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Nurturing a missional spirituality: any lessons to learn from the ministry of Andrew Murray Jr (1828-1917)?

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Abstract

The Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa [DRC] is currently in a season of reorientation, or perhaps one can say, rediscovering its mission. The aim of this article is twofold: firstly, to reflect on the journey of the DRC over the past two decades to discern its role and function in a "new" South Africa[1] as well as the challenges deriving from this journey.

Secondly, this article wants to contribute to the commemoration of the arrival of Andrew Murray Sr (1794–1866) in South Africa in 1822. The influence of this family on the life and spirituality of the DRC and its mission over the past two centuries is extensive and probably beyond description. When this article therefore dares to explore possible links between the current missional movement in the DRC and the spirituality of Andrew Murray[2] Jr (1828–1917), it is done humbly and hesitantly.

The article will be presented in four sections. The first section briefly describes the discernment process followed by the DRC since 1998. In the second section the major transformational challenges awaiting the DRC in the next decades will be highlighted, and the third section briefly explores what the transformation may entail. Then the article goes back to the time when Andrew Murray Jr ministered in the DRC Wellington (1871–1906). It is well known that under Murray's leadership the Wellington congregation and community played a leading role in the awakening of missionary work by the DRC as well as social development, and the fourth section alludes briefly to some characteristics of Murray's spirituality. The article concludes

1 In common conversation today, the phrase "new South Africa" refers to post-apartheid South-Africa. It is, however, ironic that according to Louis Wilsenach (reported by Beyers in *Die Burger* 20 April 2011) this phrase was originally coined by the National party as a slogan in its 1988 election campaign.

2 In this article the name Andrew Murray always refers to Andrew Murray Jr (1828–1917).

with a suggestion that the evangelical piety (De Gruchy, 2009:221) of Andrew Murray Jr may be regarded as an early form of missional spirituality.

Keywords

missional spirituality; spiritual formation; missional formation; Andrew Murray's spirituality

A troubled church seeking a new way of living

At the end of the previous century, many challenges faced the DRC. The socio-political changes of the 1990s caused uncertainty and even fear amongst many people, especially the White Afrikaner group, which mainly constituted the membership of the DRC (Hendriks, 2009:111). Furthermore, the intense discourse within the DRC regarding its support and theological justification of Apartheid, as well as the church's repentance in 1986, left many of its members disillusioned because for decades this church has preached that these policies were according to the will of God. One can only imagine the mood in the DRC when its General Synod [GS] convened in 1998. In their report to this meeting, the General Commission on Theology and Actual Affairs warned that the predominant negative view of many church members regarding the future of the "new" South Africa prevents them from practising their calling to play a constructive role in the land (GS 1998b:320).

Amidst this negative mood and other perturbing reports regarding the situation within the church, for instance, the steep decline in membership and the economic position of many congregations, a remarkable thing happened on the very first day of the General Synod of 1998. A member of the Synod moved that the DRC, together with other churches in Southern Africa, should accept its responsibility to promote reconciliation and also accept its role in the fight against poverty and the moral decay in the region. The motion further asked the General Synod to appoint an ad hoc committee to, as a matter of urgency, prepare concrete suggestions on how to deal with these issues (GS 1998b:402). This motion was immediately approved. In his reflection on the work of the ad hoc committee, Meiring (2001:104–105) alluded to an important change in attitude that dawned in this committee: although the committee often met, it was not always

to talk, but rather to listen to what was happening in the country and what people, also from outside the DRC, were saying. Furthermore, the committee realised that the role and position of the DRC in society had changed. Previously this church had the power to influence the politics and economy of South Africa; now the Church had to accept its role as servant.

