

# Missio Dei through complexity theory: Complexity to total salvation



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Complexity theory continues to fascinate the academics owing to its capability to describe complex systems holistically. This theory makes it possible to understand a complex system by studying its constituent subsystems. Understanding the *missio Dei* has become somewhat complex, particularly from the perspective of the 1952 Willingen Conference. This conference emphasised mission as a divine activity embodied in the core missions of the Son (*missio Christos*) and the Holy Spirit (*missio Spiritus*). It highlighted that the triune God, and not the church, is the source and centre of the *missio Dei*. Conversely, *missio hominum* and *missio ecclesiae* denote the commissions of human participation in the mission of the triune God. Observably, the complex interaction of these core missions and commissions aimed at attaining salvation as the main objective of the *missio Dei*. This arguably warrants innovative research to explore the *missio Dei* as a rather complex phenomenon. Correspondingly, as there seems to be no direct complexity-theoretic study of the *missio Dei*, this article analyses the literature to propose a complexity-theoretic analysis of the *missio Dei*. Further research is therefore warranted – first to assess the feasibility of this proposal, and then to further use complexity theory to deepen the understanding of the *missio Dei*.

**Contribution:** Although the study does not purport to provide a comprehensive understanding of the *missio Dei*, it will hopefully increase understanding and generate interest in using complexity theory to analyse the *missio Dei*.

**Keywords:** *missio Dei*; *missio Christos*; *missio Spiritus*; *missio hominum*; *missio ecclesiae*; complexity theory.

## Introduction

*Missio Dei* is a Latin theological term that refers to the mission of the triune God, aimed at redeeming his creation from destruction. It is well known among missiologists that, while the term *missio Dei* has a long history in Christian theology, its current popular understanding entered theological discourse through the 1952 Conference of the International Missionary Council (IMC) in Willingen, Germany (Engelsviken 2003:482–486; Scherer 1958:168–177). This conference emphasised that the trinitarian basis should constantly shape the understanding of missionary theology (Engelsviken 2003:481–482). In other words, it correctly positioned the Trinity as the source of the *missio Dei* and successfully based the missionary discourse on the essence of the triune God (Cronshaw 2020:119–120; Youn 2018:225). It subsequently declared: 'The missionary movement of which we are part has its source in the triune God Himself.' According to this understanding, the triune God is the fountain and acting subject in his own mission, and not the church. Bosch (2011:398) puts it: 'Mission was understood as being derived from the very nature of God. It was thus in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity, not of ecclesiology or soteriology.' In short, Willingen has, on the one hand, moved from ecclesiocentric to theocentric mission (Laing 2009:89), and on the other hand made the whole world and not the church, the locus of God's mission. In this sense, the church, other religious communities and other human actors only participate in the redemptive works of the *missio Dei*.

As the above sought to demonstrate, from the point of view of the Willingen Conference, the *missio Dei* became a somewhat complex phenomenon, consisting of God the Father, God the Son and the Holy Spirit as the centre of the mission in its entirety. Pursuant to the attainment of the kingdom of God through total salvation (Bosch 2011:402–410; Verkuyl 1979:168–176), the *missio Dei* was incarnated through the mission of Jesus Christ (*missio Christos*) and the mission of the Holy Spirit (*missio Spiritus*). Consequently the triune God, true to his relational nature, invited human participation (Arthur 2008:3–4), embodied in the *missio hominum* [mission of human beings], and communal participation, embodied in the *missio ecclesiae* [mission of the church]. The

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somewhat obvious feature of the *missio Dei* is that it has a remarkable variety of systemic components, with the centre comprising the *missio Christos* and the *missio Spiritus* on the one hand, and the peripheral commissions comprising the *missio hominum* and the *missio ecclesiae* on the other – all working together to achieve the aggregate outcome of salvation. On the face of it, what can be observed is that the *missio Dei* exhibits properties of a complex system. This can be understood through the analysis of its interdependent network of its central missions and commissions, as they interact in unique ways to bring about total salvation. Apart from Thinane (2021:1–13), who endeavoured to use the project management model to decipher the *missio Dei*, not many studies seem to have considered the *missio Dei* as a highly complex system.

