

Sheridan, Tim M & Hendriks, H Jurgens Stellenbosch University

The Missional Church movement¹

ABSTRACT

At the beginning of the 21st century, many different voices have been drawing our attention to two realities that are shaping the future of Christianity: the centre of gravity for the Christian faith has shifted to the global South and to the East; and the church in Western societies has been pushed to the margins and is facing serious decline (Guder 1998, 1). Many are asking themselves, “what are the implications of these facts for the future of the church in western culture?” For many, the term “missional” has begun to capture the imagination of the church in the West. Rather than find “missional” as a new programmatic or methodological solution for the church today, something at the foundational level needs to be discerned, namely, “who we are and what we are for” (Guder 1998, 3). Discernment² of the church’s identity and vocation is a critical task facing us today. In the previous article, the Emergent Church movement was engaged in order to summarize its important contributions toward the recovery of a missional identity and vocation of the church in the West. In this article, the Missional Church movement as observed in the North American scenario will be engaged and its contributions toward the development of a missional identity and vocation for the church in the West will be summarized.

1. BRIEF HISTORY

The pioneering work of Lesslie Newbigin is absolutely essential to understanding the birth of the Missional Church movement, particularly the work he did in the latter part of his life as he took the tools and insights of a lifetime of missionary experience in India and applied them to the task of addressing the challenges facing the church in the West and calling the church in the West to a missionary encounter with our culture. This is not to ignore the important contributions of David Bosch, but focus will be given to Newbigin’s contribution to this movement given his role as the father-figure of this movement, particularly in its North American expression. Goheen provides a helpful summary of the significance of Lesslie Newbigin’s work, in five areas.

First, at the heart of all of Newbigin’s thinking and life was the gospel – and especially the event at the centre of the gospel, the cross of Jesus Christ. Newbigin sees the cross as the “clue” that he must follow if he is to make sense of the world and his life in it. He stresses two ways in which the gospel was foundational to the church: the gospel as public truth and the gospel as universal history. The biblical story locates truth in a story of God’s redemptive deeds and words in history, which culminate in Jesus Christ. In Jesus, the end and the meaning of

1 The article is based on Chapter 4.3 of Sheridan’s doctoral dissertation (2012). H Jurgens Hendriks and Mike Goheen were the promoters.

2 Discernment is a foundational concept in the missional movement. It refers to faith seeking to discover the *missio Dei*. It is about trying to listen to God in and through Scripture and the past and present faith community and in obedience getting involved in the *missio Dei*.

cosmic history is revealed and accomplished.³ Later in his career he realized the importance of understanding God as a Trinity and wrote *The open secret* (Newbigin 1963, 1995).

The second is what Goheen has called “the logic of mission” for Newbigin. If the gospel is true and tells us where history is going, then mission must follow. Jesus did not write a book, but rather he gathered, nurtured, and left behind a community that would make known the good news of the kingdom of God by embodying it in its life, expressing it in its deeds, and announcing it in its words. Mission flows out of the gospel.

Third, if the gospel is to be made known, the church must be one, Newbigin believes. He worked tirelessly toward the cause of unity of the church, because he believed strongly that mission and unity could not be separated. Listen to how Goheen summarizes the importance of this (2004, 4):

If the church is to make known the good news that at the end of history all things will be brought together under one head, even Christ, then as a preview it must embody this in its life. Its divided life is a scandal, equivalent to a temperance movement whose members are habitually drunk; in both, the life of the community contradicts their message. It is only when the unbelieving world sees evidence of a reconciled community that they will believe the message of the gospel.

Fourth, Newbigin offers significant insights in the ongoing struggle of the church to discern the relationship between the gospel and culture. Newbigin’s understanding of this was shaped by his experience of cross-cultural communication of the gospel in India. If he was to communicate the gospel in India, he would need to both use the language and cultural categories of his audience *and* challenge the religious commitments that were foundational to those forms. Newbigin began to see that this problem was not found just in India, nor was it limited to verbal communication of the gospel. Rather, all cultures are shaped by foundational religious commitments which in turn shape its institutions and forms. The more deeply one senses the contradiction between the gospel and the worldview of the culture, the more that the church will experience what Newbigin saw as a “painful tension” (1951, 51). How the church struggles to live within that tension is at the heart of the missionary encounter with the culture.

