revelation comes first: God's mission erupts through the words of the messenger disclosing how the reign of God will be born in the womb of a believer. When Mary answered: 'I am the Lord's servant, may it be to me as you have said' she was doing theology. She was struggling to discern what God's words to her meant in her context and she started discussing it with Gabriel, Elizabeth and others. Her theology centred on God coming to us in and through Jesus Christ in the presence of the Holy Spirit. Theology originates in the womb; it takes place in the deepest place where life is born (Steuernagel 2003:100). It leads to rejoicing and worship. The Magnificat (Lk 2:46–55) is worship from the first Christian congregation ... where the majority of believers were women!

This article argues that we need a new hermeneutic for doing theology¹ in seminaries that will lead to addressing curriculum issues.² By 'curriculum' we understand more than simply the syllabus, normally taken to mean the content of the teaching at a theological school. For us the curriculum refers to the culture of education and discipleship that believers are called to minister and live. Traditionally this took place at seminaries.

1.This is not a new debate. I have been greatly influenced by Farley (1983), Kelsey (1992), Keck (1993) and their ensuing debate. The ATLA Religion Database with ATLA Serials list 17 post 1993 articles under the heading 'Between Athens and Berlin: The theological education debate'. Locally, Conradie (1997:349–361) contrasted three models of teaching or doing theology, that is the Athens, Berlin and Calcutta models. This article says: look at the context and origin of the Christendom paradigm of the western world, look at the changing context, the influence of globalization and the information revolution and revisit key theological parameters in Scripture. Observe what is happening in missional congregations and let all of these developments guide us on a journey to discover a new hermeneutic to do and teach theology. The context to which this article speaks and the original audiences to which it was addressed, is seminaries founded by mainline denominations that all have a western and thus Christendom background. As such, other urgent issues like addressing traditional African worldview issues such as tribalism, witchcraft, nepotism, power struggles et cetera are not confronted – important as they are.

2.This article demarcates and describes a hermeneutical key for doing missional theology in Africa today. The workshops addressed aspects of curriculum development at theological seminaries, amongst others by Professor Arend Carl. See Carl (2009:37–60). On curriculum see Kelly (2009:5–12; 89–117) and Marsh (2009:3–20). ACTEA's (2010) 'Proposed revisions to ACTEA standards and guide to self evaluation. Draft approved by ACTEA Executive Committee for circulation and public comment, 01 August 2010' played an important role in the curriculum standards discussed at the workshops. ACTEA is the Accrediting Council for Theological Education in Africa.

It is clear that Jesus' ministry concentrated on training 12 disciples, and leadership development is a modern way of referring to this training. His first disciple was his mother, Mary. Cultural patriarchal curtains hide much about their relationship – but she was, by way of metaphor, the first visiting professor, when Jesus started training the 12 at a wedding in Cana in Galilee (Jn 2).

With these remarks I have indicated the theological parameters of this article. I believe we need seminaries with contextual curricula and responsive training that stays in touch with what is happening in congregations. As theology comes at the second hour, so seminaries came much later. Responsive training and curriculum development are conceived as a spiritual discernment exercise, and as a walk-with-God practice (Steuernagel 2003:100; Keifert 2009:15). Without the Holy Spirit's life giving presence there is no life, no real theology (Barth 1958:614). Worship is a close second. Look at Mary and Elizabeth – they were rejoicing in worship. Worship clears the mind and opens the heart for curriculum development and responsive training.³

Understanding the problem

African theologians and seminary staff are confronted with new realities and challenges that are not addressed by the curricula that they are teaching.⁴ I want to map the problem with which we are confronted before indicating some parameters of the challenging journey of discovering new avenues for theological education and responsive training.

History helps one to understand the problem. Lamin Sanneh asked: *Whose religion is Christianity?* (2003). Jenkins's trilogy (2002, 2006, 2009) indicated how the heartland of Christianity is moving South. The decline of Christendom⁵ with its strong European DNA structure is a reality (Bosch 1991:274–5; Guder 1998:5–6). In the Western theological world, from where Africa inherited most of its theology, the story of theology and the importance of professional theological training at universities go back to the Reformation and Enlightenment (see Farley 1983, Kelsey 1992; Keck 1993 & Keifert 2009:14–17) and even before these periods. Intellectually the Reformation had to confront aspects of erroneous doctrine in the Roman Catholic Church. As such, it needed well-schooled clergy that were able to empower the laity with biblical knowledge in order to confront the Roman Catholic Church. It was an enormous intellectual challenge (Tickle 2008:43–57). During the Enlightenment period theology had to compete with the growing rationalism in a world that was moving away from superstition. The discovery of ways to print books at

3.Emily Brink writes in the *Reformed Communiqué* (2011:2) that research in 13 countries show 'that churches are hungry for spiritual and worship renewal in the face of unprecedented social and political change...'

