


The roots of *missio Dei* in the Reformation, and its implications for theological education



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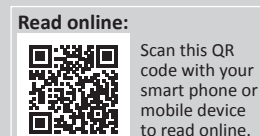
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Dates:
Received: 04 Dec. 2019
Accepted: 09 Mar. 2020
Published: 09 June 2020

How to cite this article:
Buys, P.J., 2020, 'The roots of *missio Dei* in the Reformation, and its implications for theological education', *In die Skriflig* 54(2), a2585. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v54i2.2585>

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Theological debates on the use and meaning of the concept of *missio Dei* as a term in Reformed theology emphasise the need for more in-depth theological reflection on the Reformed roots of this term. Consideration of the covenant of redemption (*pactum salutis*) as the point of departure may provide a solid foundation for a biblical theological understanding and the use of *missio Dei* in Reformed theology. Such an approach will emphasise a kingdom missional vision for Reformed churches. Such an approach may provide valid biblical, theological and doctrinal contours for theological education for the equipping of disciples of Christ, which will be enabled to equip disciples in pastoral training.

Keywords: *Missio Dei*; Covenant of redemption *pactum salutis*; Theological education; Discipling disciples; Missional church.

Introduction and problem statement

The validity of the use of the term *missio Dei* and the meaning of the concept as part and parcel of Reformed vocabulary are being contested and rejected by some as an earth-shaking departure away from traditional Reformed theology (Meijer 2015:3296).

Other critical views on the meaning of *missio Dei* stirred up a debate on the purpose of the existence of the church (Breed 2014:1–10, 2017: 113ff; Niemandt 2007:149, 151, 2008:610) and even the core meaning of the gospel (Janse van Rensburg 2011:75–89).

It is a pity that the debates and a floodgate of research in South Africa on the use and meaning of the *missio Dei* term and concept have paid very limited attention to the historical background. Schirmacher (2017) pointed out the need for more in-depth theological reflection on *missio Dei* as term and concept when he wrote:

Even articles with the title [*'missio Dei'*] often contain no biblical theological or systematic justification for God's sending or for the [continuation] of God's mission through the church. Rather, they often address other questions of missionary theology. One gets the feeling that it is a matter of a trendy buzzword and that there is no actual interest in its content or substantive value. (p. 14)

Schirmacher (2017) correctly pointed out that the:

[U]se of *missio Dei* as a slogan and the lack of detailed explanation of *missio Dei* in detail, even by its proponents, could be the main reason why [the] emphasis on *missio Dei* since [the] Willingen [missions conference] has never really had much effect. It [may] also be the reason why a missions moratoria and social gospel currents have appropriated this term too easily at and since Willingen. (p. 17)

The ambiguity that surrounds the use of the phrase, '*missio Dei*' right from its inception led to the possibility of what Rosin (1972:14–15) called ['theological exploitation']. The phrase, gradually, came to assume wide-ranging interpretations depending' on 'its theological context', giving 'it enough elasticity as a symbol of short formula ... to allow it to function in the most divergent trains of thought' (Joseph 2013:57).

When Bosch (1991:8) discussed his definition of *missio Dei*, he just mentioned that the origin of the theological basis of *missio Dei* is already to be found in covenantal Reformed theology of the post-Reformation, but he does not elaborate on this view. This article will argue that a Reformed understanding of *missio Dei* should entail that God is ushering in his kingdom through the covenant of redemption (*pactum salutis*) and the covenant of grace, and this will be completed in the eschatological whole new creation (Re 21:5, 6).

Note: Special Collection: Impact of Reformed Theology.

'At present there is general agreement that the doctrine of the covenants is a peculiarly Reformed doctrine' (Vos 1980:23). The biblical teaching of the covenant has traditionally been seen as one of the pillars of Reformed theology. Geerhardus Vos (1980) wrote:

At present there is general agreement that the doctrine of the covenants is a peculiarly Reformed doctrine. (p. 236)

This view is echoed by several Reformed theologians (Horton 2006; Morris 1972; Ridderbos 1972; Vorster 2019). According to John Hesselink, 'Reformed theology is simply covenant theology' (as quoted by Horton 2006:11). When Jacob Van der Schuit wrote about the covenant of redemption (Dutch: Verlossingsverbond), he could even say that Reformed theology has always had the deepest conviction that true religion is expressed in the covenant relationship with the Triune God (Van der Schuit 1982: 6).