The following General Synod, which was also the first meeting of the General Synod in the new millennium, convened in 2002. On the second day of the Synod a "pastoral conversation" was held with as theme the question: "South Africa, how are you doing and what can we as church learn from you and do for you?"[3] (GS 2002b:583). The introduction to this conversation was not given by a theologian but an economist, Louis Fourie.[4] In a motion at the end of the conversation, a member of Synod urged the meeting to commit themselves, on behalf of the DRC, to the calling to participate in the healing of the country and the alleviation of the socio-economic needs of its people. The motion further requested the General Synod to prepare a declaration to be sent to the respective synods, requesting them to involve all the congregations in their regions in ways they see fit (GS 2002b:583). On the last day of the Synod, a declaration[5] comprising three commitments was adopted. In the first commitment, the General Synod acknowledged that God placed the DRC in Southern Africa and called the church to proclaim the Word of God. In the second commitment, the General Synod committed itself to the continent and specifically the Southern Africa region, and in a third commitment, the General Synod committed itself to the unification of the DRC and the strengthening of ecumenical ties (Van der Merwe 2014:12; Benadé & Niemandt 2019:8). Following General Synods (2004 and 2007) refined and reaffirmed this *Declaration of Calling*.

The journey to discern the mission and future role of the DRC in South Africa continued. Several synods followed the example of the General Synod (2002) to develop a statement or declaration stating their identity and calling. This journey was also informed by at least three movements within

3 The original question in Afrikaans reads as follow: "Suid-Afrika, hoe gaan dit regtig met jou en wat kan ons as kerk by jou leer en vir jou doen?"

4 The introduction was based on a study by Louis Fourie and J.P. Landman in 2002 titled *Hoe lyk dit, Suid-Afrika?* (*South Africa, How are you?*)

5 In Afrikaans this declaration became known as *Roepingsverklaring 2002*. In this article the English translation *Declaration of Calling 2002* will be used.

the DRC since mid-1980 (Benade & Niemandt 2019:7; Van der Merwe 2014:93). The first movement focused on the development of congregations (*Gemeentebou*). The central idea was to help congregations understand their identity and purpose as the church of the Triune God in this world and therefore develop effective programmes aimed at evangelisation and the development of a stronger sense of community in the congregation (Benade & Niemandt 2019:7).

The second movement focused on studying congregations to assist them in being more effective. To achieve this goal, training programmes to enhance the ministerial skills of ministers were developed, research was done on different aspects of congregational life, and facilitators helped congregations to rethink and redesign their ministries in terms of the Kingdom of God (Benade & Niemandt 2019:7).

The 1990s also saw the dawning of the missional church movement in the DRC. Several ministers and scholars of the DRC had contact with leading figures in the Gospel and Our Culture Network and was aware of their study of the missional church.[6] Through them, the ideas and concepts of missional ecclesiology filtered into the discourse in the DRC regarding its role and mission in the "new" South Africa. Several congregations started exploring this new way of thinking about congregational life and later they formed a Partnership for Missional Churches[7] (Benade & Niemandt 2019:8).

The signs of a change in mood and thinking within the DRC became clearly visible in the 2011 General Synod. After receiving and discussing research documents and reports on various topics, including missional ecclesiology, the Church and Context, and evangelism and diversity, the General Synod resolved that the different research documents and reports must be compiled into one document that should serve as a framework for the whole Church (congregations, presbyteries, synods, and the General

6 The results of the research project were published in D. L. Guder, (ed.), *Missional church: A vision for the sending of the church in North America. Grand Rapids*. MI: Eerdmans. 1998.

7 The Southern African Partnership of Missional Churches (SAPMC) was formed in the early years of 2000. See Hendriks (2009:109–119) for a brief overview of the history and theological analysis of the SAPMC process.

Synod). This framework should not only be a theological reflection but should also contain practical guidelines (GS, 2011b:114).

Perhaps the clearest sign of a change in the DRC came at the end of that General Synod when a Confession was adopted of which the introductory paragraph reads:

> The DRC thanks God for the chance to be His church in such challenging times, within the South African context, working together with other churches. God's love and grace are undoubtedly wide and unfathomably deep. The DRC realizes and has learnt from history that we can only truly be church of God if we are willing to sacrifice ourselves and follow Him wherever He may lead us. The Triune God sent us into the world that He created to witness to the love that He has for his entire creation (GS, 2011b:126).

