

## Towards a missional liturgy

### ABSTRACT

*In this article the central question being explored is 'what is a missional liturgy?' The exploration is conducted by making use of data and insights obtained from the Southern African Partnership for Missional Churches (SAPMC). After an introduction to the theme as well as the SAPMC-process, the analyzed data is presented. In conclusion some observations are made in an attempt to provide preliminary contours for attempts to answer the initial question.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

In missional worship, as in all Christian worship, the focus is neither on the reached nor on the unreached, but on God.<sup>2</sup> And as Minatrea also states, "Worship is not learning about God; it is encountering God."<sup>3</sup> This statement sounds logical and deceptively simple and obvious, but it is not. Our worship or liturgy is very often not in the first instance God-directed with the ultimate aim of praising God and enjoying Him forever (Westminster Confession). In order to have a liturgy that is primarily focused on God and His activity, discernment is needed. In a presentation<sup>4</sup> regarding preliminary findings coming from data obtained in the Southern African Partnership for Missional Churches (SAPMC) Dr. Frederick Marais stated that the data pointed towards the fact that "busy congregations struggle with discernment". Being busy can indeed also in the worship of a congregation be a distraction with regard to discernment in and through our worship. There are also other factors that can distract us regarding discernment and calling. The two factors that possibly describe the two extreme poles regarding this distraction are firstly on the one hand an over emphasizing of church-growth and on the other extreme a ministry that is totally focused upon self preservation.<sup>5</sup> In order to work towards

---

1 I would like to extend my thanks to Dr. Frederick Marais for several discussions regarding the theme of this paper and for many valuable comments on an earlier version of this paper, as well as for making the data available to us for research purposes. Furthermore I would like to thank Mrs. Corrie du Toit, Dr. Pieter van der Walt as well as Mrs. Divine Robertson for their assistance with obtaining the relevant data. Lastly I would like to thank the participating congregations for their generous cooperation in the research project by allowing us to use the data and making time and space for us for further interviews and group discussions. An earlier version of this paper was presented as a case study at the August 2007 meeting of the international ecumenical Societas Liturgica in Palermo, Italy where the conference theme was *Liturgy in the piazza*.

2 Old also puts it plainly, "True worship, however, is distinguished from all of these in that it serves above all else, the praise of God's glory". Old, H.O. 2002. *Worship. Reformed According to Scripture*. Revised and expanded edition. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, p. 2.

3 Minatrea, M. 2004. "Missional Practice Number Four. Rewrite Worship Every Week". In: Minatrea, M. 2004. *Shaped by God's Heart. The Passion and Practices of Missional Churches*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, p. 67.

4 Cf. Marais, J.F.M. 2005. "Observations from the Partnership for Missional Churches. Things that struck us thus far and things we thought about...". Unpublished paper Buvton.

5 Cf. Hall, C. 2007. "Missional Possible: Steps to transform a consumer church into a missional church". *Leadership* Winter 2007, p. 35.

a true missional liturgy, as a preliminary working definition for our purposes it is regarded as a liturgy that is primarily God directed and focused upon discernment regarding calling and mission and exactly Who God is. One should be conscious of all the kinds of distraction, also because of the possibility that one of these distracting poles is sometimes dished up to congregations and worship leaders as being 'missional'.

With these preliminary thoughts regarding worship and the missional church, the question thus arises, 'what is meant by the term missional?'<sup>6</sup> And more specifically, 'what is a missional liturgy?' In another article on the same topic and which serves as a kind of theoretical base for this article, Prof Bethel Müller makes the distinction between a functional and foundational approach regarding theology, ecclesiology, ministry and liturgy.<sup>7</sup> His aim there is a theological exploration of this question. This article wishes to complement that of Prof Müller by making use of data obtained from the SAPMC. And together these articles wish to serve and stimulate the current reflection upon the theme of missional church, but specifically focusing on missional liturgy by means of an attempt towards an answer regarding the question 'what is a missional liturgy?'

In order to do this the SAPMC will firstly be presented and thereafter some methodological considerations will be dealt with briefly. With this in mind three congregations will be introduced by means of a short congregational sketch and thereafter the research results will be presented in a table format and by making use of Müller's previously mentioned distinctions. In conclusion and as an extension of Müller's conclusion, some points will be highlighted that may help congregations, worship planning teams and liturgists in their discernment towards a missional liturgy. In the liturgy the shift towards missional theology is manifested most clearly.