As a result of the above, this article will use complexity theory in an unconventional way to delve into the interaction of the *missio Dei*-based core-mission (*missio Christos* and *missio Spiritus*), and the co-missions (*missio hominum* and *missio ecclesiae*) or their complex relationship, as they strive to realise the objective of total salvation. The content of this contribution consists of at least five parts: First, it briefly introduces complexity theory; second, the complex nature of the *missio Dei Trinitatis* is discussed; third, it discusses *missio Christos* as encompassing the role of Jesus Christ in mission; fourth, it treats *missio Spiritus* as encompassing the role of the Holy Spirit in mission; and fifth, it treats *missio hominum* and *missio ecclesiae* both as encompassing human participation in the economy of the *missio Dei*.

## Complexity theory

Complexity theory has quickly become a reasonably important approach in research fields, due to its ability to study the dynamics of complex systems. It draws much of its capabilities from scientific research that studies uncertainty and nonlinearity. The main purpose of complexity theory is to explain how the dynamic networks of interactions or relationships between components of a given system give rise to collective action. Anderson (1999:216) proposes that this theory represents a new unique way to simplify the complex. In essence, it is intended to show how individual components within a certain system mutate into a collective action. Once properly applied, this theory allows researchers to see how multiple elements of a system, or a collection of events within a given system, dynamically interact to shape the whole towards its aggregated outcome.

Although complexity theory is widely used in the fields of chemical and biological sciences, strategic management and organisational research (Murray 1998:275), this article proposes to use it to come to a better understanding of the difficulties inherent in researching and understanding the concept of *missio Dei*. There is absolutely no doubt that the *missio Dei*, particularly from the perspective of the 1952 Willingen Conference, confronted missiologists with complexity when it came to understanding the centrality of the triune God in his own mission, the involvement of *missio Christos*, *missio Spiritus*,

along with the commissioned participation of *missio hominum* and *missio ecclesiae*. These mission framework networks represent *missio Dei*-based elements that interact or combine to produce systematic behaviour or aggregated outcomes, so to speak. Thus, by using this theory in analysing how these mission frameworks dynamically interact to shape the *missio Dei* toward its aggregate outcome of total salvation, will certainly enhance understanding of the *missio Dei*.

This article will endeavour to understand the *missio Dei* in terms of the complexity theory, simply because in its entirety, it is very complex and there is no easy way to understand it, except through its quantified sub-missions. In other words, this article approaches the understanding of the complexity of the *missio Dei* by first understanding its sub-missions as essential premises. Perhaps, to put it more bluntly, *missio Dei* is the result of trinitarian interactions, and as such, can only be understood through the study of such interactions. The next sections will accomplish this by first describing *missio Dei* through trinitarian understanding, considering the role of God the Father (*missio Patris*) in *missio Dei*, the role of God the Son (*missio Christos*) in *missio Dei*, the role of God the Spirit (*missio Spiritus*) in the *missio Dei* and finally, the participation of people (*missio hominum*) and churches (*missio ecclesiae*) in the complex context of the *missio Dei*.