Covenant theology deals with the realisation that God has revealed his truth, has revealed himself and has revealed redemption through the covenant. It is the study of God's eternal unchanging purpose to bring a people to himself in a covenantal relationship in the history of ushering in his kingdom.

During the past 50 years, a floodgate of discussions, reflections and debates on theological education has been published. When one follows the discussions in theological journals and church magazines, it is clear that there have been a growing desire and global-wide discussions to consider better ways of providing theological education to churches and Christian leaders. (cf. Bosch 1984; Cole 2001:2–15, 2007:171; Conn 1978:311–363; Covell & Wagner 1971; Decarvalho 2003; ed. Eliston 1999; Ferris 2001; Frame 1984; Haak 1999; eds. Hart & Mohler 1996; Kornfield 1984:169–221; Newbigin 1984:3–18; Niebuhr, Williams & Gustafson 1957; Ortiz 1997; Schrottenboer 1976:6–8; Wells 1994; ed. Woods 1995).

In 1999, 80 institutions of training from around the globe had a consultation on the critical need for training of pastors in the developing world. As a result of this consultation, Training of Pastors International Coalition (TOPIC) was established. Training of Pastors International Coalition wants to be an international network organisation that facilitates cooperation between institutions of training to accelerate and multiply the training of an estimated 3 million untrained pastors (Landrey 2009).

In a very challenging article, 'Restoring missional vision in theological education', distributed by the Lausanne Movement's Global Analysis, Chrispal (2019) formulated the hankering of many researchers on theological education for the dire need of comprehensive transformative pastoral training.

This need has also been expressed in recent years at several large conferences on theological education of evangelical and Reformed scholars, for example, like International Council of Evangelical Theological Education (ICETE), World Reformed Fellowship and Training of Pastors International Coalition

(TOPIC). The significant implications of a biblical and evangelical understanding of the *missio Dei* vision for all aspects of theological education were stressed.

The issue of developing a missional ecclesiology for churches in South Africa and worldwide (Benadé 2019) and developing ministers as missional leaders (Cordier & Niemandt 2015; Goheen 2018a, 2018b; Nell 2013) is considered in depth.

This article endeavours to point out how the theological roots of *missio Dei* thinking can be found in the Reformed theology of the *pactum salutis* and then considers the question: what impact and influence should these Reformed roots of *missio Dei* have on the training of Reformed ministers and what fruit may it bear on the ministry of churches? This article will reason that a Reformed understanding and conviction of *missio Dei* will ensure that the missional vision of the covenant of redemption and the covenant of grace function as a leaven that leavens all fields of theological education and stirs up a heartfelt vision, conviction and passion for missions and the glory of God in the lives of theological students.

Dogma historical background of *pactum salutis*

Reformed theologians since the Reformation and post-Reformation have indeed emphasised that believers and the 'church compose a part of the covenant that already exists [between] the Father and the Son' (Schirmmacher 2017:19). 'This was emphasized by one of the most important Reformed covenant theologians, Herman Witsius' (Schirmmacher 2009: 165–920, 2017:19, an English translation of his major work of 1677; cf. also Muller 2007:11–65). There is already within the Trinity a perfect, eternal covenant. God's covenant with human race is actually reception into the covenant of the Son with the Father (Schirmmacher 2017:20).

Definition of the *pactum salutis*

The older Reformed systematic theologies used the Latin phrase *pactum salutis* to reason about God's eternal counsel of salvation. In contemporary theology, the concept is translated as the *Covenant of Redemption*.

Van Drunen and Clark (2007) defined as follows:

In Reformed theology, the *pactum salutis* has been defined as a pretemporal, intratrinitarian agreement between the Father and Son in which the Father promises to redeem an elect people. In turn the Son volunteers to earn the salvation of his people by becoming incarnate ... by acting as surety of the covenant of grace for and as mediator of the covenant of grace to the elect. In his active and passive obedience, Christ fulfils the conditions of the *pactum salutis* ... ratifying the Father's promise, because of which the Father rewards the Son's obedience with the salvation of the elect. And because of this the Holy Spirit applies the Son's work to his people through the means of grace. (p. 168)

It is generally believed by many Reformed theologians that the (De Young 2019; cf. Enns 1989:508):

[P]actum has been a critically important doctrine, helping to make sense of (and hold together) election in Christ, God's activity in history, and the intra-trinitarian love of God. It has also been a pastoral doctrine meant to give the believer confidence that because our covenant relationship with God has its origin in the Father's pre-temporal covenant relationship with the Son, we do not have to merit our salvation but can rest secure in Christ our Surety. (n.p.)