The challenge: Be a servant in God's mission

The following General Synod, which convened in 2013, received the compiled document titled *Framework document on the missional nature and calling of the Dutch Reformed Church* (Framework Document). In receiving this "policy document", the General Synod acknowledged that this framework document would help the church develop a new language for a new discourse that would enable the church to discover new imaginative possibilities for the DRC (GS 2013:8). A bold step forward was then given when the General Synod resolved to add a new article to the Church Order – the founding document of the DRC. This article clearly defines the church's identity, calling and mission in terms of *missio Dei*. The full article reads, "The Dutch Reformed Church is called by the Triune God to participate in the mission of God in the world. The church is edified by the Holy Spirit to serve the honour of God and proclaim the ministry of reconciliation and redemption in Christ" (CO, 2019 art 2).

Not only does this article clearly state the mission of the church; it also provides four beacons or orientation points to guide the DRC on her pilgrimage as servant and participant in God's mission:

- The Triune God focuses on the world;
- God's love for the world is embodied in the Servant serving the world;

- Through the work of the Holy Spirit the Triune God is already actively busy realising His Kingdom in this world;
- God has called the church to participate in His mission (*missio Dei*) as co-worker and servant.

This addition to its church order can be seen as a milestone for the DRC. The next phase of the journey to be a servant in God's mission is to involve the whole church – the different institutional levels of the congregation, presbytery, and synod as well as every individual member – to become part of this pilgrimage and to adhere to its (rediscovered) mission. Marais (2017:374) describes this as a "massive challenge" and explains further: "[A]lthough there is a growing number of converts to missional ideas, the challenge for a church that was shaped, or even colonised, through ecclesial, philosophical, political and economic worldviews, is a (trans)formational challenge."

Becoming a servant in God's mission

The recent journey of the DRC brought her to a point where she had to admit that "the identity of the DRC is embedded in our understanding of God Himself" (Framework Document 2013:3). Furthermore, that the basic principle of "being" church is that everything the church is and does should be defined by its relationship to the living God (Framework Document 2013:5). The revised *Declaration of Calling of the DRC* (GS 2007b:220) aptly describes this new position:

> We realize anew that God calls the DRC through His Word and through the Spirit to be dependent only upon Him. Christ, the Head of the church, sends us out into the world to obey our calling and to dedicate ourselves to discerning the will of God through His Word and with willing spirits, in order to be able to live out His will in this challenging and complex world we find ourselves in.

The aim of this section is to explore briefly what the DRC has to do to affect the needed transformation. According to the Framework Document (2013:11) "[A] missional ecclesiology has everything to do with faith formation and spiritual development in the church". Pretorius and Niemandt (2018:2) argue that missional transformation is embedded in missional formation

and therefore in missional spirituality. Focusing on missional spirituality will contribute to missional formation and transformation. For them, spirituality and missionality are identical twins with spirituality as the firstborn.

Van Niekerk (2019:231) has a different view. Instead of focusing on a spiritual formation that creates a missional culture in congregations, as argued by Pretorius and Niemandt, he proposes reciprocal transformative action between *missio*-formation and spiritual formation in forming a missional spirituality and identity. Both mission and spirituality need a process of transformative reconstruction to form a missional spirituality. An important implication of this viewpoint is that the transformational effect of a missional spirituality simultaneously affects both the life and praxis of the church.[8]

Marais (2017:375) uses Zschelle's definition of spiritual formation as a vantage point to explain missional formation. According to Zschelle (2012:7), "Christian spiritual formation refers to the intentional communal process of growing in our relationship with God and becoming conformed to Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit, for the sake of the world."