4.For this discussion in Kenya, see LeMarquand & Galgalo (2004).

5.My understanding and use of the word Christendom is similar to that of Andrew Walls, discussed in the second chapter of *The cross-cultural process in Christian history* (2002:34–47). Walls (2002:34) explains that Christendom is 'a conception in which Christianity was essentially linked to territory and the possession of territory.' This led to the idea of a Christian nation (p. 35). 'The Protestant Reformation resulted in the division of Christendom, but not in the abandonment of the idea (p. 37).' Colonialism exported Christendom to the new world but one should also say that many missionaries broke with the idea and opposed cultural imperialism (p. 42).

Gutenberg helped people to become literate and the natural sciences proved superstition wrong. Non-verifiable belief became a private affair (Bosch 1991:266). Theology became one of many academic disciplines competing for power and respect in the world of the university (Heitink 1999:19–34).

At the same time, most European nations were involved in colonial enterprises and needed the support of their respective churches. The missionary movement had a major impact on the church and in the colonies. Not all of this was bad – by no means! However, in universities and seminaries leaders were trained to lead the faithful in pursuit of Christendom ideals and dreams. Nation states were building colonial empires and needed the legitimising support from their national churches. Eventually, in 1914 and again in 1939, there was war. These devastating wars were followed by a cold war. Unspeakable atrocities, suffering and pain were experienced. It led to the demise of the church in the West. The church was compromised and discredited. The Western seminary is a product of this history carrying its DNA structure in its bones and fibre.⁶

The context is changing

The globalised world requires a new paradigm in leadership and training. I want to explain this by referring to the basic hypothesis of one of the most quoted sociologist⁷ and highly respected intellectual leader Manuel Castells. I will be referring to the second book of his trilogy on *The information age: economy, society and culture, The Power of identity* (2004).

Castells describes how the world is changing in this period of late modernity through the combined impact of globalisation, informationalisation and technology. Information technology based on the World Wide Web (www) is restructuring the economy, capitalism and society. The networking form of organisation and its varied forms of communication along with its flexibility and power is transforming society, culture and the way we experience time and space. We have a new world characterised by the networked society in which social movements are playing an increasingly important role. Social movements⁸ construct identity.

Castells's (2004:7–8) basic hypothesis is that the social construction of identity and the content of that identity take place in a context marked by power relationships. Identity is formed in one of three ways:

1. **Legitimising identity** is generated by civil society and introduced by the dominant institutions of a society and those in authority. It works from the top-down and dominates society. It is illustrated by the nation-state and the Christendom church. It is driven by ideology.

6.For some views on this onslaught, see 'Africa in History' by Walls (2002:85–115).

7.The 2000–2009 research survey of the *Social Sciences Citation Index* ranks him as the world's fifth most-cited social science scholar, and the foremost-cited communication scholar (see Wikipedia n.d.[b]).

8.Social movements are purposive collective actions whose outcome, in victory as in defeat, transforms the values and institutions of society. Because there is no sense of history other than the history that we sense, from an analytical perspective, there are no 'good' or 'bad', progressive or regressive social movements (Castells 2004:3–4).

2. **Resistance identity** is generated by those actors who are devalued or stigmatised by the logic of domination. They form communities or political parties or rebel groups in order to resist unbearable opposition or oppression and build upon already existing identities defined by history, geography, biology, belief, race, ethnicity and other criteria. It is a defensive identity and is best illustrated by religious fundamentalism such as the Religious Right in the United States of America (USA) and, in the world of Islam, Al-Qaeda (Castells 2004:108–144). It is mostly motivated by anger and fear. From January 2011 the Arab world awakened to this surge to resist dictators. In Egypt and Tunisia heads of government were overthrown, leading to widespread unrest, even in Swaziland demonstrations erupted.⁹

3. **Project identity** is built when social actors build a new identity that redefines their position in society and in doing so, seek the transformation of the overall social structure. Examples are feminism and the ecological movements. This identity produces subjects. *Subjects are not individuals but the collective social actors* through which the individual reaches a holistic meaning in his or her experience. It is mostly motivated by a justice-based intellectual dream and inspires hope.