The 'pactum salutis lies at the heart of the biblical plan of salvation and is what shaped the earthly, and continues to shape the present heavenly, life of our Saviour' (CPC n.d.).

What is meant by it is the belief that before the creation of the universe, God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit made an agreement (a covenant, a pact). The content of this pact was that God will send his Son to the world. The goal of his sending was that the Son would take the sins of all those whom the Father gave to him, on himself. He would then liberate them from the dominion of Satan, by suffering and dying for them on the cross, by being resurrected from his grave for their justification and by representing them as his own in heaven at the right hand of the Father.

The Father and the Son would then send out the Holy Spirit to bring them (those whom the Father had chosen and given to Jesus) to faith in Christ and commitment to the Father. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit would sanctify them to be transformed into the image of Christ, thus restoring the image of God in them and perfecting them for the day of the final return of Christ. In this process of bringing chosen people to faith and commitment and transforming them into the image of Christ, the Holy Spirit would use (mainly) the instruments of the Word, the sacraments and the members of the Church as the body of Christ whom he would equip with his gifts and power to do the work of ministry.

Development of the *pactum salutis* doctrine in Reformed theology

Although the 'trajectory of dogmatic development toward the notion of the *pactum salutis* was already known in the seventeenth century, as is evident from the *De oeconomia foederum* (1677) of Herman Witsius' (Beach 2002:101–142; Loonstra 1990:162–167; Muller 2007; Van Genderen 1953:142–146), Helm (1983:68–71) 'has argued antecedents of the doctrine in the thought of Calvin. Clear antecedent formulations of an eternal *pactum* of Christ with the Father can be found in the thought of Olevianus (1585:23, 63, 106; Muller 2007), one of the authors of the Heidelberg Catechism (cf. also Bierma 1996:107–112).

Muller (2007:13) and Beach (2002:102) proved through intensive and extensive research that Witsius, in formulating his doctrine of the covenant, also 'appeals to the work of reformed predecessors and contemporaries, such as William Ames, F. Gomarus, J. Cloppenburg, G. Voetius, A. Essenius, and John Owen' (Beach 2002) as major formulators of the doctrine of the *pactum salutis* in the generation immediately before Witsius' elaboration of the doctrine.

Although Witsius had critiqued some of the formulations of Cocceius, he clearly conciliates and related 'his own Voetian background and training, along with his Nadere Reformatie inclinations, to that of Cocceius's greater accent upon the history of salvation' (Beach 2002:102; cf. also Duncan 1998).

According to Beach (2002) Bavinck (1928:III:346) critiqued some formulations of seventeenth-century Reformed theologians:

[S]eventeenth-century Reformed theologians. Nonetheless, he believes that the doctrine of the *pactum salutis* [clearly] rests upon a scriptural idea. Indeed, within the divine essence, the covenant has its full reality, and the relationship of the three persons of the Godhead bears the character of a [συνθήκη] in the fullest sense. (p. 116)

In his *Locus de Foedere*, Kuyper (1902:90) also expressed the opinion that we 'are fully justified to carry the concept of the *foedus*, the *pactum*, into the intra-divine life'. Beach (2002) made it clear that the:

[D]octrine does not require an uncertainty and disparity among the divine Persons. [Yet he] was concerned to emphasize that the *pactum* belongs 'to the necessary manifestations of God's essence', and so he seeks to protect it from all contingency. It is 'directly and absolutely based in the essence and the attributes of God' (1909:18,19; Beach 2002).