Marais (2017:375) expands this definition by adding four typical characteristics of missional formation:

- The missional understanding of discipleship is to participate in the life-giving mission of the Triune God, the *missio Dei*, and therefore the nature of missional formation is participatory.
- Missional formation is intentional because it demands a lifelong, ongoing process of discernment and submission to God.
- Missional formation is communal, which implies accountability. Disciples of Christ grow in community with the Triune God and in community with fellow disciples.

8 Van Niekerk (2019:235) also refers to Padilla as quoted by Balia and Kim (2010:242), who states that "Christian spirituality is a gift and a task". According to Padilla, "(I)it requires communion with God (contemplation) as well as action in the world (praxis). When these two elements are separated, both the life and the mission of the church are deeply affected. Contemplation without action is an escape from concrete reality; action without contemplation is activism lacking a transcendent meaning."

- Missional formation is liturgical. Participation in liturgies to worship and glorify God creates over time "a habitus for the followers of Jesus Christ to be sent out into the world as faithful witnesses" (Marais 2017:375).

Van Niekerk (2019:224) argues further that Christian spirituality is not necessarily the same as a missional spirituality. For him, a missional spirituality precedes Christian spirituality and is thus authentic (Van Niekerk, 2019:228). In this regard, the Framework Document (2013:11) clearly states:

> Missional spirituality implies *being in Christ*, whether you are praying or working or just busy with the normal drudgery of life. There is thus no missional spirituality that differs from "normal" spirituality – to be formed in the faith means that you cannot but be schooled as follower of Jesus Christ.

Forming a missional spirituality is therefore not a matter of personal development or growth if that development does not lead to a life focused outside of ourselves and lived for the sake of the world (Van Niekerk, 2019:228). Keum (2018:6) also warns against an individualistic spirituality that makes the Christian faith fallacious if we believe that we belong only to God and not to our neighbour.

Murray Jr's spirituality: An example of early missional spirituality?

The previous section argues that missional spirituality is the normal spirituality of a missional church – a church serving the Kingdom of God in this world with word and deed (Van der Merwe 2014). This section goes back in time to the last decades of the 19th century and, more specifically, to the ministry of Murray in the DRC Wellington in the Western Cape. In that time several institutions were established, which over the years produced thousands of alumni who became missionaries and catalysts for transformation in many communities: The Huguenot Seminary for Girls

(1874),[9] the Mission Institute (1877)[10] and Friedenheim (1881)[11] to name but a few. It is certainly a remarkable achievement, and one wonders: what made these efforts happen?

In his study of the mission history of the DRC, Saayman (2007) identified four waves. According to this study, the second wave started in 1867 and lasted until 1939. In this period, Andrew Murray, together with his brother John and NJ Hofmeyr, started their respective ministries in the DRC. Benade and Niemandt (2019:3) argued that the three of them had a strong influence on the second wave of missionary work. They studied theology together in Utrecht where they became very concerned about the influence of liberal theology. In reaction to this, they joined *Sechor Dabar*, a student movement whose goal it was to practise, in the spirit of the *Réveil*, an appropriate theology required for an evangelical ministerial praxis (Du Plessis 1920:65; Brummer 2013:21). The *Réveil* was a revival movement that started in the first half of the 19th century in several European countries (Brummer 2013:22; Lee 2006:125; Du Plessis 1920:65). Common characteristics of the *Réveil* was a strong repugnance of the rationalism of the Enlightenment, a strong focus on a personal relationship with God and stemming from this relation, a strong commitment to the proclamation of God's Kingdom, society, and the world (Brummer 2013:21).

The members of *Sechor Dabar* met weekly for tea, prayer, Bible study, the study of Hebrew and New Testament Greek, as well as to discuss various

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9 The Huguenot Seminary was later divided into three departments: the Lower Department evolved in the Huguenot School for Girls and the Hugenot School for Boys. These two schools later merged to become the Huguenot Secondary School and the Huguenot Primary School. The Higher Department later became the Training College for Teachers. The Collegiate Department developed into the Huguenot University College (Ferguson 1927). The Huguenot University College was succeeded by the Hugenote Kollege (Huguenot College) which opened its doors in 1951.