## 2. THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN PARTNERSHIP FOR MISSIONAL CHURCHES

The SAPMC was born from a theological as well as a sociological shift that has taken place over the past decades. Theologically the emphasis on the *missio Dei*, the realization that it is primarily God, not the church, who is the One who sends the church, not only individuals.<sup>8</sup> Bosch discusses Karl Barth's insight that mission is an activity of God himself.<sup>9</sup> The launching of the SAPMC must also be viewed against the backdrop of the current era being characterized as entailing a shift from Christendom to a post-Christendom era, which is a sociological shift with regards to the position of the church in society.<sup>10</sup> In the latter the relation between the

<sup>6</sup> According to Conder, "It's such a buzzword that it's fair to ask, 'Is there really any such thing as a missional church?'. Conder, T. 2007. "Will the real church please stand up? How missional communities differ, and how they're alike". *Leadership* Winter 2007, p. 47.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Müller, B.A. 2007. "A missional understanding of the church, its ministry, especially its liturgy". *NGTT* 48/3&4.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Bosch, D.J. 1991. *Transforming Mission. Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. Maryknoll: Orbis, p. 389-393.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* p. 389.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Hall, D.J. 1997. *The End of Christendom and the Future of Christianity*. Christian Mission and Modern Culture Series. Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, also, Goheen, M.W. 2002. "The Missional Church: Ecclesiological Discussion in the Gospel and Our Culture Network in North America". *Missiology* XXX/4, 479-490; Guder, D.L. 1998. "Missional Church: From Sending to Being Sent" in Guder, D.L. *et al. Missional Church. A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, p. 1-7; Keifert, P. 2007. *Ons is nou hiër. 'n Nuwe era van gestuur-wees*. Wellington: Bybel-Media, p. 17-31&147, who warns that we should not be too negative when we utilize concepts such as post-Christendom, and Van der Walt, P. 2004. "Ons is gestuurdes". *Kruisgewys* 4/1, 18-19.

church and the surrounding culture is significantly different to a Christendom era in which the church was institutionalized and had an important position. In a post-Christendom era the church is increasingly pushed to the periphery of society which implies that it will have to engage with the surrounding culture in new ways. With regards to mission it will entail that totally new ways of being church is required. Both the theological motivation as described in the concept *missio Dei* and the shift towards a post-Christendom era were two of the main impulses to stimulate the conceptualization of the idea of the missional church and acting as a basis for the founding of the SAPMC.

The SAPMC is well known by now, but a brief summary of the project will help to put the data and research into perspective. In 2003 the SAPMC was launched in South Africa and Namibia.<sup>11</sup> The explicit aim of the SAPMC is to assist (mainline) congregations in appropriating a missional theology in a three to five year process. With regards to the ecclesiology of local congregations this shift has been described as a congregational missiological shift from sending to being sent (Guder),<sup>12</sup> or from maintenance to mission. This missiological paradigm shift has numerous implications for the ways in which local congregations function. It entails a change in their congregational culture, in their understanding of their mission, structures, forms and patterns, which will inevitably include the way in which a congregation worship. Liturgically it entails among other things to become more “open” and “welcoming” with regards to strangers, but also to the issues of the public square. The public square is the place where cultures and theological perceptions meet – and this encounter will be and has to be in a liturgy of the marketplace. A missional liturgy is open to the public square without maintaining the traditional private-public split which persists in many seeker-sensitive liturgies.

The SAPMC-process moves in four stages. Firstly a ‘discovering’ phase in which congregations researches themselves by means of interviews and a study of their documents. In this way congregations can discover who they are as well as who their partners are. The second so-called ‘visioning’ phase is used to deal with their calling and specifically asking the question “what is God’s calling for our congregation?” The third or ‘learn and grow’ phase is the longest phase in order to give participants the time to fully appropriate and realize what they are doing. Lastly the phase of ‘outreach and mentoring’ works with the presupposition that good stewardship implies that the congregation will share what they have learned and experienced with others.<sup>13</sup>

Part of the SAPMC-process thus far entailed an ethnographic research process through which congregations studied their congregational cultures in the first “discovering”-phase. In this article some of that ethnographic data will be analyzed and discussed with the aim of implicating the current missional theology and attitudes towards liturgical practice in some congregations. But before an analysis is attempted, firstly more regarding the methodology employed.

### 3. METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND THREE CONGREGATIONS

---

11 Cf. The website [www.missionalchurches.org.za](http://www.missionalchurches.org.za) and Keifert, P. 2007, for a general overview, and Wepener, C.J. 2003. *Missionêre kerk. Van sturend na gestuur*. Kruisgewys 3/2, 3-5, for a brief summary.

12 Cf. in this regard chapter 1 entitled “Missional Church: From Sending to Being Sent” in Guder, D.L. *et al.* 1998. *Missional Church. A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, which is a title that strongly relies on the Christendom theory.

13 Cf. Church Innovations Institute. 1997. *Partnership for Congregational Renewal Notebook*, and for a brief summary cf. Wepener, C.J. 2003, p. 5. Currently the SAPMC works with 5 stages, but there were 4 at the time the data was gathered.