G. C. Berkouwer (1960:162) as the theological heir of Bavinck's and Kuyper's work, [considered the essence of the debates by stating that] what is at stake in the *pactum* is the place and function of Christ in the [...] divine process of salvation. The *pactum* safeguards against any notion that divine election is decreed apart from Christ or that he is rendered the mere executor of that decree. (p. 119)

Beach (2002) rejects Barth's (mis)construal of the doctrine and stated:

It is beyond doubt that the doctrine of the *pactum salutis* has been meant to indicate the depth- and stability-aspects of salvation in Christ. When we speak of depth-aspect, we mean that eternity does not stand in contrast to what in time becomes historical reality, but rather that the salvation accomplished by Christ's death of reconciliation cannot be merely historical, but that it has its eternal foundation in the love of God. If we speak of *pactum salutis* to indicate this aspect, we do not thereby attempt to humanize the counsel of God. We wish, on the contrary, to indicate an analogy with what is called a 'covenant' or 'pact' on earth. Much, then, depends on the tertium comparationis, since we do not wish to transpose what cannot be transposed without violating the honor of the triune God. (pp. 167–168)

Ferguson (2004) formulated the pastoral implications of the eternal roots of the covenants as follows:

The triune God had a plan, involving the mutual commitment of Father, Son and Spirit to save a people. About this the reformed theologians speak with one voice.

Before all time; prior to all worlds; when there was nothing 'outside of' God himself; when the Father, Son and Spirit found eternal, absolute and unimaginable blessing, pleasure and joy in their holy triunity – it was their agreed purpose to create a world which would fall, and in unison – but at infinitely great cost – to bring you (if you are a believer) grace and salvation. This deeper

grace from before the dawn of time – pictured in the rituals, the leaders and the experiences of the Old Testament saints (cf. Heb 11:39–12:3) – is now ours. These are the dimensions of what the author of Hebrews calls ‘such a great salvation’ (Heb 2:3). Our salvation depends on God’s covenant, rooted in eternity in the plan of the Trinity, foreshadowed in the Mosaic covenant, fulfilled in Christ, enduring forever. No wonder Hebrews calls it ‘great’.

You considered your salvation to be ‘great’ early in your Christian life didn’t you? Do you still think about it that way today? (n.p.)

Exegetical and biblical theological foundations of the covenant of redemption

In Luke 22:29, Jesus promises that he will make the disciples part of his kingdom in the same way as (καθώς) his Father has performed for him. Διατίθεμαι (from the verb διατίθημι) can mean: ‘to issue a decree’ or ‘to make a covenant’ (Ac 3:25; Heb 8:10; 10:16).

Witsius (1990) paraphrased:

And I engage by covenant unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath engaged by covenant unto me. In which words the Lord Jesus says that, by virtue of some covenant or disposition, he obtains a kingdom, as we also obtain it by virtue of the same. (p. 166)

It is important to consider ‘that the word translated “granted” comes from the Greek word διατίθημι. The Greek word for covenant is διαθήκη’ (Grace Reformed Baptist Church n.d.).

Barcellos (2015) then reasoned that every time when the word Διατίθεμαι that is used in:

Luke 22:29 is used [elsewhere] in the New Testament it is used in contexts where the normal Greek word [διαθήκη in the sense of] covenant is used. It ends up being a word that is used in covenantal contexts in every instance it occurs in the New Testament. (n.p.)

For instance, in the following (Barcellos 2015):

1. Acts 3:25, ‘It is you who are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant [διαθήκη] which God made [διατίθημι] with your fathers, saying to Abraham, “and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed”’.
2. Hebrews 8:10, quoting Jeremiah 31:33, ‘for this is the covenant [διαθήκη] that I will make [διατίθημι] with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord ...’.
3. Hebrews 9:16–17, ‘For where a covenant [διαθήκη] is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it [διατίθημι]. For a covenant [διαθήκη] is valid only when men are dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it [διατίθημι] lives’.
4. Hebrews 10:16, quoting Jeremiah 31:33, ‘This is the covenant [διαθήκη] that I will make [διατίθημι] with them after those days, says the Lord ...’ It is also of interest that the LXX, the ancient translation of the Hebrew text into Greek by Jewish scholars, translates Jeremiah 31:33 using the words διαθήκη for ‘covenant’ and διατίθημι for ‘made’.

The context of Luke 22:29 is also important to keep in mind.

Luke 22:14–20 describes the installation of the Lord’s Supper (vv. 19–20)

It is important to take note of the eschatological perspectives. Jesus says that there is going to be a future supper (vv. 16 and 30) and an eschatological or future kingdom (v. 30). The Lord’s supper points to the ushering in of ‘the new covenant in My blood’ (Lk 22:20b).