10 The Mission Institute was closed in 1962 when the training of missionaries was merged with the training of ministers at the Faculty of Theology, University of Stellenbosch. Specific training programmes for missionaries were transferred to the Huguenot College. Over the years, more than 500 missionaries were trained at this Institute (Saayman, 2007).

11 Friedenheim started as a Bible study programme. It developed into a training school for women/female missionaries, and since 1924, the training of social workers was added. When the Huguenot College started in 1951 as a school for social workers (and missionaries), the Friendenheim programmes were initially used. Friedenheim as an institution was later integrated into Huguenot College.

theological subjects. Apart from these studies, they were also involved in evangelisation and charity work (Brummer 2013:23). Andrew was also a founder of a small missionary society called *Eltheto*, through which he and fellow students disseminated information regarding "the progress of the work of God throughout the whole world" (Lee 2006:131). In his recent study on the spirituality of Murray, Lee (2006:124) observed "his association with both of these societies was on the one hand an expression of his spirituality and on the other hand they were instrumental in the continuous process of shaping and identifying his particular spirituality".

This *Réveil* spirituality (Brummer 2013:23) introduced to the Murray brothers by the *Sechor Dabar* movement became the foundation of Andrew Murray's spirituality. In 1905, Murray published a book[12] in which he describes the main themes in the thinking of Count von Zinzendorf, an influential German missionary and one of the key figures in the German Pietism of the early 19th century. Murray concludes that the one truth which characterises the life and preaching of von Zinzendorf was "the love of Christ". This resonates strongly with Murray's own spirituality. The core of his spirituality – "het godzalig leven" – was his deep personal experience of the love of Christ (Brummer 2013:25). Andrew Murray was also a mystic and Brummer (2013:26) puts him in the same line as other Christian mystics such as Augustine, St Bernard of Clairvaux[13] and Francis of Assisi. For them, the real purpose of the *via mystica* is a mystic, personal relationship of love with God. Brummer (2013:26) calls it "a love-affair."

In another recent study on Andrew Murray's spirituality De Villiers (2015:655) points out that mystic spirituality often negates as passive, escapist and self-centred, though there are many examples of mystics of whom this is not true. For him, Andrew Murray is one of them. To illustrate his point De Villiers (2015:655) refers to a comment of Murray regarding the New Testament epistles to explain mystic spirituality:

> The high state and calling of the Christian in Christ is are first expounded; then the reader is led on into everyday life, and shown

12 Andrew Murray, *Het Godzalig Leven. Gedachten van Graaf von Zinzendorf* (Cape Town, 1905).

13 Murray named his house in Wellington *Clairvaux*.

> what are the conditions of the maintenance and enjoyment of the grace bestowed in Christ. Or, as we have it in Ephesians, the first half lifts us into the heavenly places with the life in the Holy Spirit, the second brings us down to the practical duties on life on earth, with its cares and duties.

This "sober mystics" (De Villiers 2015:655) inspire Murray to become involved in the social and spiritual needs in society. Though he is not renowned for his involvement in social welfare in the same way as his involvement in mission work and education, serving society was an integral part of his spirituality. According to Lee (2006:294), "Murray's spirituality did not flutter in his brain of heart. It was very much embodied in a historical, real existential role. It was a motivation to get involved, to change society, to play a role".

To illustrate this fact, Lee (2006:294) quotes Murray, who says in his book *Not my will* (1878:12), "heaven's citizens find complete joy in contemplating and doing the glorious will of God." A paragraph in his *Master's Indwelling* (1983:12) also underlines his teaching on involvement in social matters: "the other sign of an infant is this: He can do nothing to help his fellowman. Every man is expected to contribute something to the welfare of society. Everyone has a place to fill and a work to do. But the babe can do nothing for the common good" (Lee 2006:296).