Fifth, Newbigin believes that the missionary encounter of the gospel with Western culture is the most urgent task facing the church in the West, and ought to be a priority task for missiology (Newbigin 1986, 3). In that encounter, Newbigin sees four essential tasks: the cultural task of engaging in a missiological analysis of culture; the theological task of recovering the gospel as public truth; the ecclesiological task of recovering the missionary understanding and practice of the church; and the epistemological task of unmasking the idolatry of reason and other philosophical assumptions reigning in Western culture (Goheen 2004, 7-8).

Within this broader horizon of Newbigin’s contribution, we can situate the particular contribution he made toward the development of a missional ecclesiology for the church in

³ The way Newbigin articulated the gospel is equally important: against the relativism of Western culture, Newbigin affirmed that the gospel is public truth – a truth that is true for all people. Against the fundamentalist belief that the gospel is a set of unchanging eternal propositional truths, Newbigin argued that the gospel is first and foremost events that form a story that reveals the meaning and goal of world history and thus provides the clue for understanding and living in the world (Goheen 2004, 2).

the West. Goheen has done extensive work in this area and has provided a helpful summary of Newbigin's missional ecclesiology that has so profoundly shaped the missional movement (see Goheen 2000).

Newbigin's influence led to the emergence of Gospel and Culture movements that began to explore the various implications of his work for the theology and practice of the church in the West. The Gospel and Our Culture Network (GOCN) in North America has significantly brought Newbigin's insights to bear on the missional movement. The GOCN is a movement within North America made up of theological educators, pastors, denominational leaders and administrators, and other local congregational leaders from a variety of confessional traditions, all devoted to the task of developing and encouraging a missionary encounter with North American culture. Similar movements were birthed in the U.K., South Africa, and Australia/New Zealand – again by practitioners and academics who are building on the insights of Newbigin and seeking to address the unique challenges of a missionary encounter with culture. The GOCN movement has been generated by both cultural and ecclesiastical shifts – culturally the shifts from modernity to postmodernity, and ecclesiastically the growing reality of decline of the church and cultural displacement to the fringes of society.

Goheen highlights two broader contexts within which we must understand the GOCN. The first is the World Council of Churches (WCC), particularly the International Missionary Council, and its work to flesh out the structures of a missionary ecclesiology. The GOCN has embraced the *missio Dei* framework developed within the WCC, in which the church seeks to situate its mission and understanding in terms of the central role it plays in the broader mission of God to restore the creation. After the secularizing of the *missio Dei* framework in the WCC and the relativizing of the church that came along with it, the GOCN is a renewed attempt to flesh out the structures of a missionary ecclesiology, specifically focused on a North American context (Goheen 2002, 480-481).

The second broader context of the GOCN is the loss of Christendom and the desire to rethink ecclesiology in light of that reality (Goheen 2002, 481). Guder describes the “functional” Christendom that has been operative in North America and is now crumbling:

Various churches contributed to the formation of a dominant culture that bore the deep imprint of Christian values, language, and expectations regarding moral behaviours.

Other terms like “Christian culture” or “churched culture” might be used to describe this Christian influence on the shape of the broader culture (Guder 1998, 48).

This sort of cultural impact by the church in the West is crumbling, and the GOCN is seeking to re-think ecclesiology in light of these realities.