## Missio Dei Trinitatis in complexity

Although trinitarian theology has been studied extensively within Christian theological works and particularly in systematic theology (Cunningham 1997; Oliver & Oliver 2019; Smith 2012), in recent decades there has been significant and renewed missiological interest in the implications of trinitarian theology in relation to the *missio Dei* from the perspective of the Willingen Conference (Cronshaw 2020; Flett 2009). In fact, Cronshaw (2020) argues that the true understanding of the *missio Dei* has its basis in understanding trinitarian theology. In other words, the *missio Dei* is not just about God the Father as the sending entity; it is holistically about embracing the eternally unbreakable unity of the *missio Trinitatis*, which consists of three divine Persons, namely God the Father, God the Son and God the Spirit – all equally central within the economy of the *missio Dei* (Cronshaw 2020:119–120). The guiding principle of this understanding is anchored in the timeless Christian theological creed, which holds that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are consubstantial. Mission (*missio Dei*) emanates equally from the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, or the self-mission of the triune God, so to speak (Flett 2009:5; Youn 2018:225). In fact, as correctly recited in Scherer (1958:171), the Willingen conference acknowledged this by stating: ‘the missionary movement of which we are part has its source in the Triune God Himself’. Correspondingly, Daugherty (2007:163) notes that, while the term *missio Dei* was not used at the conference, it strongly connected the essence of mission with the triune God as the centre that holds everything together.

Given the understanding presented above, complexity theory can be used to incorporate the dynamic centrality of the triune

God into the broader economy of the *missio Dei*. In other words, since the doctrine of the Trinity submits that there is a God, and within such a Godhead, there are divine personalities, it may be similarly said that there is one *missio Dei*. With such a mission there are three inherent systems working toward an aggregated objective of total salvation. Better yet, the wording or phrasing of the Athanasian Creed regarding the Trinity: 'Thus, the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God; and yet there are not three Gods, but there is one God', may be borrowed to substantiate the argument that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are not separate entities of the *missio Dei*, but are consubstantial and equally constitute the centrality of the *missio Dei*. The complexity inherent in this understanding of the triune God as the centre of the *missio Dei*, is that everything seems logically inconsistent until inherent components (co-missions) are examined individually. While the triune deity, which consists of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, may nonlinearly reveal their distinct roles within the *missio Dei* economy, such roles remain eternally interconnected and organised divine workings toward the objective of total salvation. This is exactly what Anderson (1999:216–217) points out when he argues that, while complex organisations exhibit nonlinear behaviour, they ultimately interact and align their efforts towards achieving the intended organisational objective.

Accordingly, in line with the efforts of complexity theory, it then becomes important to examine the distinct roles played by Jesus Christ (*missio Christos*) and the Holy Spirit (*missio Spiritus*) in the economy of the *missio Dei*. It is equally important to emphasise, however, that although *missio Christos* and *missio Spiritus* can theoretically be analysed separately for the sake of human understanding, both God the Son and the Spirit remain co-essential with the Father, meaning that they remain inseparable. Therefore, against this background, *missio Christos* and *missio Spiritus* are analysed in the next two sections as primary but corresponding systems within the complexity of the *missio Dei*.

## Missio Patris in complexity

*Missio Patris* can be defined as a Latin theological expression referring to the collaborative, yet unique role of God the Father in the economy of the *missio Dei*. The unique yet cooperative role of the Father in the economy of the *missio Dei*, represents an important starting point, although it is sometimes treated as self-evident by most scholars, even though it is more complex. The inherent complexity of this role can be amplified by the fact that the Father is represented primarily as a sending entity, while simultaneously embodied by the Son and Spirit in the course of the *missio Dei*. Bosch (2011:390) points out that the classic doctrine of *missio Dei* is about God the Father sending the Son first and then God the Father sending the Spirit along with the Son. As if to explain this in simple terms, Soares, Lotter and Van der Merwe (2017) state:

The Father loves the world, the Son accepted to be sent to express the Father's love to the world and the Holy Spirit empowers the Son and is continuously recreating creation to be in harmony with the Creator. (p. 6)

Similarly, Engelsviken (2003:492) puts it more forcefully, noting that it is important to consider first the work of God the Father to whom the work of creating and maintaining the world is ascribed. It is for this reason that Anderson (2017) recited St. Irenaeus of Lyon's understanding to locate the start of the *missio Dei* from creation phase, by stating:

In terms of tracing a *missio Dei* hermeneutic from the start of the Bible, Irenaeus shows us one possible way of understanding an unfinished divine purpose in the creation narratives of Genesis 1–2. Keeping in mind that the theology of *missio Dei* centers on the Father's sending of the Son, Irenaeus allows us to see the Son's commissioning as potentially inherent to God's aims at creation – and so discern the Triune God's missional activity at the start of the Biblical narrative. (p. 416)

This means that while the mission of the Son and the Spirit emanates from the Father, the Father continues to play a unique role in the attainment of the goal of *missio Dei*, which began after the fall of humanity in the early biblical narrative (Gn 1–3). The Father's work from such an early stage is to secure salvation for his fallen creation and then works with or manifest through the Son and the Spirit pursuant to the *missio Dei*'s goal of total salvation. However, the involvement of the Father, like that of the Son and the Spirit, arises from the *pactum salutis* [covenant of salvation], built around their cooperation, which Williamson (2018:259) says was made long before the creation of the world. This is perhaps clearer in Jesus Christ's own words when he asserted in John 5:17: 'My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working.' This is similarly understood by Soares et al. (2017:1) as they correctly reason that the Father, presented in the book of Genesis as the Creator, continues to interact with the affairs of his creation through his acts of creation and re-creation. However, this does not limit the work of the Father to creation, nor the work of the Son and the Spirit to earthly functions. This is equally rejected by Engelsviken (2003) who categorically states:

It is therefore not correct to say that God the Father is at work in the whole creation ... Both the Son and the Spirit are also active in creation and in the world. (p. 491)

According to Engelsviken (2003:482), the 1952 Willingen Conference underscored the Father's unique role by acknowledging that the missionary activity of which the church is a part, is made possible by the Father working from the depth of his perfect love to reconcile all things to himself by sending the Son and the Spirit. Flett (2009) explains that in the context of *missio Dei* the Father does not cease to be the Father, but brings his uniqueness into union with the Son and the Spirit. He (Flett 2009) further states:

[I]n this act of the Father, there remains a genuine antithesis which is not obscured or resolved by admixture or transference, either by divine influence or infusion in the life of God. (p. 11)

Accordingly, the following sections will consider the unique yet collaborative roles of God the Son and God the Spirit as they embody God the Father in the context of *missio Dei*.



## Missio Christos in complexity

*Missio Christos* can be defined as a Latin theological expression referring to the collaborative yet unique role of Jesus Christ in the economy of the *missio Dei* (Thinane 2021:8). From the beginning of his mortal ministry, Jesus Christ's mission statement made it clear that his ministry was consistent with the mandate and ultimate objective of the *missio Dei* (salvation), to seek and save all that was lost (Lk 4:18–19). In other words, from the very beginning of his ministry, he sought to make it clear that the objective of the *missio Dei* is his top priority. At the time when his mother was distraught about the brief disappearance of her 12-year-old, Jesus spoke with authority upon their reunion, saying: 'Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?' (Lk 2:49 – New King James Version [NKJV]). In keeping with such a mission, Jesus Christ ministered to the poor during his mortal ministry (Lk 6:20–21), gave sight to the blind (Mk 8:22–24), healed the sick (Mt 8:16), raised the dead to life (Mk 5:24–43), proclaimed the sublime kingdom of God (Mt 3:2; 4:17; Mk 1:14–15), taught about true love and forgiveness (Mt 5:44). Most importantly, he kept reminding his listeners that the things he said and did, were according to the will of God. This was his way of saying that his mission interconnectedly grew out of the eternal mission of his father (*missio Dei*). He even said in no uncertain terms: 'so that the Father may be glorified in the Son' (Jn 14:13). This means, the mission of Christ (*missio Christos*) is in its totality concerned with serving the mandate of the *missio Dei*. This means that the *missio Christos* is inherently regulated by the scope and ultimate objective of the *missio Dei*. This is evidenced in John 12:49, where Jesus Christ alludes to the inseparability of the mandate of his earthly ministry from the *missio Dei*, saying: 'The Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment about what to say and what to speak.' There can never be an expression of the *missio Christos* unless such is done in accordance with or in light of the aggregated objective of the *missio Dei*. Juxtaposing Lesslie Newbigin's pre-1959 understanding of *Missio Dei*, Goheen (2000) notes that, while the *Missio Dei* is understood from a Christocentric perspective, such an understanding must not neglect the eternal involvement of the Father and the Holy Spirit, because their interconnectedness is central and authenticates the entire functioning of the *missio Dei*. He (Goheen 2000:115) further states: 'The Triune work of God is the context for understanding Christ's mission.' This is supported by Shambare and Kgatla (2018:1) by suggesting that *missio Christos* derives both its source and missionary integrity or authenticity from *missio Dei*.