A questionnaire of eight questions was put to approximately forty congregations participating in the SAPMC.<sup>14</sup> They consisted of congregations coming from a wide variety of denominational backgrounds. The questions were about conflict resolution, fears and hopes, expectations regarding the next five years, a description of the congregation to a new comer, feelings regarding recent changes in the local community and also in the congregation. The answers to these questions were all relevant for us in our attempt to understand the basic question of what a missional liturgy is. Some of these questions however were of particular importance for our purposes here, specifically the question asking for a description by the respondent of his/her experience of God's presence and activity in their congregation and also a question asking for a description of a meaningful worship experience he/she has had in the congregation.<sup>15</sup>

What were before us in the research program were thick descriptions<sup>16</sup> of the stories and cultures of these congregations. The signs of a developing missional thinking were rather obscure, hidden, and very delicate; references to an emerging new thinking were mostly oblique and lateral. Therefore, by means of a sensitive, appreciative and unprejudiced close-reading technique the data were to be reviewed. Along with this, and specifically also after our own attempt at reading the data, the reading reports of the congregations that were compiled by the reading teams of the SAPMC were also consulted. Apart from reading the raw data and reports, visits were made to these congregations as well as interviews with congregational leaders.

For the sake of this paper it was decided not to incorporate all forty congregations, but to concentrate on three congregations, one from the URCSA and two from the DRC, and thereby theologically remaining within the Reformed tradition and thus in a first round to be able to compare apples with apples, so to speak. Although very brief congregational sketches of each of the four congregations will be provided here,<sup>17</sup> confidentiality<sup>18</sup> will be kept regarding the identity of the three congregations. This is however not the case in most studies of this type which currently abound. More often than not the names of particular congregations are used and their practices described and appreciated as, for example, being good examples of what it means for a congregation to be missional. In other words the research is a kind of search for 'best practices'. However, such an appreciative approach leaves very little room for criticism.<sup>19</sup> Therefore we do not provide the names of the congregations here which give

---

14 Cf. also the pamphlet Stellenbosch University, Faculty of Theology. "M.Th. Opsoek na missionale transformasie. Van instandhouding na gestuur-wees", for some insight regarding methodology employed in the SAPMC.

15 Cf. with regards to the questions and ethnographic process in the SAPMC-project Van der Walt, P. 2005. "Kultuur in gemeentes". *Kruisgewys* 5/1, 5-7.

16 They were not really thick description in the sense that Geertz uses the term, but also not so-called thin description. Most probably the responses could in the ethnographic sense of the word be typified as belonging somewhere in between thick and thin descriptions. Cf. Geertz, C. 1973. *The interpretation of cultures*. New York: Basic Books, p. 3-30, and also Wepener, C.J. 2005. "Researching Rituals. On the use of participatory action research in liturgical studies". *Praktiese Teologie in Suid-Afrika*. 20/1, 117-118. Cf. also the definition of 'applied ethnography' in Keifert, P. 2007, p. 152.

17 For a similar approach and study of the liturgy of local congregation, cf Cilliers, J.H. & C.J. Wepener. 2007. "Research on liturgy and the generation of social capital in contexts of poverty. A South African exploration". *International Journal for Practical Theology*. 11/1, 39-55.

18 Babbie, E. 1989. *The practice of social research*. Belmont: Wadsworth, p. 475 refers to confidentiality in research as the process where a specific response cannot be identified with a specific respondent. This is in this research firstly true regarding ethnographic research conducted within the framework of the SAPMC-process itself as well as in this research as pertaining to these three congregations.

19 Cf. in this regard also Post's criticism of the work of Hendriks on the so-called 'Open Kerk-beweging' in

us more room to be more than just appreciative in a positive way. We are convinced that by taking such an approach in our research, our research will even more be able to really serve the congregations we research. We thus employ a qualitative methodology which makes use of variety of sources and which cannot be denoted as belonging to only one type of empirical methodology.

#### 4. THE RESEARCH RESULTS

We present the result here in a table format and by making use of Müller's fourfold distinction regarding Theology, Ecclesiology, Ministry and Liturgy and the acronyms DRC1, DRC2 and URC1. DRC1 is an old and established Dutch Reformed congregation in a more traditional white Afrikaans-speaking well to do area in a large town. It is a larger congregation with three full time ministers. The congregation's main Sunday liturgy can be described as a traditional Reformed liturgy centred on the proclamation of the Word and the singing of traditional church hymns. DRC2 is a younger Dutch Reformed congregation in a multicultural environment; it is in a more urban middle class setting with one full time minister. The congregation's main Sunday liturgy can be described as a Reformed liturgy with emphasis on Word and sacrament, but also making use of other rituals and symbols and strongly influenced by the praise and worship movement. URC1 is a congregation of the Uniting Reformed Church in a suburban multi-cultural setting which could probably in economic terms be described as middle to lower middle class. The congregation has one full time minister. The congregation's main Sunday liturgy can be described as a traditional Reformed liturgy, the result of the specific type of liturgy transmitted by the Reformed missionaries.