A key development for the Missional Church movement was the publication of *Missional Church* in 1998. Various leaders from the movement were brought together to begin bringing definition to the movement's ecclesiology, and to explicitly push beyond the methodological and model-driven answers of how the church responds to the reality of North America as a mission field. Instead of a methodological and pragmatic focus, *Missional Church* looked at something deeper; namely, a theological re-thinking about the nature of the church in light of the shift from a church-centred understanding of mission to a God-centred understanding of mission (*missio Dei*). *Missional Church* argues that mission lies at the very centre of the nature and identity of the church. It goes on to then identify 5 key elements in a missional ecclesiology: (1) missional ecclesiology is biblical and must be grounded in what the Bible

teaches; (2) missional ecclesiology is historical and must build on and take account of the historical developments and reflections on the church; (3) missional ecclesiology is contextual and will develop within particular cultural contexts and seek to be faithful and relevant within those contexts; (4) missional ecclesiology is eschatological which will drive the church to be dynamic in its movement toward the consummation of all things; and (5) missional ecclesiology must be practiced and therefore the missional understanding of the nature of the church must be translated into practice(s) (Guder 1998, 11-12).

As others have pointed out, the missional movement, in contrast to the emergent movement, has tended to take root among more established mainline and evangelical churches, looking at how these churches can make the shift to a missional posture and practices within their communities. There has also been more academic and scholarly effort in this movement than in the emergent movement.

2. KEY PRACTICES OF THIS MOVEMENT

Defining the key practices of the Missional Church movement can be difficult, due to the increasing diversity and unique emphases that are emerging within the movement. However, most who find themselves within the Missional Church movement would resonate with and find solid connection to the GOCN in North America.⁴ Within the GOCN, a team was compiled to give expression to the common practices that were being found within churches that were resonating with the missional movement and seeking to transform their congregations into Missional Churches.

The following twelve practices are identified as key to Missional Churches:

1. Proclaiming the gospel story of God's salvation in a multitude of different ways;
2. Teaching all members to become disciples of Jesus, and expecting all to grow as disciples;
3. Treating the biblical story as normative in the church's life, and having it inform and shape all of the church's practices;
4. Understanding itself as living in contrast to the world as an alternative community because of its participation in the life, death, and resurrection of its Lord;
5. Discerning God's specific missional vocation for the entire community and for all of its members in its local place;
6. Becoming known for acts of self-sacrifice on behalf of one another, both in the church and in the local community;
7. Practicing reconciliation and moving beyond homogeneity toward a more heterogeneous community in its racial, ethnic, age, gender and socio-economic make-up;
8. Placing high value on mutual accountability and support for engagement in the mission;

⁴ For authors and leaders as diverse as Michael Frost, Alan Hirsch, Ed Stetzer, Mark Driscoll, and Dan Kimball, there is a shared starting point in their identification with the GOCN as a starting point for their missional practices and thinking.

9. Practicing hospitality that welcomes the stranger into the community and makes space for the “other”;
10. Celebrating, in the central act of worship, both God’s presence and God’s promised future;
11. Seeking vital public witness in its local place, and the transformation of public life, society, and communities; and
12. Recognizing itself as always an incomplete expression of the reign of God, and working toward more faithfully living life within the reign of God that has arrived in Jesus Christ (Barrett 2004, 159-172).⁵

3. KEY THEOLOGICAL EMPHASES

The theological emphases of the Missional Church movement can be summarized along four lines. The first is the understanding of mission as *missio Dei*. There is a commonly-held, theocentric understanding of mission, what Hendriks has termed a “theocentric reconceptualisation” of mission (2004, 25). Mission is first and foremost the mission of the Triune God to restore and renew the entire creation. The church finds its identity as the community of people God has chosen to participate in this creation-wide mission.

The second emphasis is on the gospel, understood primarily to be the good news of the coming of the reign of God. Out of this comes an understanding of the church that is oriented to and shaped by its place and task in the kingdom of God. As an agent of the kingdom of God, the church is called to advance the reign of God in all areas of life, seeking to bring God’s restorative rule to bear and reverse the effects of sin’s curse. The church is a people called by its very nature to be an extension and continuation of the kingdom mission of Jesus, called to represent the reign of God in its communal life together, called to function as a servant of the kingdom of God in the world, and called as the messenger of the kingdom of God proclaiming the good news and heralding the arrival of the kingdom of God in power.