Sproul (2018) referred to the great ‘Kenotic Hymn’ of Philippians 2, to see a glimpse of the obedience of Christ to the Father and the Father’s reward to the Son as understood in the covenant of redemption (ESV Php 2:5–11):

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (pp. 5–11)

Missio Dei and the covenant of redemption

The goal of the intertrinitarian covenant (the *pactum salutis*) is the ushering in the Kingdom of God through the salvation of the elect and thus ultimately to confirm the glory of the Triune God.

Gomes (2016), the International Director of World Reformed Fellowship, stresses the difference it makes when the mission of the church is understood from the perspective of the covenant of redemption:

[T]he depth of purpose, of understanding that Jesus’ mandate to the Church summarized in the Great Commission is not simply an epiphenomenon of the church’s historical existence, but is, in fact, the summary of a program for the fulfilment, in the church, of a deeper and eternal purpose that has to do with the being of God himself (Eph 1: 3–23). Brazilian theologian Wadislau Martins Gomes speaks of that: ‘The purpose of God, in this case, is to plasm his holiness (his glory, his grace, his character) in us, as members of his body; ours, is to reflect the glory of his character, by grace through faith’. The connection is clear: the mission of the church (missio ecclesiae) derives from the mission of God (missio Dei) and the latter is the manifestation of God’s purposes rooted in his own being! (p. 9)

Gomes (2016) formulated the missional purpose of the covenant of redemption concisely as follows:

The eternal and glorious Trinity moves outwards in a gracious expression that has as a purpose the reflection of his glory in the objects of his grace! (p. 13)

Passages like the following can be understood along these lines (ESV Php 2; ESV Re 15):

... [S]o that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (vv. 5–11)

Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed. (vv. 3–4)

History of the term *missio Dei*

The term *missio Dei* was coined in the 4th century AD by 'St. Augustine who was most influential in the development of the doctrine of the Trinity in Latin theology' (Joseph 2013; Varghese 2013:17; cf. also Gensichen 1971:55–57; Gomes 2016:9; Müller 1985:57–59; Poitras 1999:26–46; Sundermeier 2002:1243–1244). St. Augustine used the term to 'denote the sending of the Son by the Father and the sending of the Spirit by the Father and the Son, or the proceeding of the Son and the Spirit from the Father' (Schirmacher 2017):

Behold, then, why the Son of God was sent; nay, rather behold what it is for the Son of God to be sent. Whatever things they were which were wrought in time, with a view to produce faith, whereby we might be cleansed so as to contemplate truth, in things that have a beginning, which have been put forth from eternity, and are referred back to eternity: these were either testimonies of this mission, or they were the mission itself of the Son of God. But some of these testimonies announced Him beforehand as to come, some testified that He had come already. (p. 82)

'Subsequent to St. Augustine, it also became a technical term used by St. Thomas Aquinas for Trinitarian doctrine, having to do with the eternal procession of the Son and the Spirit' (Schirmacher 2017:9–10).

The World Missionary Conference held in Willingen in 1952 adopted the term *missio Dei* for the Protestant realm in order to illustrate that world missions efforts are rooted in the Trinitarian nature of God. Georg F. Vicedom (1958) made the term popular through his book, *Missio Dei*.

Missio Dei in Reformed missiology

At the Synod of Dordt 1618–1619, Gisbertus Voetius (or Gijsbert Voet, 1589–1676) was at the very young age of 29 a delegate of the Classis of Heusden. The terms *missio* or *missions* were absent from the vocabulary of Dordt (it was only used in later documents of Voetius, e.g. his *Politica Ecclesiastica* of 1669–1671; cf. Van Andel 1912:20). Voetius had influence on the outcomes of the Synod of Dordt, but then Dordt also had a profound influence on Voetius' missiology and church polity (Van der Watt 2019:3).

Van der Watt (2019) summarised the importance of Voetius as follows:

In David Bosch's *Transforming mission*, he describes Voetius as the first Protestant to have developed a comprehensive 'theology of mission' (Bosch 1991:257–258). He concurs with Jongeneel (1991:78) that, although Voetius is 'hopelessly outdated', he is

also surprisingly 'modern' with significant relevance for today. Voetius may rightfully be considered one of the first exponents of the 'modern' concept of *missio Dei*. (p. 1)

Voetius developed a wide-ranging, contextual Reformational missiology and is generally regarded as the father of Reformed Missional Science (Jongeneel 1998:3).

