

Andrew Murray’s “Missionary Problem”: addressing the gap between the spiritual and the everyday lives of church members

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Abstract

The article compares two views on the missionary problem: one was expressed in Andrew Murray’s book *The Key to the Missionary Problem*,¹ about 120 years ago. Murray emphasised the low level of the spiritual life of the church as the main missionary problem; the key to solving this problem is the revival of a strong personal spiritual life in all missionaries and in all church members. The second view on the missionary problem has to do with one of the unfinished tasks of the missionary movement that Murray helped to establish. It is tacitly found in the Nova Institute’s work over the last 26 years. It is not presented as *the key* to the missionary problem but as a small effort to contribute to the solving of one of the missionary problems, namely the gap between the spiritual and the everyday lives of church members.

Keywords

Andrew Murray Jr; spirituality; Nova Institute; Missionary Problem; Pietism; prayer

Introduction

This article compares two answers to the question on the key missionary problem: one at the beginning of the missionary movement of the twentieth century, which had a strong influence on this movement, and the other at the end of the same movement. The first answer can be described by terms such as straightforward, clear, strong, influential, and self-confident, the

1 <https://ia800206.us.archive.org/27/items/keymissionarypro00murruoft/keymissionarypro00murruoft.pdf>

second is better described by terms such as complex, difficult, uninfluential, and limited in focus, but it is also based on strong convictions and marked by an active pursuit of goals.

Andrew Murray was invited to address the international Ecumenical Missionary Conference that was held in New York in April 1900, but he was unable to go. After reading the preparatory material for this conference, he wrote *The Key to the Missionary Problem: A Passionate Call to Obedience in Action*. I have used the edition published by Morrison and Gibb in 1902. This book must be seen within the context of Murray's role as a leader of the movement that transformed the Dutch Reformed Church from an introverted into a missionary institution². *The Key to the Missionary Problem* (1902) and *The state of the church* (1911) have been described as Murray's two most important books. Both deal with the need for a spiritual revival in the church.

When the Cape Synod decided in 1857 to initiate its own "foreign mission", Murray became a member of the committee that was appointed to launch the undertaking, and he continued to play an active role in it until 1903 when this committee was re-constituted as the General Mission Committee. Then he continued as a member of this new committee until 1906. "He thus continued for half a century to guide the mission policy of the D. R. Church." He played a leading role in establishing mission work in areas north of the Cape, such as the Transvaal, Bechuanaland, Nyasaland, and Swaziland. His second daughter Mary, and his sons John and Charles were stationed as missionaries in Bechuanaland, Transvaal, and Nyasaland (Du Plessis 1919:373–374).

The Nova Institute NPC is an independent Public Benefit Company that works with low-income households to improve their quality of life. It is not formally registered as a Christian organisation; however, it came into existence towards the end of the twentieth century due to a problem that was perceived in the missionary work of churches, as well as in the efforts of governments and development agents, to eradicate poverty: an inability to respond in a meaningful way to pressing problems in Africa such as

2 <http://www.bu.edu/missiology/missionary-biography/l-m/murray-andrew-jr-1828-1917/>

poverty, ecological degradation, the instability of political structures and the disintegration of families.

Andrew Murray and Nova are, apart from their respective relations to the DRC missionary movement of the 20th century, connected with a personal link. Three of Murray's descendants are working for Nova: Henry Murray, a retired electrical engineer, and his two sons, Montagu, who is the chief executive officer of Nova, who holds a doctoral degree in theology and is a member of the editing committee of this book, and Tertius, who is the financial officer of Nova.

This article will highlight a few of the key aspects of Murray's *The Key to the Missionary Problem* and indicate a few ways in which the understanding of mission has unfolded since 1900 and where Nova fits into the present missionary world. The aim of the article is to gain a better understanding of the structures that are needed to best put our present understanding of mission into practice, what we can learn from Andrew Murray's views on the key to the missionary problem, and where we have to adjust.

Andrew Murray's *The key to the missionary problem*

Firstly, something about Murray's style. The book is not written in an analytical style, but rather in a rhetorical style, in the sense that he wants to convince the reader of his message. He presents a simple and clear-cut message, dealing with one aspect per chapter, often formulated in a catchphrase that is repeated throughout the text, frequently in italics or bold, such as: *Every believer a soul winner!* He does not point out any complications that his views may have, nor does he enter into rational debates with different or opposing views. For him, the theology is clear; the main problem is that many believers do not understand it in a way that ignites passion and dedication. The aim is to convince them of the truth that the writer sees so clearly.