The third missional emphasis is on the communal dimension of the church’s mission, following the lead of the GOCN. Reacting against the reduction of mission to the calling of individuals in culture, the GOCN has emphasized the church as a community called to embody the life of the kingdom of God *together*. As Newbigin puts it, the church is called to be a hermeneutic of the gospel in its local place, an inherently communal task that defines its mission and purpose.⁶

5 The work of the team led by Barrett offers a broad summary of practices and empirical indicators that have been identified within churches seeking explicit identification with the Missional movement spawned by the GOCN. Other work has been done in seeking to capture “empirical indicators” of Missional Churches. Minatrea has developed his own unique list of nine practices after field research into churches that were seeking missional transformation (2004). Hirsch has come up with six key elements in what he describes as “missional DNA or mDNA” (2006). Stetzer and Putnam highlight best practices of Missional Churches in his *Breaking the Missional Code* (2006). And Driscoll outlines practices he learned in moving from Emergent to Missional in his *Confessions of a Reformission Rev* (2006).

6 Newbigin writes, “How is it possible that the gospel should be credible, that people should come to believe that the power which has the last word in human affairs is represented by a man hanging on a cross? I am suggesting that the only answer, the only hermeneutic of the gospel, is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it” (1989, 227).

A fourth missional emphasis is the tendency to see the church largely in terms of an alternative community or contrast society in its relationship with Western culture. Again, this emphasis finds its roots in the GOCN. Goheen argues that, at least in part, the anti-Christendom mentality within the GOCN has been responsible for this counter-cultural perspective on the church's calling in culture (2002, 485-487). The GOCN has seen modernity's Christendom produce a church that had accommodated itself to culture and become blinded to its idolatrous shifts, particularly individualism. Reacting to this, the GOCN and Missional Church movement have emphasized the calling of the church as an alternative community or, as Alan Roxburgh summarizes, "as a contrast society . . . formed around beliefs and practices, which continually school and form it in a way of life, which cannot be derived from the particular culture in which it is found" (2007, 8).

4. DIVERSE CONTRIBUTIONS

Within the growing Missional movement, there are unique and diverse contributions being made. Having highlighted the shared theological emphases, it remains to capture the spectrum of these diverse emphases and contributions which are beginning to shape the movement and missional conversation. There are six areas that can be distinguished.

4.1 Incarnational ministry

For some within the missional movement, "missional" has become closely identified with the call to "incarnational ministry." Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, both leaders of the missional movement in Australia, emphasize the importance for the Missional Church to practice ministry that is incarnational in its local communities. Both are, in fact, quite critical of the institutional church in the West, even contrasting at times the "missional" church with the "institutional" church (Frost and Hirsch 2003, xi). They see three distinctives in the missional movement: (1) an incarnational ecclesiology; (2) a messianic spirituality; and (3) apostolic leadership. As they explore an incarnational ecclesiology, they move from Christology (heavy emphasis on Christ's incarnation and the ministry practices of Jesus in the secular world) to missiology (having an incarnational presence in our cultural context and following the practices of Jesus) to ecclesiology (the nature, functions, and forms of the church in its practice and life) (2003, 16). Put simply, they take the incarnation of Christ as the theological starting point for their reflections on mission and ecclesiology.

Given this starting point, they draw out five important implications for incarnational ministry. First, the incarnation must guide our cultural expression; second, the incarnation calls us to identify deeply and closely with our local context and the people within it; third, the incarnation reminds us that an abiding presence in the local community is important; fourth, the incarnation gives us a sending impulse into our local communities that runs counter to the impulse or desire to extract people out of a community into a gathered church community – a centrifugal mission rather than a centripetal one; and fifth, the incarnation calls us to find culturally meaningful ways to understand Jesus and communicate about Jesus (Frost and Hirsch 2003, 35-40). Based on these implications, they look at various models for being incarnational in a local community. They emphasize the importance of the church's three key relationships in practicing incarnational ministry: communion with Christ, communion with one another, and commission to the world.