His main ideas on mission were written in Latin with the title *De plantationes ecclesiarum* (regarding the planting [or establishing] – of churches) (cf. Voetius 1910).

Mission could only be founded in God, in God's decision and God's will (hidden, predestined as well as revealed in the Old Testament and New Testament), as well as God's fulfilled and still to be fulfilled promise – all bearing down to God's election, the calling (*vocatio*), conversion and salvation (*conversio et salus*) of the elect (*electorum*) from all nations (*universitas gentium*). 'Mission work is the means through which God's goal of saving the elect is reached' (Ireland-Verwoerd n.d.). These concepts were directly taken from the Canons of Dordt (I, 7, III and IV, 8) (Van Andel 1912:63). The mandate for mission and the fulfilment thereof lies in Matthew 28:19; only partially fulfilled in the extraordinary apostolic era, but to be continued by the church in the ordinary cause of history (Van Andel 1912:69; Van der Watt 2019:4).

The Reformed missiologist Jan A.B. Jongeneel expressed amazement in an article that Voetius has been virtually neglected by later Reformed theologians until Abraham Kuyper in the times of the Doleantie reached back to Voetius to articulate an 'ecclesiological mission structure'. 'In the 20th century, Voetius regained some recognition for his mission theology in the work of prominent Dutch missiologists J.H. Bavinck and J. Verkuyl' (Ireland-Verwoerd n.d.; Van der Watt 2019:5–6).

The covenant of redemption is the channel through which the Father executes his election. Understanding the *Missio Dei* concept from the perspectives of the covenant of redemption then emphasises that 'worldwide proclamation of the Gospel is from God, by God and for God. It is truly *missio Dei*, God's mission' (Ireland-Verwoerd n.d.).

Van der Watt (2019) hit the nail on the head when he stated:

[I]t could be enriching to enter in a more conscious discussion with the roots of the Reformed missiology, especially that of Dordt 1618–1619 and Voetius. It will be interesting to discover that what is today often presented as 'new insights', can actually be traced back to someone like Voetius. But it will also be enriching to understand the necessary discontinuities with this tradition and what issues should indeed be regarded as 'new insights'. (p. 8)

A revitalisation of our understanding of the concepts of the covenant of redemption (*pactum salutis* and the covenant of grace) is vital for developing a Reformed approach to global missions and pastoral ministry and an understanding of the true calling of the church in the world.

This should clarify an understanding that:

1. The church as the covenant community of the King is the instrument of God's 'Mission (cf. Mt 9:37–38; Jn 13:20; 15:16; 17:18; Eph 3:8–10). The church is not the end of God's mission, but the instrument of it – God's tool in the outworking of his plan' to usher in his kingdom (Length 2007).

But:

2. The church is also the goal of mission, in the sense of God gathering his elect to be his Bride for the great day of the wedding of the Lamb (cf. Rv 5:9–10; 7:9–12; 19:1–8). This 'multitude of the redeemed worshipping [God] through Christ in the New [Creation] is the Universal Church of God; the new humanity in Christ' (Length 2007). We need to refresh our vision of the church called to be the covenant community of the King (Van Engen 1993:105). In his doctoral thesis, De Ridder (1971) convincingly proved with in-depth exegesis the covenantal basis of Mathew 28:18–20. His conclusions actually underscore Voetius' emphasis as church planting to be a valid goal of the mission of the church. Christ's command to make disciples of all nations (μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη) is obeyed by baptizing (βαπτίζοντες) and teaching them to observe all that he has commanded them (διδάσκοντες αὐτοὺς τηρεῖν πάντα ὅσα ἐνετειλάμην ὑμῖν). This clearly implies that the Lordship of Jesus Christ is extended when the church is to win people to Christ and grow these converts in the faith. That process is meant to take place in local churches being planted (Stetzer 2006:40). In this way, the ultimate goal of mission, that God is glorified, is fulfilled.

Implications for theological education

What happens in churches – or does not happen in many places – stimulated many debates on pastoral training. On the one hand, there is a scenario of overwhelming numerical growth of Christian churches in the developing world that produces a great need for trained leaders.

On the other hand, there is a tendency of a scary decline in Western churches and a lack of missional vision and passion to evangelise.