In looking at the stories of the congregations we were mainly interested in the question how much they reveal (manifest) the *missional character* of the congregation – or the lack of it. Specifically also with regard to their worship. We were not interested whether they are successful congregations, for example sporting a church-centred mission where everything is measured in terms of church growth, but whether they are God-centred (on the triune God and His mission) churches. It is therefore important to reflect on the following questions regarding the image and shape of the congregation: is it primarily regarded as a place, or as a people; is it regarded as an organisation dealing with important issues, or an organism in service of the mission of God; a vendor or a peoples sent; is it determined by the accumulated patterns determined by the so-called "plausibility structures" upholding its shape?<sup>20</sup> Here is a very brief summary of the data:

---

the Netherlands which is in many regards rather similar to what can be called a missional church movement. Post, P.G.J. 2006a. *Liturgische bewegingen. Thema's, trends en perspectieven in tien jaar liturgiestudie. Een literatuurverkenning 1995-2005*. Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij Meinema, p. 61.

20 Cf. in this regard Müller, B.A. 2007.

<b>Domains</b>	<b>DRC 1</b>	<b>DRC 2</b>	<b>URC 1</b>
<b>Theology</b> Functional	Apologetic theology viewing God as the answer to all the needs of humankind, or God as the Problem solver. This formed the basis of their vision statements.	The theology is a kind of missionalism. Growth being the core activity to which everything, especially God's activity, but also that of the leaders, is being measured.	The Reformed theology of Belhar must be made functional in the market place of cultures in new RSA.
Foundational	Indeed Reformed and about God's initiative in ministry, especially in baptism and Eucharist; mission statement testifies to its Reformed bias.	There is indeed a kind of genuineness behind it all. The DRC's Scottish evangelical/pietistic tradition can still be traced here with a sincere calling and vision for winning souls for Jesus.	Reformed, but strongly inspired by Belhar i.e. God is viewed as the God of the poor, of reconciliation and of justice.
<b>Ecclesiology</b> Functional	A good functioning congregation is the ideal: relevance and management central; strong ecclesio-centrism in practice (tensions between conservatives and liberals solved by functional approaches).	An almost 'over-committed' core family doing most of the work in the congregation. This kind of bonding or cohesion which is usually positive can become exclusivist towards the rest of the congregation.	Very strongly influenced by pietistic origins, being a product of earlier mission endeavours; stress on kerugmatik and evangelical functions

Foundational	Vocatio very important Discipleship training (takes place outside liturgy in small group activities).	There is an attempt to have less focus on the minister alone being the leader and more on the congregation as a whole and all the members being kings, priests and prophets.	Strong focus on peculiar identity in order to overcome its history of ecclesial dependence on missionary traditions.
<b>Ministry</b> Functional	Ministry regarded as agency to Christianise cultures confronted in market place through missionary enterprises.	In a rapidly changing context (demographics old vs. new SA) there is a survival instinct. See a kind of withdrawal to a comfort zone in congregation – last outpost of the ‘good old days’. Attempts to avoid unknown and threatening new marketplace confrontations.	In a sense a ‘closed’ congregation viewing the market place as a threat, a reality that must be conquered.
Foundational	Dialogue with other cultures and social realities should continue, but in the long run the functional is determinative of the foundational.	Nevertheless, the congregation is very welcoming and witnesses to blessings coming from boundary-crossing events. E.g. baptism of the son of a lesbian couple, ecumenical Pentecost, many new coloured members.	Ministry must keep an openness towards certain cultural customs in the society in which the congregation ministers.

<p><b>Liturgy</b> Functional</p>	<p>To be welcoming and make people feel at home. Growth of membership as criterion. Liturgy serves individual spiritual needs.</p>	<p>God's activity and presence in the congregation is closely connected to whether people see an increase in worship service attendance on a Sunday. Liturgy is a kind of visual barometer with regards to God working in people's hearts.</p>	<p>Very strong individualistic tendencies in the experience of e.g. the Eucharist. Still for a large part the liturgy is a legacy of the 'sending' church's liturgy and not really inculturated within its own specific cultural context.</p>
<p>Foundational</p>	<p>In theory it is indeed God's initiative that is in the centre of the liturgy. Ideal is to be Reformed in most ways and this is seen as a correction of the functional approaches in non-Reformed liturgies. Dogmatic correctness is sought, but softer approaches are developed to make the intellectual ultra dogmatic approaches more pastoral.</p>	<p><b>1.</b> People experience God's presence through worship very often connected to experiences outside the worship service, such as the small groups.</p> <p><b>2.</b> Especially with regards to worship related to pastoral issues, such as death, God's comforting presence and initiative is experienced in the worship in the church building.</p>	<p>The liturgy is truly experienced as an encounter with the living God, but the most important liturgical encounters with God are experienced outside the Sunday liturgy in e.g. prayer meetings and special services.</p>