In his more recent contribution, *Exiles*, Michael Frost adds further nuance to this incarnational

emphasis by describing “missional practices” necessary for smaller missional communities that find themselves on the margins and fringes of culture, alienated from the institutional church, and living as exiles in a post-Christian world (Frost 2006, 3-8). Halter and Smay have made a similar contribution in *The Tangible Kingdom: Creating Incarnational Community*, where they call Christians in the West to a pre-institutional form of Christian community that seeks to recover the incarnational practices of Jesus and the pre-institutional church (2008, 51-56). Such incarnational communities would seek to form themselves around shared missional practices that move them out into the local community to leave behind the comfort of the institutional church, live among, listen to, and love unconditionally those in their local context. What is needed, they argue, is to allow “church” to emerge out of this missional and incarnational way of life, so that its practices, structures, and leadership are defined by this incarnational posture (2008, 38-41).

4.2 Contextualization

A second contribution to the missional movement is in the all-important challenge of contextualizing the gospel in the cultural context of the West. Understanding the relationships between gospel, church, and culture is of primary significance in the missionary encounter (Hunsberger 1996, 8-9). Among scholarship on these relationships, two bear specific mention.

Ed Stetzer highlights the central importance of the Missional Church’s task of contextualizing the gospel in the local community. He sees the heart of the shift to a missional ecclesiology as the process of learning to “break the code” of the local cultural context in which the church finds itself. For Stetzer, breaking the code will only happen as the church learns to be deeply engaged with its local cultural context, and so becomes both faithful and relevant (2006, 89-107). Stetzer calls the church in North America to learn once again the missionary posture and make cultural engagement a primary task. He proposes a “missional matrix,” in which the local church’s work is grounded in biblical foundation, and Spirit-empowered in its application to the local place. This movement from foundation to application happens as the church begins to find the interactions between Christology, Missiology, and Ecclesiology, driven by three questions Stetzer insists the church answer: “Who is Jesus and what has he sent us to do? What forms and strategies should we use to most effectively expand the kingdom where we are sent? What expression of a New Testament church would be most appropriate in this context?” (Stetzer 2006, 54).

Along similar lines, Mark Driscoll is keen to equip the Missional Church movement to wrestle deeply with contextualization, re-thinking its evangelistic practices while avoiding syncretism with the cultural context of the West (see Driscoll 2004). He works to maintain theological orthodoxy while at the same time reshaping the church’s practice of mission and ministry. Driscoll was an early leader within the Emergent movement, who eventually left the movement due to his concerns about what he perceived to be its lack of theological orthodoxy.

While these and other contributions are helping the missional movement learn to engage the culture of the West with the gospel, this area is one that is in need of further thought. The movement has not historically given priority to the gospel-and-culture relationship, focusing instead on questions of ecclesiology. And what scholarship has emerged on contextualization needs to deepen and broaden. Methodologies for evangelism and effective witness to the gospel are extremely important, but the Missional Church movement – indeed the entire church in the West – needs a deeper awareness of the cultural story in which we find ourselves,

and the important questions and issues that arise when seeking to faithfully contextualize the gospel in our cultural context.

4.3 Biblical-theological orientation

A third major branch within the missional movement is the biblical-theological contributions to it. Historically, the contribution of the landmark *Missional Church* book was in large part to define the biblical and theological trajectories of the missional movement. What is needed now is ongoing biblical-theological reflection on the missional nature of the church, as well as engagement with the major confessional and theological traditions within Christianity that have shaped our various ecclesiologies.

Craig Van Gelder's *The Essence of the Church* is an important contribution to this end. Van Gelder offers the following summary definition: "The church, as the people of God in the world, is inherently a missionary church. It is to participate fully in the Son's redemptive work as the Spirit creates, leads, and teaches the church to live as the distinctive people of God" (2000, 31).

Van Gelder explores historical and theological developments both within missiology and ecclesiology and argues that a fully robust missional ecclesiology must draw from four important sources: biblical-theological perspectives on the church; historical and confessional perspectives on the church; contextual perspectives arising out of the study of contextualization within missiology; and perspectives on the churches' ongoing development and guidance by the Holy Spirit in its local community, along with ways of discerning this guidance.