The short reference to how Castells describes sociological processes in modern Western history serves to illustrate what legitimising identity formation is, and how the European nation-states and their Christendom denominational partners applied it. In retrospect it is clear how they manipulated the minds and cultures of people (Bediako 1992, 2004), exploiting them to benefit from their scramble for political and economic power and empire building. The opposing interests and ideologies of the competing Western and Eastern nations eventually led to war.

From Castells' analysis the following is clear: power is in the process of being redefined (2004:424–5). It is moving from physical power to intellectual power; from *Macht* (German) or *Might* to *Mind*; from guns to information. Power has moved to the network society where there are two major actors. The first is the power elite. Castells calls them *globapolitans* (2004:72); they are the people who control the flow of money, and the main financial actors in the informationalised global neo-capitalistic economy. The second major player is social movements – of which the church can be one! It will, however, have a radically different identity from that of Christendom.

In *The power of identity* Castells (2004) describes how the different identity formation processes works, illustrating them with case studies from all continents. With information technology becoming available to all people, power balances shift. Urbanisation is accelerating all over the world. People form new social networks in order to face new challenges. The nation state is in demise¹⁰, democracy is under attack and

9. See GlobalSecurity.org (2000).

10. Walls's (2002:104–110) view on the nation-state from a historian's point of view is prophetic and interesting when he speculates about a 'post-nation-state' situation where movements may play a more significant role.

patriarchalism, the founding structure of all contemporary societies (rife in Africa), built on the power and authority of men over women and children, is experiencing an irreversible transformation Castells (2004:192–302). The structure and culture of families are changing worldwide. Nothing seems to be the same any longer.

Uploading: Harnessing the power of communities

Brian McLaren remarked (2000:11): 'If you have a new world, you need a new church.¹¹ You have a new world.' The cultural tectonic plates of our world are shifting. Thomas Friedman's bestseller *The world is flat* (2007) helped me to understand one of the most fundamental implications of this shift for the church and theological education. This book is a vivid collection of stories illustrating the extent to which the economic playing field is being levelled. The world has become a village. Friedman used a different hermeneutic to confirm what Castells explained in sociological terminology. The first of his ten 'flatteners' was the fall of the Berlin Wall on 11 September 1989, being the tipping point (Gladwell 2001) that unleashed forces (social movements) that ultimately liberated countless people. The first of the major breakthroughs was brought about by the information revolution that started in the mid-1980s Friedman (2007:51–55). The unrest in the Arab world from January 2011 onwards echoes the same sociological phenomenon.

I found the fourth flattener the most important one to understand. It is about harnessing the power of communities. Friedman (2007) defines uploading as follows:

The newfound power of individuals and communities to send up, out, and around their own products and ideas, often for free, rather than passively downloading them from commercial enterprises or traditional hierarchies, is fundamentally reshaping the flow of creativity, innovation, political mobilization and information gathering and dissemination. It is making each of these things a bottom-up and globally side-to-side phenomenon, not exclusively a top-down one. ... Uploading is, without doubt, becoming one of the most revolutionary forms of collaboration in the flat world. More than ever, we can all now be producers, not just consumers. (p. 95)

Harnessing communities is a major new trend with enormous potential for congregations and seminaries alike. Friedman says (2007:96): 'Our communication infrastructure has taken only the first steps in this great shift from audience to participants, but that is where it will go in the next decade.' The top down approach is replaced by a *bottom-up* and especially *side-to-side* movement. It is a *revolution* of collaboration: users become *producers*, not just *consumers*. It is a massively emancipating move. The best illustration of the paradigm difference is to compare the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, authored by specialists and highly qualified academics to the achievement of Wikipedia, a network

11. The church is, of course, a creation of God. What McLaren means is that the church in so many cases lost its true identity and by the grace of God, that identity needs to be rediscovered.

based encyclopaedia, started in 2001, that is a collaborative effort by voluntary participants that within a very short time outstripped the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and became the most used and biggest source of reference¹². Rephrasing this in Castells's sociological categories, one can say that legitimising identity formation is replaced by the power that social networks and movements have to pursue project identity formation.