## 5. TOWARDS A MISSIONAL LITURGY

With the summarised data in mind we suggest that it is impossible to define exactly what a missional liturgy is, because in different circumstances it might mean different things. We would suggest that in all three the congregations there are data pointing towards the presence of a missional liturgy and also pointing towards the contrary. It would probably be more accurate to suggest that worship moving along certain lines and at the same time being sensitive to certain extremes, would be liturgies that move towards a missional type. We would suggest that such a movement towards a missional liturgy is a movement towards a continuous pneumatological interaction between worshippers and Scripture with specific awareness of where their specific congregation is in its current context and where the triune God is already at work in that context. Thus a movement towards a missional liturgy will be a kind of a liturgical epistemological movement (to use the term in this sense) by moving towards becoming a liturgy that really seeks to understand the meaning of the Word now for *this* congregation and let that epistemological or hermeneutical process incarnate into the worship act and the worship act into worshippers lives. Missional theology thus refers to a being and not so much a doing theology and ultimately liturgy too. And with all of this in mind we suggest that a missional liturgy is a liturgy that seeks to experience the presence of God or open up a space in which God can encounter the worshippers with *His* mission, always being aware of the following extremes that could potentially distract the focus from the triune God, His mission and the congregation's place or calling within that whole. Some of these extremes or poles could include:<sup>21</sup>

### **5.1 Between aimlessness and missionalism, uselessness and functionalism, attractional and unattractional, quantity and quality, inhospitable and over welcoming, clinical dogmatic correctness and pastoral mode**

In 2007 the DR Church received a new service book. It is quite a radical renewal since the last one that was published in 1988.<sup>22</sup> All in all this new book is an excellent contribution and source for the Reformed liturgy in South Africa in as far as it is one of the first official liturgical documents that reflect the work of the Liturgical Movement<sup>23</sup> of the twentieth century. However, the book also includes guidelines for a so-called missional worship service. It defines a missional liturgy as: a. "a liturgy directed towards people who do not usually participate in the liturgy of congregations" or b. "a liturgy in a newly planted congregation". It goes on by stating that missional services strive to steer clear of any traditional church language and liturgical practices. Some advice is given for all four movements<sup>24</sup> of the liturgy ... in short: 1. be as hospitable as possible without making people feel uncomfortable and experiment with different art forms. 2. Preaching should take the world of secularized people into account and invite them to become part of God's kingdom in the world. 3. A long paragraph is devoted

---

21 Cf. for current liturgical movements I.J. van der Merwe. 2007. "Tien hedendaagse liturgiese skuiwe", as well as, Wepener, C.J. 2007. "Ontdek eietydse tendense en uitdagings rondom die erediens", both in: Wepener, C.J. and I.J. van der Merwe. (eds.). 2007. *Ontdekkings in die erediens*. Wellington: Lux Verbi BM (forthcoming).

22 Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk. *Handboek vir die erediens van die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk*. Kaapstad: NG Kerk-Uitgewers.

23 For more on the Liturgical Movement cf. Pecklers, K. 2003. *Worship*. New Century Theology. Chapter 4.

24 For more on the four movements cf. Van der Merwe, I.J. 2007. "Ontdek die bewegings van die erediens". in: Wepener, C.J. and I.J. van der Merwe. (eds.). 2007. *Ontdekkings in die erediens*. Wellington: Lux Verbi BM (forthcoming).

to the table service in which the core suggestion is basically, skip the table service and 4. During the last movement contact information should be communicated.

This proposal has many positive points that could indeed be described as missional. It however tends towards the missionalistic approach against which McDonald quite rightly warns. McDonald defines missionalism as “the belief that the *worth* of one’s life is determined by the achievement of a grand objective. Key word: *worth*.”<sup>25</sup> Closely scrutinized the suggestion in the new service book is thus rather a missionalistic liturgy than a missional liturgy as the worth of the missional liturgy will here be determined by the amount of so-called seekers that are attracted by it. This is not a bad incentive, but surely not the central aim of any liturgy or missional vision. The data coming from the congregations in this study also showed a very big focus of worship attendance as indication for God’s activity and presence. The point here is just that a missional liturgy should be conscious of the dangers of liturgical missionalism, but without lapsing into a totally aimless liturgy. Hall’s<sup>26</sup> remark that missional is not attractional and also not the opposite is also applicable to a missional liturgy. In the same article he also suggests that leaders “used to measuring success by numbers and accolades, they may have to endure desert days”. Yes the attendance of the liturgy may in a real missional liturgy even drop, but hopefully the levels of commitment will make up for that.