The centrality of social involvement in Murray's spirituality also became clear in his teachings to his children. In a letter written to his young adult daughter, Kitty, while he was in Edinburgh to participate in the Pan-Presbyterian Council, dated 9 July 1877, he writes:

> Let me give you an account of my Sunday morning yesterday. I went at 8 o'clock to a large Hall, called Drill Hall, where the volunteers are exercised. They were gathered together some 600 poor ragged men, women, and children to breakfast […] They are almost all young people of 18 and 20 who do the work. Coming out on Saturday evening to meet the poor – and then serving them in the Hall. May someone of my dear children learn to live and serve Jesus so (Lee, 2006:297).

Murray's passion for the transformation of society also becomes evident in the letter[14] he wrote on 2 December 1872 to Mary Lyon, the founder and first principal of Mount Holyoke Seminary, Massachusetts:

> We feel the need of a special effort to secure the rising generation for Christ. Under the strong impression that education, no less than the Ministry, is a means of Grace, and a Channel for the working of the Blessed Spirit, we are anxious to have a school in which shall be sought first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. The object we have in view is a twofold one. Let me mention the larger and more distant part first. We desire to have an Institution in which servants for the service of the Kingdom in teaching both Christian and heathen children, may be trained. Our more immediate object is to obtain for the girls' school now in existence at Wellington, a teacher under whose fostering care it might into a larger Institution (Ferguson 1927).

The Huguenot Seminary for Girls opened its doors on 19 January 1874 under the leadership of Miss Ferguson, who came from Mount Holyoke in response to Murray's letter. The rest of the teaching staff comprised Miss Bliss, also from Mount Holyoke, and Miss McGill. From its inception, the school was based on the Mount Holyoke principles of self-management, self-government, and communion with God (Ferguson 1927:19) – a clear indication of its founders' firm belief that spiritual formation and self-development are just as important as knowledge. Two accounts cited in a letter written by Miss Ferguson in the first year of the Seminary's existence illustrates how the learners were also involved in outreach projects. On 11 May 1874 she writes:

> I must tell you of our Sunday School yesterday. We had 74 scholars, and a very earnest group of little people they seemed. I shall have employment for all our girls as teachers […] Another cottage prayer meeting has been held. Nine women came together. The girls came back with faces aglow, and said they had such a good time.

14 An extract from this letter is published as a preamble in Ferguson, Geo P. The original letter can be seen in the DRC Archives, Stellenbosch.

> The women listened eagerly and begged the girls to come again (Ferguson 1927:27).

Reflecting on the challenge to cultivate a missional spirituality in the DRC and from the above glimpse on Andrew Murray's spirituality, a statement of Van Niekerk (2019:231) may be quite apt: "[T]there is only one way that the church in mission can cultivate true spiritualities, and that is through communion with the Trinity which is imbued with love. By being grounded in this love is the only way we as true Christians can live out our mission".

Conclusion

This article argues that nurturing a missional spirituality is about nurturing a personal, intimate love relationship with the Triune God as well as "doing spirituality", a concept used by Lee (2006:308) to describe Andrew Murray's spirituality. From the very cryptic overview of Andrew Murray's spirituality above, it should be clear that though missional language did not exist in Murray's time, traces of missional ecclesiology are visible in Murray's writings. Key concepts of missional ecclesiology like communion with God, discerning God's will, a zeal, a vision, a vocation to become involved in the spiritual and social needs of the world and to participate in God's mission are also key concepts of Murray's spirituality. Granted, Murray lived in a different era, his context was different, Murray's writings are not always systematic and well-structured (Mahne 1999:380), but it could be worthwhile for the DRC to again observe John W de Gruchy's (2009:222) appreciation of Andrew Murray: "Murray was an exemplar of the Christian life in the Spirit such as we find expressed in Book Three of *Calvin's Institutes*, and his legacy in this regard continues to influence many within the Dutch Reformed Church today."

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