In summary, the above is a fair illustration of how the unique role of Jesus Christ contributes to or connects to the ultimate objective of the *missio Dei*. While the *missio Christos* can be examined individually as a singular account of Jesus Christ's ministry on earth, such an analysis ultimately directs the discourse to the *missio Dei* as a whole. Pearce and Merletti (2006:517) apply the understanding of complexity theory to the epidemiological discourse using the brain as an example. They argue that, to understand the workings of the human

brain, one must look at the systems context holistically, rather than just studying its component parts. Similarly, while using complexity theory from a political science perspective, Cairney (2012:348) argues that the policy-making system cannot be understood by examining its component parts, but rather by examining how those components interact with or depend on each other, to make the whole systematic result intended by a particular government. As if to elaborate further, Turner and Baker (2019) add:

[C]omplexity science expands on the reductionistic framework by not only understanding the parts that contribute to the whole but by understanding how each part interacts with all the other parts ... Thus having a more comprehensive understanding of the whole. (p. 2)

Therefore, although *missio Christos* constitutes a key element in a *missio Dei* network or economy, its proper understanding is derived from a holistic analysis of its interaction with other elements that work together to systematically achieve the ultimate objective of *missio Dei*.

Perhaps in order to ensure the continuity and coherence of the *missio Dei*, Jesus Christ considered it important to first inform his disciples that he will not leave them orphaned, but under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, they will be guided in their work to achieve the ultimate objective of *Missio Dei* (Thinane 2021:9). In fact, Van Aarde (2015:50) puts it more clearly and convincingly, arguing that Christ's work and his heavenly mission are to continue until the *missio Dei* is fully realised in creation. Accordingly, the next section focuses on identifying the unique yet cooperative role of the Holy Spirit in the complexity of the *Missio Dei*.

## Missio Spiritus in complexity

*Missio Spiritus* can be referred to as a Latin theological expression that refers to the unique and collaborative involvement of God the Holy Spirit in fulfilling the purpose of the *missio Dei* (Thinane 2021:9). Even if the Holy Spirit's participation in the economy of the *missio Dei* seems to be invoked by the last part of Christ's earthly ministry, as if to empower the witness to Christ (Ac 1:8; Mk 16:17–18), the Holy Spirit was already present from the beginning and throughout the *missio Dei*'s eternal course. White and Niemandt (2015) state:

[T]he role of the Holy Spirit has been paramount in the *Missio Dei* process. He (Holy Spirit) has been active in the Old Testament, in creation, in salvation, and in various other spiritual undertakings. (p. 3)