In many congregations the experience of attending a worship service and being welcomed by someone at the door with many kind words and then, when you realise you forgot something in your motorcar and afterwards return to the same person at the same door minutes later and hearing the same words uttered in the same extremely friendly and ‘hospitable’ way is a weekly experience. In this way the quest for a welcoming liturgy ends up in becoming just too nice and thereby succumbs to the danger of becoming artificial. We have also experienced the opposite, namely that absolutely nobody notices you and you realise that there is a core group in the church who always remain the insiders and you are a type of outsider, even if you become an active worshipping member. This also became apparent in the data, especially as pertaining to the very individualistic tendencies in many of the liturgies, for example the celebration of the Lord’s Supper.<sup>27</sup> In a missional liturgy the worshipping community will be nice, but not too nice! In other words, a movement towards a missional liturgy is a movement towards true biblical hospitality which is not a strategy, but lived love. This brings us to another set of extreme poles that take these first set of poles a bit further.

## **5.2 Between anthropology and theology, aliens and consumerists, individual and community, cult and culture, Scripture and context, a spiritual gospel and a social gospel, the private household and the public square, liturgy and life**

In an article dealing with the culture in congregations participating in the SAPMC, Van der Walt<sup>28</sup> points towards the fact that members often ask “What can I get out of the liturgy for myself?” On the other hand there is a longing for genuine and simple worship encounters

---

25 McDonald, G. 2007. “Dangers of missionalism. Even the best causes can become cold, prideful, and all-consuming”. *Leadership* Winter 2007, 39.

26 Hall, C. 2007, p. 35&36.

27 Cf. with regards to this individualistic tendencies with regards to the celebration of the Lord’s Supper in Reformed congregations in South Africa also, Wepener, C.J. 2002. “Still because of the weakness of some? – A descriptive exploration of the Lord’s Supper in South Africa, 1948 – 2002”. *Jaarboek voor liturgie-onderzoek* 18, 139-158.

28 Cf. Van der Walt, P. 2005, p. 6. See also the general overview article on finding from the SAPMC, Dames, G. Marais, J. and P. van der Walt. 2004. “Gemeentes wat hul roeping ontdek”. *Kruisgewys* 4/2, 23-25.

with God. The tension between anthropology and theology is manifested in his observations, something that we also encountered in our own data, namely attempts to focus the worship service in a dogmatically correct way on God, but then temper it down in attempts to let the liturgy serve the individual spiritual needs of the people. We are convinced that in a missional liturgy both anthropology (what people want) and theology (what God wants) are important, but to borrow terminology from Van Ruler – in a theonomic reciprocal way.<sup>29</sup> There is indeed an inherent danger of liturgical consumerism in the anthropological side,<sup>30</sup> but so is there also the risk of becoming totally alien to the world of the worshipping people by not taking their realities into account. Both the theological and anthropological poles of a missional liturgy must have the market place and public life in focus. True missional worship helps to connect liturgy and life.

In our own research we realised that many of the most significant worship experiences occur outside the formal Sunday liturgy, in small groups or in some other untraditional (for Protestant Christian worship) spaces. This can be a problem or an opportunity. Studies on European Christianity often show in quantitative terms how worship attendance has dropped dramatically and therefore, so the argument often goes, that the average Europeans have become removed from their faith and that Europe has become a continent of unbelievers. We are convinced that such observations need ritual qualification, in as far as numerous ritual-liturgical studies indicated that there are currently 'rituals in abundance'<sup>31</sup> in European society, also religious and Christian rituals. They are in abundance also outside of the walls of traditional church buildings. A missional liturgy will take these new spaces seriously as, like Paul Post puts it, potential 'Holy Land'<sup>32</sup>. Or as Conder<sup>33</sup> remarks, "The sharp boundary between the sacred and secular evaporates as missional fellowships listen for God's voice in culture and creation".

This last observation brings us to another important point in an exploration of a truly missional liturgy, namely that liturgy can be totally culture pessimistic on the one side and overly positive about the surrounding culture on the other. And the surrounding culture and openness towards it or lack thereof is closely related to attitudes towards outsiders and strangers. The question here relates to the process of liturgical inculturation. The critical reciprocal interaction between cult (liturgy) and culture in which something new comes into being, to wit an inculturated liturgy. A truly missional liturgy will always be looking for the best ways of expressing the message of the Gospel in the culture of the worshipping people and thereby utilising cultural phenomena in the liturgical encounters with God, without selling out to all aspects of the surrounding culture and subjecting this encounter to negative aspects of the culture such as consumerism. This inculturation should also be intercultural<sup>34</sup> where

---

29 Cf. Van Ruler, A.A. 1973. "Hoofdlijnen van een Pneumatologie". *Theologisch Werk Deel IV*. Nijkerk: Uitgeverij G.F. Callenbach, 9–40.