Van Gelder offers an important contribution to our understanding of the mission of the church in light of the NT emphasis on the kingdom of God, drawing out the importance of focusing that mission on the redemptive reign of God to restore all of creation; the mission of God as Trinitarian; the mission of God as eschatological; and the church as missionary by its nature (Van Gelder 2000, 74-99). He then looks at four primary biblical images for the people of God and how they inform this missional understanding of the church: church as people of God, body of Christ, communion of saints, and creation of the Spirit. It is striking how these images are rooted in systematic theological reflections on ecclesiology (2000, 107-112). Finally, he rounds out his biblical-theological contribution to the nature of the church by recasting the four classical attributes of the church in a missional framework: the church as Holy, Catholic, One, and Apostolic (2000, 116-125). Van Gelder seeks to develop a model for the ministries and structures of the Missional Church that are rooted in and informed by these biblical-theological insights.

Significant work in this area is also being done by the growing movement of Allelon, under the leadership of Alan Roxburgh. Allelon is a hub of missional activity and movement within North America, the U.K., and Africa. What is striking in Roxburgh's work on Missional Church is that he re-imagines the biblical-theological starting point for the missional movement. He insists that God is the starting point of the missional conversation, not the church (Allelon 2008, 1-2). He argues that the whole missional movement in the West has been de-railed by the continued focus and emphasis on the church and about how to make the church work:

Whether within established traditions of the post-Reformation era or among newer, postmodern Emergent churches, the conversation remains colonized by an ecclesiocentric imagination. Without a return to an understanding of God as the subject there can be no

Missional Church, only churches using missional language to find new ways of making church work in a culture that has radically changed from the one in which Christianity was at the centre (Allelon 2008, 1-2).

Instead, Roxburgh draws our attention back on God with two basic questions: “Who is this God revealed to us in Jesus Christ?” and “What is this God up to in the world?” Building on a Trinitarian understanding of God – the Triune God existing in a community of self-giving love for the sake of the world – Roxburgh defines the core identity of the church as the communion of God that gives itself for the sake of the world (Allelon 2008, 2).

God’s missionary nature, argues Roxburgh, must be expressed in terms of the *missio Dei*. Missional Church is fundamentally a call to move from a church *with* a mission to become a church that *is* missional in all its life; it is a call from an ecclesiocentric to a God-centred community for the sake of the world. Roxburgh identifies several factors at work in both the UK and in North America that have made the church the primary centre of the missional conversation and have dissociated the missional language from the *missio Dei* and instead used it as a label to lay over programs, activities, and ministries designed to make the church work or look successful. At the heart of it is a loss of place in society and the assumption that the main issue is for the church in the West to diagnose the problem within the internal life of the church, remedy the problem with a specific set of programs, and then finish our missional work by clarifying the nature and purpose of the church. Roxburgh laments (Allelon 2008, 5),

The church was the problem and needed a method to fix itself. Behind this kind of assumption lies a deeper unspoken conviction: the church is the key issue that must be addressed; it is the central subject of all the questions about the mission of God in the world; get the church right and everything else will follow.

For Roxburgh, the work of the GOCN and publication of *Missional Church* only continued and solidified this focus of the missional conversation on issues of ecclesiology. By contrast, Roxburgh recasts the focus of the missional conversation along the following six lines:

1. We must restore God as the subject of the missional conversation. The church is not the focus or centre of a missional engagement with Western culture.
2. The primary locus of engagement is the gospel and culture relationship, with ecclesiology as a sub-set of that primary relationship.
3. Focus should be put on the development of a missional theology and praxis for engagement with the neighbourhoods and communities in which we live and work. The shape and purpose of the church emerges out of that theology and praxis.
4. We live in times of rapid, discontinuous change and therefore we must avoid the default processes and questions of the past.
5. In our present postmodern context, we must learn to ask different questions within different kinds of contexts.
6. The guiding principle for the nature and function of the church will be framed by Luke 10:1-12, where the set of questions shaping our listening and discernment are focused (Allelon 2008, 9-10).