Many missiologists and theologians (Goheen 2018a, 2018b; Ott 2001; Shaw 2014) who are studying the decline of Western churches are convinced that the main reason for this decline is to be found in outdated models of pastoral training. When churches are not growing, seminaries have to do some healthy introspection and ask themselves: why are we not producing pastors who have genuine compassion for the lost and are not on fire for the proclamation of the gospel and church planting?

Seminaries, curricula and models of pastoral training are seen as stumbling blocks for church growth. Winter (2003) formulated this charge as follows:

... [I]t is sad yet fair to say that the seminaries and Bible schools of the world are actually a surprisingly weak and often negative contributor to the growth of Christianity around the world. (p. 11)

Theological educators from a wide variety of backgrounds express their frustration with the fragmentation and contextual irrelevance of most ministerial training programmes (Conn 1983:312 ; Goheen 2018b).

Ott (2001) wrote:

The traditional field of studies will no longer automatically define the curriculum. They have to fit in a new structure of studies which is shaped by the centre and the orientation of the church-in-mission. Some traditional areas of scholarly specialization, or at least some part of them, may become *irrelevant*. Others need to be *adjusted* to the new centre of theology. All areas of studies have to *rethink* their agenda in the light of this unifying centre. New areas of research and study will emerge. (p. 226)

Shaw (2014) verbalised his experience as follows:

My own experience had seen student after student entering college passionate for ministry and leaving passionate for academia, with little idea how to empower the church and often with no genuine desire to do so. (p. 253)

The ingrown attitude of church leaders results in declining and dying churches. Miller (1986) wrote from a Calvinistic paradigm about this phenomenon and described it as follows:

Ingrown Churches and their leaders have crashed spiritually and never noticed their own fatal ending. The evidence is easily found in their lack of zeal for outreach. In some cases, congregations and their leaders have even come to suspect zeal for witness as evidence of fanaticism – or at least a sign of immaturity. Other congregations still give lip service to missions and evangelism, but inwardly they have given up – quit – having lost confidence in their being used by the Lord of the harvest to bring people to Him. (p. 17)

Over a period of more than 30 years of ministerial experience, many theological students who were sent to us for short internship experience as part of their training told me that they have never really learnt how to share the gospel with unbelievers and now that they have seen it really happening, their own lives will never be the same gain.

Mashau (2012) argued:

Missiology covers the entire scope of theology without relegating all of theology to mission and missiology. Missiology has the function to provide scientific description and analysis of the life of the church in the past and in the present, but at the same time, it provides a normative critical function with regard to the future of the church and the manner in which the church should conduct its activities towards that future. (p. 5)

My critical question on this view of Mashau would be: where do you fit practical evangelism skills training in the teaching of missiology? Young pastors often raise the complaint: 'I have learnt a lot about the theology of missions and the

analysis of the church but I have still not learnt practical skills in sharing the Gospel with non-church going people’.

Niemandt (2019:3) expressed the conviction that ‘mission studies and the nature of theological reflection on and training for mission’ and pastoral ministry in general ‘will be shaped by the near universal consensus on the meaning of *missio Dei*, and the wide-ranging implications of this approach for ecclesiology’.

He agrees with (Niemandt 2019):

Mashau’s (2012:1) conclusion that theological training in both the minority and majority worlds has failed to live up to the expectations created by the conviction that mission is [at] the heart of theology. (p. 3)

Cole (2001:145) and Farley (1983:11) made the remark that most theological training institutions assess the progress of theological students predominantly on their ability to reproduce factual knowledge in an exam and perhaps in their acquirement of practical ministry skills, but their growth in real godliness, which should be the first priority, is hardly measured because it can actually only be assessed properly in a person to person mentoring relationship. The same sentiment has been expressed by Goheen (2018b).

An important point for Cole and other authors on equipping leaders for ministry is that the gifts and calling of potential pastors should first surface in hands-on ministry before they are allowed to enter into formal training programmes. Paul’s criteria for an overseer are specifically that he should not be a recent convert but someone who is well thought of even by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, and into a snare of the devil (1 Ti 3:7).