The best illustration of this phenomenon in Africa may well be the intensely emotional conflict that most mainline denominations are experiencing in worship liturgy (Long 2001; Brink 2011:2). The liturgy was directed from the pulpit by an ordained minister strictly according to the prescribed order. Mass prayer changed all of this (Soko 2010)¹³. Audiences became participating producers forming social networks which one can visually see as people are sending one another SMSes. We are on our way to understanding something about rethinking curricula and responsive training and the power of congregations where the Spirit of God is active.

A new hermetic for seminary and congregation

Uploading, or harnessing the power of community, of social networks where people are participants and not simply an audience, should ring a few theological bells. Start by listening to 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, Ephesians 4:1–17! Apply this phenomenon to the history of the expansion of Christianity and suddenly lights go on. Andrew Walls's *The cross-cultural process in Christian history* (2002) helps to understand one the growth and decline patterns between North and South as well as in the course of history. In short, he illustrates four patterns in history:

1. The Christian story is not a steady triumphant progression; it is a story of advance and recession. (p. 12)
2. Christian faith must go on being translated, must continuously enter into the vernacular culture and interact with it, or it withers and fades. (p. 29)
3. Islamic expansion is progressive; Christian expansion is serial (p. 30). The heartland of Christianity moved from Jerusalem to Asia-Minor, to Africa, to Europe. It is moving from the North to the South. No church, no place, no culture owns Christ. (p. 66)
4. A significant feature of the demographic and cultural shifts in the Christian centre of gravity is that each threatened eclipse of Christianity was averted by its cross-cultural diffusion. Crossing boundaries has been the life blood of historic Christianity. The energy for these crossings has come from the periphery rather than the centre. (p. 67)

12. See Wikipedia n.d.(a).

13. Soko's doctoral dissertation dealt with the schisms in the Reformed Church in Zambia. Pentecostal and charismatic influences (Kalu 2008) are changing the liturgy of mainline denominations. Mass prayer depicts these tendencies. Mass prayer that leads to chaos should surely be addressed with the principles of 1 Corinthians 11–14. The church in Africa needs teaching! However, the paradigm has changed and theological training & curricula have to take cognisance of it. The pulpit is no longer the castle of a king and a one-man-show.

In Walls's discussion, Acts 15 plays a major role. Paul and Barnabas met with the apostles in Jerusalem and the 'synod' decided not to make proselytes¹⁴ but to entrust converts with the gospel. Conversion meant turning to Christ and following him in your culture and place, using your mother tongue to worship Him. It means addressing what is wrong in your culture (Acts 15:20). Romans 12:1–2 reminds one that this can never be a superficial process. The letter to the Ephesians is a prime example of handling the cross-cultural process. Where this happens, the gospel takes root in new soil and grows. Sanneh (2003) illustrates how this happened in Africa after the missionaries left (circa 1962). Between 1970 and 1985 Africa saw 16 500 conversions a day, with Christianity numerically overtaking Islam (Sanneh 2003:15). It had its own leaders, sang its own music, preached in the vernacular and worshiped and grew by multiplication at congregational level – with *very* little seminary involvement at all (Cox 1995:243–262). The growth of the church in Africa is, in sociological terminology, social networks working on the uploading principle even before the heyday of the information revolution. Christianity is a religious social movement. Congregations that proclaim the Gospel in their own culture are busy with, again in sociological jargon, *project identity formation*. The project is local congregational manifestations of the Kingdom of God being drawn into the *missio Dei*¹⁵ (Bosch 1991:389; Guder 1998:81–82).

The Paradigm Shift

The argument will now be summarised. Christendom is in decline. We understand that it has major fault lines in its epistemology.¹⁶ Van Huyssteen (1997) explains:

Postmodernism is, as I see it, first of all a very pointed rejection of all forms of epistemological foundationalism, as well as of its ubiquitous, accompanying metanarratives that so readily claim to legitimize all our knowledge, judgements, decisions and actions. Foundationalism, as is generally defined today, is the thesis that all our beliefs can be justified by appealing to some item of knowledge that is self-evident or indubitable. Foundationalism in this epistemological sense therefore always implies the holding of a position of inflexibility and infallibility, because in the process of justifying our knowledge claims, we are able to invoke ultimate foundations on which we construct the evidential support systems of our various convictional beliefs. (p. 2)

The seminary is a product of late Christendom and modernism. It usually forms denominational proselytes and Western theology proselytes. Theologically we see the Acts 15 principle, the cross-cultural dissemination of Christianity taking place in Africa and elsewhere. It was well illustrated

14. A proselyte was someone who was circumcised and who was to adopt the Jewish tradition and obey the Torah. It meant that he [sic] had to leave his own culture behind and convert to a new culture.