The basic arguments in *The Key to the Missionary Problem* revolve around the relationship between the believer (the missionary, the pastor, all church members) and Christ. The "Contents" of the book indicates the prominence of themes such as the poor state of the church's spiritual life as the main missionary problem, of the believer's spiritual life, of passionate prayer, and

of Pentecost and the Holy Spirit in this book. It also illustrates Murray's ecumenical approach. The book emphasises the need for a great revival of spiritual life, of truly fervent devotion to our Lord Jesus Christ, of entire consecration to his service:

- Responses to the Missionary Conference
- Foreign missions: a test of the state of the church
- The Moravian Church and the love to Christ as motivation
- The Church Missionary Society and the deepening of spiritual life
- The China Inland Mission and the power of believing prayer
- The Church of Pentecost and the Holy Spirit
- The missionary problem as a personal one: every believer a soul winner
- A missionary ministry
- A call to prayer and humiliation
- A proposal – a week of prayer

Week of prayer for foreign missions

In short, the key to the missionary problem is one thing only: the dedication of Christians, which is expressed in prayer, being filled with the Holy Spirit, on fire for winning souls. Attention will be given to what he had to say about a few key issues. We begin with his view of the *missionary problem*.

The missionary problem

Before the “*Contents*”, there is a page with the following: “Oh! If we could make this missionary problem a personal one, if we could fill the hearts of the people with a personal love for the Saviour who died for them, the indifference of Christendom would disappear, and the kingdom of Christ would appear.”

Chapter 2, “*The state of the Church*”, makes it clear that, for Murray, the core of the missionary problem is the lack of devotion of the large majority of Christians to the task of spreading the gospel of Christ to every person in the world. Murray shows that the potential of the church, given the number of Protestants in the world and the resources at their disposal, was indeed

more than enough to accomplish that task, and what had been done, as impressive as it was, paled in comparison to what could have been done. The spiritual life of church members is the problem: “[...] surely it cannot be true that His love has ever been a reality to them [i.e., to most church members] or they could not so neglect their calling” (Murray 1902:26).

Another, related, problem is a selfish spirituality: “They were content with the selfish thought of personal salvation, and even in the struggle after holiness never learnt the Divine purpose in their salvation” (Murray 1902:140). The divine purpose is: “[...] Every believer a soul winner! This ought to be the theme of every pastor’s preaching and every believer’s life” (Murray 1902:142). Given these premises, he logically concludes that the church’s lack of dedication is the core missionary problem. He talks of the church’s “terrible failure”, she is “utterly unfaithful” – and all the causes can be summed up by the main problem: “The low spiritual state of the Church as a whole” (Murray 1902:28–29).

The key to the missionary problem

The solution to the low spiritual state of the church is, as can be expected, renewed dedication, prayer, revival, being filled with the Holy Spirit. That was central to Murray’s whole ministry, but it will not be dealt with here. We will only give attention to a few of the aspects that are directly related to mission.

The connection between a strong spiritual life and mission is emphasised throughout the book, to quote a few examples: “It needed Christ to come from heaven to save men out of the world: it needs nothing less than the Spirit of heaven in Christ’s disciples to save them from the spirit of the world, to make them willing to sacrifice all to win the world for Christ” (Murray 1902:31). Entire consecration to Christ would, it seems, by itself lead to missionary interest: “The only way to waken true, deep, spiritual, permanent missionary interest, is not to aim at this itself, so much as to lead believers to a more complete separation from the world, and to an entire consecration of themselves, and all they have, to their Lord and His service.” (Murray 1902:71); also: “And many have found that what first was sought for the sake of personal blessing became the power for living to be

a blessing for others. And so, the deepening of the Christian life becomes the power of a new devotion to missions and the Kingdom of our Lord” (Murray 1902:92).

The goal of mission

Murray is as clear about the goal of mission as about the missionary problem. The goal of mission is to win souls. “Every Christian a soul winner – this is indeed the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (Murray 1902:139). Winning souls means that those souls are saved for life after death. Several times in this book, Murray refers to people who are dying without Christ. People who died without Christ “passed away into the darkness” (Murray 1902:33).