Winter (2003) stated this strongly:

The most severe problem is the simple fact that 90% of the students in pastoral training are not the seasoned mature believers defined by the New Testament as candidates for pastoral leadership. Both in the U.S. seminaries and in some four or five thousand overseas Bible Institutes, Theological Colleges etc. the vast majority of the students will never be effective pastors, no matter what or how or where they were taught, simply because they may lack pastoral gifts and at their age and level of maturity there is no way to predict that they will ever gain the essential gifts and maturity. (p. 11)

The contours of the impact of a *missio Dei* vision based on the covenant of redemption on theological education

Reasoning from the covenant of redemption about *missio Dei* will restore a Reformed conviction of the sovereignty of God and the gospel of *sola gratia* in all aspects of theological education.

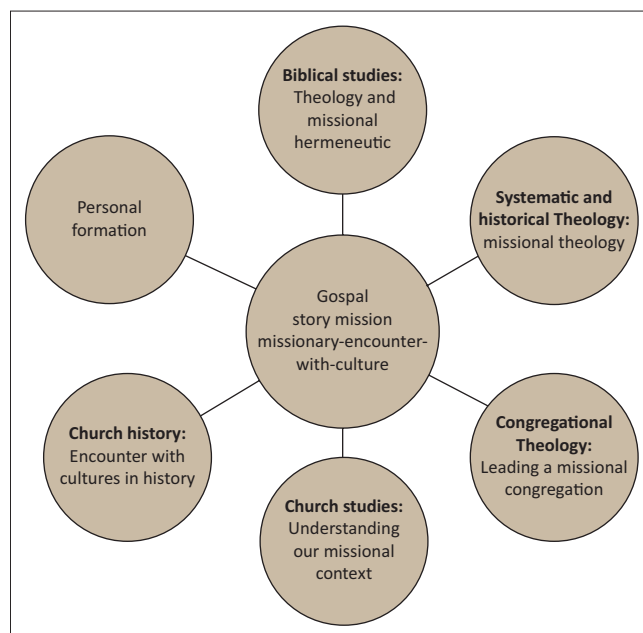


FIGURE 1: The gospel as unifying and directing core of theological education.

‘Theological education [in the reformed tradition] should [then] be much more radically orientated to the total missional task of the Church’ as God’s instrument to usher in his kingdom’ (Goheen 2016:304, 2018b). Niemandt (2019; see also Figure 1) states that:

The establishment of the centrality of the proclamation of [*the gospel as the good news of*] Jesus Christ is an important point of departure as this ensures the primacy of Jesus Christ rather than [*merely*] the survival or expansion of the church. From these, Goheen (2018b) develops his proposal for a theological framework that can serve as a case study. (p. 7)

‘A centring vision and purpose for theological education (a unifying and directing core)’ (Niemandt 2019) will stimulate unity among the teaching and teachers of all subject fields.

Mashau (2012) underscored this vision as follows:

The entire curriculum of theological training should therefore be missional, permeated by our theological understanding of God’s mission and the missionary nature of the church as an instrument participating in the mission of God to advance his kingdom. (p. 8)

‘Goheen (2016:311–313, 2018b) proposes [four] important [aspects] of the core’ of theological education (Niemandt 2019):

- the gospel – the core is Jesus Christ as revealed in the proclamation of the good news of the kingdom. A conversation about the gospel should be the first conversation that takes place in theological education, says Goheen (2016:311, 2018b), ‘as the basis for further theological work’
- ‘the mission of God’s people as they participate in God’s mission’ (Niemandt 2019)
- ‘the missional encounter between gospel and culture and thus the whole concept of [valid] contextualisation’ (Niemandt 2019)

- the best model of pedagogics will be in-service training for modelling discipleship, spiritual growth, character formation, and developing and improving ministry skills of pastors being trained.

Conclusion

A *missio Dei* vision based on the covenant of redemption will on the one hand grasp and hold onto the valuable aspects of Reformed inheritance of previous centuries and on the other hand ensure the equipping of ministers of churches with a passion to preserve and multiply the church with a sincere heartfelt prayer (Heidelberg Catechism Sunday 48):

Preserve and increase your church. Destroy the works of the devil, every power that raises itself against You, and every conspiracy against your holy Word. Do all this until the fullness of your kingdom comes, wherein You will be all in all. (n.p.)

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The author declares that he has no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced him in writing this article.

Author's contributions

P.J.B. is the sole author of this research article.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for a research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors

Data availability statement

Data sharing is not applicable to this article, as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the author.

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