15. *Missio Dei* literally means the mission of God. It is God's agenda for the world. This is what the church should discern and be involved in: God's agenda. The problem with the Christendom paradigm was that ideological agendas of denominations and nations influenced the agenda of congregations (see Wikipedia, n.d.[c]).

16. A helpful interpretation of how to deal with the changing theological reality can be found in Osmer (2008:129–173 and even more so: Green & Robinson [2008]).

by the Lausanne 3 meeting, held in Cape Town in October 2010. The church is growing. Millions of Marys, Elizabeths and Zechariahs are breaking out in song and worship all over our continent. They are doing theology, because they have experienced the presence and power of God. They are forming congregations, they need discipling.

The point should be clear: we have a new world. We have a new church. We need a new approach to leadership development, to the formation of prophets and apostles for the church. Making disciples needs a contextual reformulation for our day and age. The key to it will be in the congregations where the Spirit is moving, where Mary and Elizabeth – later followed by Zechariah (when he got his voice back) – are singing and worshipping because they have been in the presence of their Saviour and Lord. They are an example of responsive training, they were taught with a completely different curriculum compared to that of synagogue stuff! Note: project identity formation took place and the project was the living and proclaiming of the Kingdom of God.

Discovering a missional hermeneutic

Seminaries that are stuck in a Christendom DNA structure will find it hard to survive.¹⁷ They train proselytes, they are following the principles of legitimising identity formation and are focused on denominational survival. There is no future there.¹⁸ We should take our cue from Mary, the mother of Jesus. Doing theology is getting engaged in the *missio Dei*.

What I am saying is that if we study missional congregations and our attitude is one of humility and an openness to listen to countless Marys, Elizabeths and Zecharias in Africa, we may be taken on a journey where we can learn something about responsive training, about how seminaries can train leaders that will be able to upload and form social movements called congregations where project identity formation envisaging the Kingdom takes place. We have a new world, we need a new church. A new church will eventually spawn a new form of theological training.

At the 2010 meeting of SAMS (South African Missiological Society) SAPMC¹⁹ members delivered papers in which they described what they are learning from Southern African congregations on a missional journey (Hendriks 2009; Marais 2010; Mouton 2010; Nel 2010 & Niemandt 2010). I will illustrate how one should learn by listening to the Marys in congregations. Three spiritual practices taking place on a congregational level, namely dwelling in the world, dwelling in the Word and plunging, were, amongst others,

17.06 December 2011, the well-known Theological Seminary at Kampen finally closed its doors. See Reformatorisch Dagblad n.d.

18. Newspapers reported that three of the once-famous Dutch seminaries are closing: Kampen, Antwerpen and Leiden. On the internet the following note was found: 'De Protestantse Theologische Universiteit (PTHU) verhuist naar de Vrije Universiteit (VU) in Amsterdam en de Rijksuniversiteit Groningen (RUG). De huidige drie vestigingen, Utrecht, Kampen en Leiden, worden gesloten. Volgens het College van Bestuur van de PTHU is dit de beste manier om het voortbestaan van de PTHU ook op de lange termijn te garanderen'.

19. See *Communitas* n.d.

described. Together they represent a journey in discernment (Hendriks 2009:112–117; Niemandt 2010:10) based on a praxis methodology. It reaches out and gets involved, it learns, reflects, evaluates, adapts and continues the doing-reflecting-doing spiral. This is a first step towards discerning and developing a new missional curriculum focussed on the *missio Dei*.

Dwelling in the world

It is a new world. In this new world the Christendom church is dying. The *missio Dei* is focussed on this world so it makes sense to understand what is happening in the world because Christians are to be its light; Christians are to be salt in this world.

I will now illustrate how transformation took place on a congregational level in the South African Partnership for Missional Church (SAPMC). The logic is that we should follow the same process if we want to discern a way forward in theological education and curriculum development. There are no final answers in this article. We are only at the beginning of a process of transformation.

Congregations seeking a way forward form a cluster after obtaining their respective church councils' permission (Hendriks 2009:109–119). They appoint leaders to guide them through the process. Laity plays a key role, but not without their clergy's integral involvement. The cluster of congregations then departs on a missional discernment journey of approximately three years. This journey has four phases during which they seek to build five capacities:

1. discovery: building the capacity to listen
2. engagement: building the capacity to take risks
3. visioning: building the capacity to focus
4. practice and growth: building the capacity to learn and grow
5. the fifth capacity, sharing and mentoring, is built throughout the process.