30 The temptation is always to have a grand scheme to which we incessantly try to invoke God's presence rather than ourselves fitting into God's agenda". See Conder, T. 2007, p. 47.

31 Cf. Lukken, G. 2005. *Rituals in Abundance. Critical reflections on the place, form and identity of Christian ritual in our culture*. Liturgia Condenda 17. Leuven/ Dudley :Peeters.

32 Post, P.G.J. 2006b. "The 'Trees for Life' Day: A New Ritual for Memorial and Reconciliation. Some Ritual-Liturgical Observations on an Emerging Ritual to Commemorate Victims of Cancer in the Netherlands". *Studia Liturgica* 36/1, p. 108.

33 Conder, T. 2007, p. 48.

34 Wepener, C.J. 2006. "Participation and power: Opportunities for method and theory in liturgical research from a changing (Dutch Reformed) South African liturgical landscape". *Jaarboek voor liturgie-onderzoek* 22, 49-66.

different cultures (plural) of which the liturgy is an integral part meet and enrich each other and thereby creating the opportunity for a liturgy that not only incorporates some aspects of a culture. In this process of being truly open to strangers to change existing liturgical ways it must guard against being open to them in order to make them like us. Being open to strangers, to outsiders, to the public square, to our surrounding cultures, requires real listening, real Biblical hospitality which will include both the potential to be blessed by angels and to be raped by scoundrels.<sup>35</sup> This aspect of liturgical inculturation, specifically also in relation to the search for a missional liturgy, is an area in need of more liturgical-theological reflection.

## IN CONCLUSION

The theme of the 'missional church' is very popular world-wide, also in South Africa. Several studies have been conducted on the topic and many theologians are currently working on it while more and more congregations strive towards becoming truly missional. And within this world-wide movement, also specifically with regards to the liturgy, many diverse liturgical practices are being labelled as 'missional'. This article is just one small contribution within the current reflection on the theme 'missional church', specifically also 'missional liturgy' and this within our South African context. But its explicit aim of exploring the question 'what is a missional liturgy?', is to hopefully contribute in stimulating critical liturgical reflection on that wide array of liturgical practices currently bearing the adjective of being 'missional'. In final analysis, the shift towards a missional theology and praxis must be manifested in and nourished by a missional liturgy focussing on the worship and adoration of the God Who recruits the missional congregation time and again, over and over, to serve the *mission Dei*.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Babbie, E. 1989. *The practice of social research*. Belmont: Wadsworth.
- Barrett, L.Y. et al. 2004. *Treasure in Clay Jars. Patterns in Missional Faithfulness*. The Gospel and Our Culture Series. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Church Innovations Institute. 1997. *Partnership for Congregational Renewal Notebook*. St. Paul, MN: CII.
- Cilliers, J.H. and C.J. Wepener. 2007. "Research on liturgy and the generation of social capital in contexts of poverty. A South African exploration". *International Journal for Practical Theology*. 11/1, 39-55.
- Conder, T. 2007. "Will the real church please stand up? How missional communities differ, and how they're alike". *Leadership* Winter 2007, 47-48.
- Dames, G. Marais, J. and P. van der Walt. 2004. "Gemeentes wat hul roeping ontdek". *Kruisgewys* 4/2, 23-25.
- Geertz, C. 1973. *The interpretation of cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
- Goheen, M.W. 2002. "The Missional Church: Ecclesiological Discussion in the Gospel and Our Culture Network in North America". *Missiology* XXX/IV, 479-490.
- Guder, D.L. (ed.). 1998. *Missional Church. A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Hall, C. 2007. "Missional Possible: Steps to transform a consumer church into a missional church". *Leadership* Winter 2007, 35-37.

---

35 Cf. Theron, J. and P.F. Theron. 2001. "Die vlees het Woord geword: Rigters 19". *NGTT* 42/3&4, 406-415, and for the importance of the private-public split in relation to missional thinking also Marais, J.F. 2007a. "Vergete Apostel leierskap". Paper read at NEK-conference, Cape Town August 2007 and Marais, J.F. 2007b. "Hoe verskil gestuurde teologie van gemeentevernuwingsbewegings soos die Church Growth Movement?". Unpublished paper, BUVTON, 1-3.