In other words, the Holy Spirit is just as present in the Old Testament as in the New Testament (Hamilton 2006), which explains why the apostle Peter could easily quote from the Old Testament book of Joel, which speaks of the Spirit of God being poured out on all flesh in the coming years (Ac 2; Jl 2:28–32). While reducing the role of the Holy Spirit to a transitional instrument can sometimes be problematic (Flett 2014:73). Such a designation underscores the eternal presence

of the Holy Spirit, destined to ensure the uninterrupted and absolute continuity of the *missio Dei* across generations. This somewhat reflects Kemper's understanding (2014:189) in suggesting that the Holy Spirit acts as a sustainer, refresher and the moving force throughout the *missio Dei*. In other words, *missio Spiritus* guarantees and provides what is necessary to support the process of achieving the objective of *missio Dei*. In essence, the Holy Spirit is the timeless source of refreshment and nourishment in the attainment of the objective of the *missio Dei*. In essence, Jesus Christ was assuring his disciples that the Holy Spirit would be there in his absence to guide or direct their participation in achieving the objective of the *missio Dei*. Therefore, Ma (2015:172) argues that it is no coincidence that the entire book of Acts shows that the Holy Spirit guided and instructed the apostles to go out and engage in mission. Therefore, it can be said that the unique yet cooperative role of the Holy Spirit is to direct, support and sustain all efforts towards the ultimate objective of *missio Dei*.

In summary, the above provides examples of the many ways in which the Holy Spirit contributes or connects with the ultimate objective of the *missio Dei*. The Holy Spirit's role in fulfilling the ultimate objective of the *missio Dei* brings with it a variety of skills designed to support and keep the mission moving. Perhaps, as Thinane (2021:9–10) compares the Holy Spirit to a capable project manager who has the inherent responsibility to navigate, manage and resolve all forms of complexity to ensure organisational projects, deliver the intended outcome (Sunindijo & Zou 2011:140–141). This means that *missio Dei*-oriented activities are forever committed to the presence of the Holy Spirit, omnipresent with the Father and the Son (Oliver & Oliver 2019:9) cooperatively there to oversee that missionary activities are directed toward the *missio Dei*'s intended goal. In other words, as is the case in most complex organisations where close supervision or control of multiple processes running simultaneously is always required, the omnipresence of the triune God, represented by the Holy Spirit, is required to watch over the *missio Dei* and ensure that it is strictly in accordance with God's will, and that all necessary steps are taken to timely attain the intended objective of complete salvation. As noted by Scherer (1958), the Willingen Conference also recognised that the eternal presence of the Holy Spirit is necessary to reach the objective of salvation in time. He (Scherer 1958) reiterates the conference statement:

[M]ore over and even more important, it was a concern at Willingen that in the present desperate world situation, the evangelization of the world might be more speedily accomplished through the power of the Holy Spirit. (p. 166)

Therefore, it is the responsibility of the Holy Spirit to ensure that any activity inspired by the *Missio Dei* is timely in order to achieve its intended goal of salvation. Referring to the dynamic role of the Holy Spirit in mission, Scherer (1958) states: 'He [the Holy Spirit] prompts acts of witness, inspires decisions, comforts, and up builds the Church', or a community that should, so to speak, contribute to the objective of the *Missio Dei*. He (Scherer 1958:183–184) even points out

the following: 'He is rather the living presence of the Crucified and Risen One, constantly in communication with His Church.' From this it can be concluded that, according to the complexity theory, the omnipresence of the triune God embodied in the Holy Spirit guarantees that all missionary activities permanently correspond to the objective of the *Missio Dei*.

## **Missio hominum in complexity**

*Missio hominum* can be described as the Latin theological term referring to any human participation in achieving the objective of the *missio Dei* (Thinane 2021:10). This underscores the understanding that, as humanity is created in the image of the missionary God (Stott 1979:3–8), each human being is a missionary being within the economy of the *missio Dei*. This means that every human being is a missionary being, because they are created in the image of God (Thinane 2022:1–6). Thinane (2021) puts it as follows:

[T]he divine as the primary substance of all missions, is here embodied by all human beings or (as) project stakeholders who participate in the work of achieving the objective of *Missio Dei*. (p. 1)