Studying in order to prepare for mission is important in order to know about those who die without Christ, but also for those who long for true worship but do not know God :

The first thing is: Study the world. Take some of the statistics that tell of its population. Think, for instance, of some three million of the heathen and Mohammedans dying every month, dropping over the precipice in the gloom of thick darkness at the rate of one every second. Or take some book that brings you face to face with the sin and degradation and suffering of some special country [...] Look at the picture of that man worshipping, with a reverence many a Christian know little of, a cobra cut in stone, until you take in what it means, and cannot forget it. That man is your brother. He has, like you, a nature formed for worship. He does not, like you, know the true God. Will you not sacrifice everything, sacrifice yourself, to save him? (Murray 1902:159–160)

Murray makes a clear distinction between the natural and the spiritual and between heaven and the world. Without the spiritual, the natural and the world do not have much meaning. He argues, for example, that it is not enough to do “works of philanthropy which are within the range of human nature, while that which is definitely spiritual, supernatural and Divine, is to a large extent lacking.” Without this spiritual element, the church looks very much like any human institution (Murray 1902:29–30). The goal of

mission is clear: for the Head, Christ Jesus, and for the body, the church, and for every believer, the supreme and sole end of our being is the saving of souls, above everything else.

The agents of mission

It is remarkable how central the role of the believer is, both in prayer and in work. On the first pages of the book, Murray states that he would have wished to speak on one point at the Ecumenical Missionary Conference:

How the Church could be roused to know and do the Lord's will for the salvation of men? [...] There is no greater spiritual and mysterious truth than that Christ our Head is actually and entirely dependent on the members of his body for carrying out the plans which He, as Head, has formed. It is only spiritual men, and a Church in which spiritual men have influence, that is capable of rightly carrying out Christ's commands (Murray 1902:2).

The image of the head that is helpless without the body – the head is “actually and entirely dependent” on the body – recurs several times in the book. Only a few examples are quoted:

[...] that Christ should in his love have died for all, and rendered himself dependent on us to let them know of that love [...] (Murray, 1902:26).

The head can do nothing but through the body. Each member is as completely under the control of the head as the whole body. If the members, owing to disease, refuse to act, the head is helpless to carry out its plan (Murray, 1902:145).

Christ's love has no way, now that He is in heaven, of reaching the souls for whom he died, for whom he longs, but through us. Surely nothing can be more natural and truer than the blessed message: Every believer redeemed to be a soul winner (Murray 1902:140).

The power of prayer

The central role that the individual believer and the church play in God's work is also seen in Murray's view of prayer: it is prayer that makes things happen. The reason why the whole church is not actively involved in bringing the gospel to every creature is that "the Christian [...] has little faith in the efficacy of prayer, in the need of much and unceasing prayer, of the power there is in him to pray in Christ's name and prevail" (Murray 1902:31).

An event in the life of Hudson Taylor, the famous missionary to China, is related, at some length, as an example to the reader of the power of prayer and the goal of mission. At one stage, Taylor was in an inner conflict. On the one hand, he realised that "[...] a million a month, in China the heathen were dying without God" (Murray 1902:107). On the other hand, he could not pray for missionaries to go there because he feared that they may meet too many trials and conflicts, they may fall in danger, and their health may give in, so that they may lose even their faith or their lives. He felt guilty that he could not bring himself to pray for people to bring the gospel to China. "If you would pray for preachers", came the dreaded conviction, "they might have a chance of hearing the glorious gospel, but still they pass away without it, simply because you have not faith to claim for them heralds of the Cross" (Murray 1902:107). The inner conflict went on for weeks, so that he could hardly sleep. It affected his health. "I had no doubt that if I prayed for fellow-workers they would be given to me [...] Simply because I did not ask for them, the labourers did not come forward, did not go to China [...]" (Murray 1902:107–108). Eventually, he realised that, if God, in answer to prayer, did send out missionaries to China, he, Taylor, could leave the responsibility of keeping them safe with God (Murray 1902:109). Murray presented this event as an example of the spiritual life and prayer and concern for souls that are lost, that missionaries need to do their work (Murray 1902:110–111).

It is remarkable what Hudson's and Murray's view of the power of prayer was: "Simply because I did not ask for them, the labourers did not come forward, did not go to China [...]" (Murray 1902:107–108). True prayer is "proof that the worldly power is being overcome" (Murray 1902:31). I hope that the above quotations give the reader a good indication of Murray's

passionate view of the key to the missionary problem. We will now reflect on these views.

Murray and Pietism

In his book, *Die Relevansie van die kerk* (The relevance of the church), Willie Jonker has identified different ways in which Christians have tried to deal with the impact of the *Aufklärung* (the Enlightenment) and Renaissance that lead to modernism in Europe. The *Aufklärung* put critical reason in the centre, and this has led to spectacular developments in science and technology, that have caused many to question the truth and the role of faith. It also impacted theology, e.g., by way of biblical criticism (Jonker 2008:24) and criticism of religion as such (Jonker 2008:25). Pietism was one way in which Christians have responded to modernism.