Clusters meet nine times over the three-year period and these meetings have the following set of activities that form the agenda of each meeting:

- dwelling in the Word
- reflection on what was learned
- learning from one another
- function-orientated teaching
- practising the teaching by dwelling in the world.

In most congregations this starts with congregational discovery and training members to listen. Developing listening leaders and listening teams (Keifert 2006:76–79; Marais & Taylor Ellison n.d.) is accomplished by teaching basic principles of applied ethnography. The very elementary research that members undertake is revealing the congregation and the world in ways not known before. The cluster events gradually prepare and lead the way for crossing boundaries towards the wider world. At the seminary we train students and ministers in congregational studies which involve them in performing different analyses, such as a cultural or

identity analysis of a congregation (Hendriks 2004:105–143) as well as a contextual analysis which involves discovering the macro-, meso- and micro- context of their community and society. This involves answering the question about how globalism influences your society and faith community (Hendriks 2004:69–103). Every member lives and works somewhere in the world and is taught or sensitised to listen, deliberately and spontaneously, to what is happening in the world. Everyday encounters can become missional events if coupled with dwelling in the Word.

Dwelling in the Word

Throughout the journey ‘dwelling in the Word’ plays a key role. In all the SAPMC meetings Luke 10:1–12 was repeatedly read, reflected upon and discussed. It becomes a well-trodden path that challenges one to ‘step out’ in faith on a journey across new frontiers, being guided by scriptural and spiritual principles. Nel (2010) summarised it well:

The methodology of *Dwelling in the Word* consists of reading a chosen text aloud in a group. After the initial reading of the text, time is given for silent reflection on the meaning thereof. Every group member is then instructed to find a ‘reasonably friendly-looking stranger’ with whom to share what has been ‘heard’ in the personal reflection on the text. After sharing in pairs, members report to the group what they have heard from their respective partners. The group is then invited to discover the meaning of the text for their specific context by asking: ‘What is God up to here?’ and ‘What is the Word of God for us in this place and time (cf. Keifert 2009:21)?’ These two questions reflect the specific theological aim of *Dwelling in the Word* as to invite the participants thereof into the world of the text, and in so doing to join in the mission of God (the *missio Dei*) to the world (Keifert 2006:36–37). As such, it is part of the SAPMC journey to discern to whom God is specifically sending the participants as individuals and as a faith community. In the SAPMC, the expressed aim of the process of corporate spiritual discernment through *Dwelling in the Word* is to discover the preferred and promised future of God for a specific faith community. (cf. Keifert 2006:64)

I am now following the central argument of Nel (2010) to explain this spiritual exercise that is so profoundly reshaping lives and congregations. Keifert called it the most significant innovation for building the missional capacities of a local church (2006:69). Dwelling in the Word stimulates the ability of congregants to imagine their everyday life within the narrative of Scripture. If groups start practising it together, it shapes a communal spiritual discernment capacity. Mouton (2010) added to this:

This communal missional imagination empowers congregations to develop a missional understanding of the Scriptures, which will gradually change and re-shape the culture in the congregation. Those currently outside the congregational community will become more and more important. Soon congregations will ask: But to whom is Jesus sending us? Which part of the harvest was prepared in advance by the Father and the Spirit to whom Jesus is sending us, his body, now? (p. 2)

We are reminded of what Newbigin (1989:234) said: ‘the only effective hermeneutic of the gospel is the life of the congregation which believes it.’ Newbigin argues that a text like Luke 10:1–12 is acting like a hermeneutical lens

which shapes the way you look at and experience the world (Newbigin (1989:97–99). The Word dwells in the reader; he or she is beginning to understand the world through the text. It awakens the imagination through the presence of the Holy Spirit and opens new plausibility structures of how to act and what to do. If this is performed in a group, it activates communal spiritual discernment. God’s *missio* gets underway in ways that was usually completely unpredictable. The interesting thing is that it usually began at the fringes, from where it was not expected. Walls remarked that history shows this is a typical characteristic in missionary boundary-crossing events (Walls 2002:67). The SAPMC’s own research shows the extent to which dwelling in the Word leads to spontaneous missional behaviour (Nel 2010:7–10; Niemandt 2010 & Marais & Taylor-Ellison n.d.).