Roxburgh argues that the questions arising from Luke 10 should shape the role of the church. As

we enter towns, villages, and neighbourhoods where we live and work, how might we discern what God is up to in these places? As we sit at the tables of others and enter their narratives, how might we hear the ways in which the gospel already intersects with their stories? As we dwell like this, becoming the stranger and taking the posture of being served, how will we listen and discern what God is doing? We allow the gospel to challenge our assumptions as we listen to the gospel in the context of the *other* we encounter in these ways. Finally, out of all these experiences, we then are in a position to ask the ecclesiological questions, which Roxburgh articulates in the following way:

What then will it mean to be the church in this place and among these people given what God is already doing here? Here, the shape of the church isn't already assumed but emerges from these interrelationships. This does not mean we must give up or let go of all the traditions that have shaped us to this point; they will be relativized and we will be challenged to make sense of them from within the contexts of neighbourhood (Allelon 2008, 10).

4.4 Organizational change models and communal discernment

A fourth branch of contributions in the missional movement is the important work being done on organizational change models and methods for communal discernment of the church's missional vocation in its local place. Van Gelder makes more explicit connections between the nature of the church as missional and both purposes and strategies for ministry as well as discernment for engaging our changing cultural context. He gives focus both to the Spirit's role in creating the church, a perspective which nuances the nature of the church as missional; and the Spirit's role in shaping the ministry of the church, a perspective which clarifies the purpose and practices of the church (see Van Gelder 2007).

Patrick Keifert is another important leader in the missional movement's work in organizational change and communal discernment. Through extensive work as a church consultant, working through processes for missional transformation and change, Keifert has developed tools to equip churches in the West to find again their places in society. These new place must lead churches to renewed discovery of their particular visions and missional vocations in the local communities within which God has situated them. Keifert has developed processes and models for the necessary mentoring, partnership, learning, and planning that must take place in order to enable the transition into missional practices and engagement with the local context (see Keifert 2006).

4.5 Missional leadership

The Missional Church movement has also engaged questions and issues of discipleship and leadership within the church. This concern for missional leadership and the uniqueness of what contributes toward a leader being equipped to lead a Missional Church has been highlighted by various people within the missional movement. Alan Roxburgh has made an important contribution on the process of developing missional leadership capacity for the local church (see Roxburgh 2005 and Roxburgh and Romanuk 2006). Frost and Hirsch developed the APEPT model for missional leadership, which has served as a practical tool for leadership assessment and development (2003, 169-171). Hirsch has further developed this APEPT model,⁷ with

⁷ Frost and Hirsch use APEPT to refer to “five fold,” apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers.

particular emphasis on the apostolic gifting needed in the missional leader (2006, 149-177). Stetzer addresses this issue as well, highlighting the need for missional leadership which is able to lead communities in cultural exegesis so that they might break the cultural codes of their local places (see Stetzer 2006). The GOCN also gave early recognition to the importance of wrestling with the leadership models that have come along with the Christendom legacy, and how the Missional Church conversation can begin to shift our models for church leadership (Guder 1998, 183-220).

It has been primarily the contributions of Alan Roxburgh that have shaped the leadership efforts of the missional movement. Roxburgh has given detailed reflection on the uniqueness of missional leaders for missional communities. Among those contributions, the following can be highlighted. Roxburgh explores how the missional imagination must be cultivated among God's people by the leadership; models for missional change in making the transition into a missional understanding of the church; different images that will help shape the role of the leader in a missional community; the importance of coming to terms with the reality of rapid, discontinuous change in our present cultural context in the West and the unique challenges this change presents to leaders; and models for understanding the different phases and stages of change, with insights into the unique leadership challenges at each stage and phase. This area of missional leadership will continue to be cultivated and developed, given the importance of leadership in the local church and the role leaders must play in missional transformation.