Flett (2009:11) puts it more clearly: 'the coordinated ecclesiological affirmation holds that the human missionary act does not occur in independence from God's act, but only as it is grounded in and corresponds to this act'. While *missio ecclesiae* focuses on collective participation in the *Missio Dei*, *missio hominum* is about all people who individually participate in achieving the objective of the *missio Dei* – regardless of their religious affiliation. It is to these people that Whitworth (2012:19) refers when he said the following: 'The *Missio Dei* is made manifest through the activity of the triune God in which the church and persons participate.' *Missio hominum* has rarely been studied, as the traditional approach in missiology has always been to look primarily at the church's commitment rather than starting with a person. This is consistent with the fact that, in the Old Testament, God is often portrayed as engaging individuals who, in turn, form a body of believers. For example, Noah is arguably the first person to primarily demonstrate human involvement in the attainment of the redemptive objective of the *missio Dei* (Gn 6:9–19). Similarly, in the New Testament, Jesus Christ first called individuals who, in turn are used to attract mass communities. In other words, Jesus Christ, in the very early phase of his earthly ministry commissioned individuals who came to be known as the 12 disciples (Mt 10:1–4; Mk 3:13–19; Lk 6:12–16). The disciples in turn, provided the basis for a new community. Even in the final phase of his mortal ministry (post-resurrection), Jesus appeared to individuals such as Mary Magdalene (Jn 20:16–17), Mary of Clopas, Mary the mother of James and Joanna (Mt 28:8–10), the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24:13–43), Simon Peter (Lk 24:34) and eventually to them as a group and said: 'As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you' (Jn 20:21). This means *missio hominum* focuses directly on individuals before they are integrated into a community. For example, the apostle Paul had a personal encounter with Christ (Ac 9

before being sent to mission of establishing churches in several territories such as Galatia, Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth and Ephesus. Consequently, it can be said that *missio hominum* is primarily about God using individual human beings to achieve the objective of *missio Dei*. This is consistent with Flett (2009:6) who states that: '*Missio Dei*'s theological substance, first, posits a gap between God and the world, and second, traverses this gap (by) using human means.'

Complexity theory suggests that complex organisations employ professionals with different specialties to function, or competency-based non-linear teams to work on specific tasks aimed at achieving the broader outcome (Dooley 2002:5013; Turner & Baker 2019:1–2). Similarly, human participation in the *missio Dei* consists of a set of individuals with unique qualities, employed to achieve the ultimate objective of the *missio Dei*, as was the case with the likes of Noah and the apostle Paul. Dooley (2002:5013) attempts to distinguish between complex organisations through an illustration involving a school and a hospital, stating: 'a school would be considered a less complex organization than a hospital, since a hospital requires a large diversity of professional specialties in order to function'. As for human participation in the *missio Dei*, perhaps the apostle Paul wanted to clarify this to a certain extent in his epistle to the Ephesians, noting that Christ made some apostles and some prophets; some evangelists and some pastors and teachers (Eph 4:11–16). As argued by Hirsch and Catchim (2012), and cited in Van Wyk (2018), these unique offices ought to be operationalised accordingly so as not to render the *missio Dei* ineffective. They further distinguish that apostles are to become pioneers, prophets acting as visionaries, evangelists inspiring others, pastors mobilising others, and teachers awakening wisdom through teaching (Hirsch & Catchim 2012:1018, 1088; Van Wyk 2018:2–3). From this it can be concluded that each of these offices, as with various specialists in complex organisations, has a particular value that contributes in a unique way to the desired outcome of the *missio Dei*.