Nel latches on to Keifert (2009:15) when he very aptly explains the difference between this movement and what typically happens in a seminary. The old notion was that theology is done in academia and is then applied in congregations. Exegesis is done according to a set of exegetical rules that often negate a missional reading of the text. It often focuses backwards or inwards but seldom outwards in dialogue with the world. Nel (2010:6) explains that academic exegesis is often an exercise in boundary marking instead of one of boundary crossing. He classifies dwelling in the Word as a form of reader-response criticism practised by ordinary, average readers, not academically trained exegetical specialists. My understanding of theology is that it takes place when God intervenes. This is the case in Mary’s example, it is a womb that unleashes, or gives birth to Christ walking out ahead of us. Dwelling in the Word puts one ‘on track’ ... the *missio Dei* track.

Plunging

Plunging refers to the capacity to cross the congregation’s cultural boundaries, which includes conceptual and geographical boundaries (Mouton 2010:2). In this section I am drawing on Mouton’s paper in which he sees plunging as a South African innovation of the methodology of Church Innovations (Church Innovations n.d.). During the nine cluster meetings, described above, the phases and capacities develop the plunging skill as a concrete skill that enables reaching out to the world to discover where the *missio Dei* wants to take us. This is when and where people really experience ‘mission’ or being sent. One can say that it is an antidote to the deadly virus of institutionalisation when a congregation starts taking care of itself. Mouton (2010) answers the ‘Why plunge?’ question in the following way:

1. It reconnects the congregation with its context and with God’s actions, and as such it is refreshed and energised. The cross-cultural movement always does this (Walls 2002).
2. The teachability of a congregation immediately expands. In Luke the ‘no purse, no bag, no sandals’ advice addresses the power issue. Being a servant and eating ‘whatever they provide’ says something about the way in which this is undertaken.

3. The invisible walls of our own culture and setup soon become clear. The world of 'the other', the stranger, the widow and the orphan usually is a different and unknown world, and hospitality acquires a new meaning.
4. New community formation takes place.
5. The new community forms something like a bridge community that guides the ministry forward and acts as a guide for all concerned in the process of discernment of where to go with the 'new creation.' As such it illustrates the praxis methodology of being a missional church and doing theology. It allows itself to be disciplined by the Triune God, realising that life is a journey and that roadmaps do not exist. It is like the manna in the wilderness. There is enough for each day. (pp. 3–4)

Conclusion

Theologically speaking, we need something of the hermeneutic outlined above, which is akin to the training Mary received. It is about following Jesus in the world. It should happen as a response to God's Word and God's call. Responsive training is discernment in progress on the discipleship journey. The congregation is the habitat for doing theology²⁰, for this journey, because theology is about the mission of God (Bosch 1991: 519). Theology is sustained by the manna of every day, received whilst on the journey. Theologians are, in the first place, the people to whom God has spoken, who believe that nothing is impossible with God, who answer to this call by saying: I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said. (Lk 1:36)

We have a new world. Globalisation is a reality, penetrating even to the most remote villages of Africa. We are discovering how to be a missional church in this new world and how important congregations are as the places where primal theology is done. Seminaries should therefore reconsider their very being and function.

We do understand that proselytising is not what Acts 15 had decided. We do realise that what happened after Acts 15 is what today can be called 'uploading'. The Wikipedia principle is simply new language for a very basic assumption of Christian faith. The body of Christ is a missional body and each and all members are gifted to take part in the *missio Dei* (1 Cor. 12; Rm. 12; Eph. 4:1–17). It does require a discipleship process (Coleman 1963).

History shows that churches die when they neglect this and grow when they are obedient and reach out to Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth.

So where does this leave us with our seminaries and their curricula?

It is obvious that the traditional seminary and traditional way of doing theology are about 500 years old, a product of Christendom (Tickle 2008). We are in the liminal sphere in which a new epoch is taking shape. More than ever seminaries

20. Newbigin's (1989:222–233) words are famous: 'The congregation as the hermeneutic of the gospel.'

now need congregations where God has moved the waters and healing takes place, to guide them. Discernment is living from manna on a journey and seminaries should be invited to join that journey. If both congregations and seminaries can travel without bags and purses and sandals and eat what food there is on the table, the journey will continue and the road will unfold and peace will be with them; a peace not like that of the world.

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