4.6 Missional practices and empirical indicators

A final branch or contribution in the missional movement is work that is being done to identify missional practices and empirical indicators. What sorts of signs should one begin to find in a church that has made the transformation into a missional community?

These practices and indicators are being identified on both corporate and personal levels. As noted above, the work edited by Lois Barrett was a significant contribution toward identifying essential corporate practices in Missional Churches. Minatrea developed his own research project and empirical indicators in *Shaped By God's Heart: The Passion and Practices of Missional Churches*. Alan Hirsch has argued for what he refers to as six missional DNA indicators that need to be activated again in the church in the West: the confession of Jesus as Lord; disciple making; missional-incarnational impulse; apostolic environment of leadership; organic systems of organization; and commitment to "communitas." Hirsch argues that these six corporate practices that are part of the missional DNA latent within every follower of Jesus and need activation by the Holy Spirit through the gifts of an apostolic missional leader (2006, 15-26).

But, perhaps most significant are Michael Frost's efforts to recover the original genius of Jesus' teaching and lifestyle example during his earthly ministry, as well as recover the missional practices of the early followers of Christ in the apostolic era. Frost is concerned to help Christians live in the tension of not being at home in the world nor in the contemporary church in the West. He is writing to a growing number of Christians in the West who are dissatisfied with current expressions of the church, trying to inspire among them a Christ-centred faith and lifestyle of "missional practices" (2006, 3-27). Frost confesses his own lack of hope for the

They make the argument that "to each one grace has been given" and "he gave some to be" in Ephesians 4 applies the APEPT giftings to every believer.. every believer has one of the APEPT gifts.

future of the institutional church in the West, but sees hope in the death of Christendom – hope that Christians who resonate with the feeling of displacement both culturally and from the institutional church will rediscover these missional practices and over time develop like-minded Christ-followers, who together might begin the formation of alternative communities of people living out these practices together.

5. CONCLUSION

The Missional Church movement is growing in its breadth and diversity as it continues to work out the implications of what is involved in seeking missional transformation of the church in the West. The article focused on the influence of Lesslie Newbigin on the church in Northern America. It may be summarized as refocusing theology on the Trinity and the *missio Dei*. Newbigin's sensitivity for inter- or cross cultural communication and the importance of ecumenism helped to eventually unmask what became known as the Christendom paradigm. The church in the Western world started realizing its cultural captivity and reigning philosophical assumptions. This sparked a number of movements that revitalized the theology in the established mainline and evangelical churches. The missional church movement is a somewhat different movement if compared to the emergent church movement.

The article summarized the key practices and theological emphases of the missional movement and then highlighted six diverse contributions that spawned from the movement. Missional transformation will take place as the church recovers a missional identity and fleshes out the implications of that identity for all aspects of ecclesiastical life and practice. As the movement matures, it will need to continue to engage in the depth of biblical/theological reflection and cultural analysis that gave birth to this movement. Without this, there is a growing danger of the movement succumbing to a pragmatist desire to find some methodology or model that will lead to church renewal. Ongoing discernment within this movement is critical for the church in the West to renew its missional identity and vocation.

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KEY WORDS

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TREFWOORDE

Ontluikende kerk
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ekklesiologie
inkarnasie.

Tim M Sheridan,
Senior Pastor, Maple Ridge CRC
20245 Dewdney Trunk Rd.
Maple Ridge BC V2X3C9, Canada.
pastortim@mapleridgecrc.com
Cell +1 (778) 874-7542; Home +1 (604) 460-0337

H Jurgens Hendriks
Emeritus Professor: Practical Theology en Missiology
Executive Director: Network for African Congregational Theology (NetACT)
Faculty of Theology

NGTT: Oopbron – <http://ngtt.journals.ac.za>

Stellenbosch University

171 Dorp Street

Stellenbosch 7600

South Africa.

+27-21-808-3260 (w); +27-21-808-3251 (fax); +27-73-772-6706 (cell); hjh@sun.ac.za