- Hall, D.J. 1997. *The End of Christendom and the Future of Christianity*. Christian Mission and Modern Culture Series. Valley Forge: Trinity Press International.
- Keifert, P. 1992. *Welcoming the stranger. A public theology of worship and evangelism*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Keifert, P. 2007. *Ons is nou hiér*. 'n Nuwe era van gestuur-wees. Wellington: Bybel-Media.
- Lukken, G. 2005. *Rituals in Abundance. Critical reflections on the place, form and identity of Christian ritual in our culture*. Liturgia Condenda 17. Leuven/ Dudley :Peeters.
- Marais, J.F. 2005. "Observations from the Partnership for Missional Churches. Things that struck us thus far and things we thought about...". Unpublished paper Buvton.
- Marais, J.F. 2007a. "Vergeete Apostel leierskap". Paper read at NEK-conference, Cape Town August 2007.
- Marais, J.F. 2007b. "Hoe verskil gestuurde teologie van gemeentevernuwingsbewegings soos die Church Growth Movement?". Unpublished paper, BUVTON, 1-3.
- McDonald, G. 2007. "Dangers of missionalism. Even the best causes can become cold, prideful, and all-consuming". *Leadership* Winter 2007, 38-42.
- Minatrea, M. 2004. "Missional Practice Number Four. Rewrite Worship Every Week". In: Minatrea, M. 2004. *Shaped by God's Heart. The Passion and Practices of Missional Churches*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Müller, B.A. 2008. "A missional understanding of the church, its ministry, especially its liturgy". *NGTT* 49/1&2.
- Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk. 1988. *Handboek vir die Erediens van die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk*. Kaapstad: NG Kerk-Uitgewers.
- Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk. 2007. *Vir die erediens*. 'n Handleiding. Wellington: Bybel-Media.
- Old, H.O. 2002. *Worship. Reformed According to Scripture*. Revised and expanded edition. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Pecklers, K. 2003. *Worship*. New Century Theology. London/ New York: Continuum.
- Post, P.G.J. 2006a. *Liturgiese bewegingen. Thema's, trends en perspektieven in tien jaar liturgiastudie. Een literatuurverkenning 1995-2005*. Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij Meinema.
- Post, P.G.J. 2006b. "The 'Trees for Life' Day: A New Ritual for Memorial and Reconciliation. Some Ritual-Liturgical Observations on an Emerging Ritual to Commemorate Victims of Cancer in the Netherlands". *Studia Liturgica* 36/1, 94-108.
- Stellenbosch University, Faculty of Theology. "M.Th. Opsoek na missionale transformasie. Van instandhouding na gestuur-wees" (Pamphlet).
- Stutzman, L.L. and G.R. Hunsberger. 2004. "The Public Witness of Worship". In: Barrett, L.Y. et al. 2004. *Treasure in Clay Jars. Patterns in Missional Faithfulness*. The Gospel and Our Culture Series. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 100-116.
- Theron, J. and P.F. Theron. 2001. "Die vlees het Woord geword: Rigters 19". *NGTT* 42/3&4, 406-415.
- Van der Merwe, I.J. 2007. "Tien hedendaagse liturgiese skuiwe", in: Wepener, C.J. and I.J. van der Merwe (eds.). 2007. *Ontdekkings in die erediens*. Wellington: Lux Verbi BM (forthcoming).
- Van der Walt, P. 2004. "Ons is gestuurdes". *Kruisgewys* 4/1, 18-20.
- Van der Walt, P. 2005. "Kultuur in gemeentes". *Kruisgewys* 5/1, 5-7.
- Van Ruler, A.A. 1973. "Hoofdlinies van een Pneumatologie". *Theologisch Werk Deel IV*. Nijkerk: Uitgeverij G.F. Callenbach, 9 – 40.
- Wepener, C.J. 2002c. "Still because of the weakness of some? – A descriptive exploration of the Lord's Supper in South Africa, 1948 – 2002". *Jaarboek voor liturgie-onderzoek* 18, 139-158.
- Wepener, C.J. 2003. "Missionêre kerk. Van sturend na gestuur". *Kruisgewys* 3/2, 3-5.
- Wepener, C.J. 2005. "Researching Rituals. On the use of participatory action research in liturgical studies". *Praktiese Teologie in Suid-Afrika*. 20/1, 109-127.
- Wepener, C.J. 2006. "Participation and power: Opportunities for method and theory in liturgical research from a changing (Dutch Reformed) South African liturgical landscape". *Jaarboek voor liturgie-onderzoek* 22, 49-66.
- Wepener, C.J. 2007. "Ontdek eietydse tendense en uitdagings rondom die erediens". in: Wepener, C.J. and I.J. van der Merwe (eds.). 2007. *Ontdekkings in die erediens*. Wellington: Lux Verbi BM (forthcoming).

**KEY WORDS**

Missional Congregations  
Missional Liturgy  
Missional Worship  
Discernment

**TREFWOORDE**

Missionale Gemeentes  
Missionale Liturgie  
Missionale Erediens  
Onderskeiding

Dr. Cas Wepener  
Forest Drive 63  
Pinelands  
7405  
Tel: 021 5312401  
E-pos: [cwepener@sun.ac.za](mailto:cwepener@sun.ac.za)