## Missio ecclesiae in complexity

*Missio ecclesiae* can be described as a Latin theological expression that refers to a community of believers who share in the fulfilment of the purpose of the *missio Dei* (Thinane 2021:11). Although often neglected in missiological scholarship, the transition from *missio hominum* to *missio ecclesiae* reveals important human dynamics related to individual and communal participation in the *missio Dei*. This transition is perhaps better described by Bazzell (2016:121), who typifies the account of Cornelius and Peter in Acts 10: 1–11 as involving two individuals who have each encountered God and subsequently interact or witness with their respective communities. To this end, Wieland (2020) adds:

Bazzell urges mission practitioners to look for Cornelius encounters in which the *Missio Dei* may be discerned, keeping in mind that it is crucial for all to participate and to see the moment through its end. (p. 109)

The expedition involves a godly, righteous person meeting God and connecting with others to participate in the *missio*

*Dei*. In other words, the *missio ecclesiae* incorporates devout people into a community sent out to participate together toward achieving the objective of the *missio Dei*. This is what Van Aarde (2017:297) means by stating that: 'In the mission of the church individual Christians embody God's mission and are empowered by the Holy Spirit to convey it to the world.' In other words, this community exists primarily to serve the mission of the *missio Dei*, hence Flett (2009:6) consciously states that: 'the Christian community is a missionary community, or it is not the Christian community'. The *missio ecclesiae* is not inspired for its own glory, but as a body of Christ participating together in reaching the ultimate objective of the *missio Dei*. Youn (2018:228) recites George Hunsberger who argued that, by being and acting, 'the church points away from itself to what God is going to complete'. Referring to Newbigin's understanding of *missio ecclesiae*, Goheen (2000:115) states: 'Nevertheless Newbigin's understanding of the church is firmly rooted in an understanding of the redemptive work of the Triune God that is commonly referred to as the *Missio Dei*.' *Missio ecclesiae* thus includes a community sent by Christ through the Great Commission to share in the task of total *salvationes* the ultimate objective of *Missio Dei*. Youn (2018:229) puts it in simple terms by stating: 'God requests the church not only to communicate to the world the reconciliation that the church is now enjoying in Jesus Christ, but also to participate in God's transforming and liberating work in the world.' This is also acknowledged by Peterson (2013:94) who conclusively states: 'It is in this *Missio Dei* that the church finds its identity and purpose.'

As recorded in the letter to the Corinthians, when there were divisions among those who preferred the ministry of Apollos to Cephas, Paul reminded them that they were all co-workers commissioned to build on the foundation of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 3:1–13). In other words, Paul wanted to emphasise that every builder, like Christ did during his earthly ministry, should work toward the fulfilment of the *missio Dei*. Cheng, Dainty and Moore (2005) refer to Loosemore, Dainty and Lingard (2003) where they submitted that: 'Construction projects are inherently unique, tend to be awarded at short notice, are reliant on a transient workforce and exist within a multidisciplinary team-oriented environment.' Similarly, Wood and Gidado (2008:683) speak of a construction project as complex, because multiple people are to work together in a complicated operational network to achieve a specific objective within a set production time. Similarly, Paul understood that the building project of the *missio Dei* involves a series of interfaces between the different parties that should come together to deliver the result (salvation) and that there should be full collaboration between the builders, as misaligned interests could damage the project or prevent the participants from achieving the set objective.

## Conclusion

This article relied on literature search and made use of a complexity theory to analyse *missio Dei* and the interaction of its core missions (*missio Christos* and *missio Spiritus*) and the



co-missions (*missio hominum* and *missio ecclesiae*), as they strive to realise the objective of total salvation. This article consists of five parts: First, it introduced complexity theory; second, it discussed *missio Dei Trinitatis* as complex in nature; third, it discussed *missio Christos* as involving the role of Jesus Christ in mission; fourth, it discussed *missio Spiritus* as involving the role of the Holy Spirit in mission; and fifth, it discussed *missio hominum* and *missio ecclesiae* both as involving human participation, because they all work together to achieve the objective of *missio Dei*. Based on this breakdown, it can then be concluded that *missio Dei* has the characteristics of a complex system that can be understood by analysing the interaction of its inherent components, as they each play a role in attaining the aggregate outcome of full salvation. Overall, this work attempted to offer a new approach to understanding the complexity of the *missio Dei*. Therefore, further research is warranted to develop and explore the potential of this approach.

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