Pietism located faith in the inner spiritual life of the believer in an effort to put it outside the reach of science. Especially since the 19th century, Pietism strongly resisted the spirit of the *Aufklärung*, the Enlightenment – but it was also a product of modernism, especially through the way in which Pietism emphasised subjectivism and individualism. Pietism is, like modernism, very interested in the human person, so that the pious individual is put in the centre. Everything centres around the personal appropriation of salvation to oneself by the individual (Jonker, 2008:35–6). Both these aspects of Pietism – putting the spiritual life of the believer outside the reach of science, and the central role of the individual – can clearly be seen in the life and work of Andrew Murray.

In 1983 he wrote that divine life can be worked out nicely by reason, “but the Hidden, the Incomprehensible One Himself, reason cannot touch”, and faith has to do with life in the presence of this Hidden, Incomprehensible God. Murray blamed theological rationalism and intellectualising for having a devastating impact on the church’s spiritual life. He insisted “especially on the truth that the organ by which God is to be known, is not the understanding but the heart; that only love can know God in truth” (De Villiers 2015:4, 11, 14–15).

The conflict with the “Rationalistic or ‘Liberal’ Movement” started with the Synod of 1862, and for forty years, Murray played a leading role in this

“momentous epoch in the history of the D. R. Church in South Africa” (Du Plessis 1919:208). The events are discussed in Du Plessis’ biography of Murray, chapter 10: “The struggle with the civil courts and the extrusion of liberalism” (1919:208–236). Modernism and liberalism were suppressed quite successfully in that period. While Du Plessis and Murray agreed that modernism was a danger for the church, they disagreed about the role of reason. In 1912 Du Plessis wrote in an article that the church should respond with sound rational thinking to the problem that the insights of modern science were causing the youth to leave the church. Murray responded that the actual need was powerful preaching inspired by prayer, on fire with power from above. Du Plessis replied that preaching that only touched emotions and did not penetrate to the reason and the conscience of the believer would only have a superficial impact (Brümmer 2013:160–162).

The second characteristic of Pietism that Jonker identified, the tendency to put the pious individual in the centre, also manifested strongly in Andrew Murray’s spirituality, as can be seen, for example, in his views about God’s total dependence on dedicated people and the indispensable role of the individual’s prayer – to the extent that it is felt that, if we do not spread the gospel and pray, God can do nothing to accomplish his goal with the world. Getting involved with the daily problems of life and the community is not prominent in *The key to the missionary problem*, but it was a central element in Murray’s life and in his spirituality: being lifted up into the heavenly places with the life in the Holy Spirit inspires us to get involved in the practical duties of life on earth, with its cares and duties. Faith must find expression in service. In line with this, the missionary movement that was deeply influenced by Murray, involved things like schools, hospitals, and agriculture (De Villiers 2015:15).

Murray’s impact on society was substantial: he played a leading role in founding Grey College and the Grey University College (which developed into the University of the Free State) while he was a minister in Bloemfontein (Du Plessis 1919:412) and the Huguenot College in Wellington (Du Plessis 1919:272 ff). Mrs Murray was also active in both church and society: the Huguenot College, the Mission Training Institute, and the Friedenheim School for women with an interest in missions owed much to her fostering

care. An industrial school for poor white girls³ was opened chiefly on her initiative (Du Plessis 1919:486).

Jonker gives due recognition to the positive impact of Pietism in preserving the relationship with God in direct personal experience as defence against modern rationalism, and the impact that this movement has had on society, also in its missionary and evangelical vigour and enthusiasm, in spite of the impression one gets that it withdraws from the world. As a result of its acceptance of certain elements of modernism, many modern people can relate to Pietism in a way. However, in some of its forms, Pietism presents an antithesis to the secularising impact of the Enlightenment that is more relevant than liberal theology, which has given in completely to modern rationalism (Jonker 2008:36–7). This has had an impact on the Evangelical movement that has followed later, which still has as strong pietistic character and often also a very powerful offensive against everything that is seen as liberal or ecumenical theology (Jonker,2010:36–7).

The problem of Pietism

Jonker shows that Pietism has its shortcomings, the most important being that its focus on the individual religious experience tends to bring about a massive reduction of the Christian message, as can be seen in its influence on Schleiermacher and Bultmann. It is so focused on the inner life of the believer that the believer is able to accommodate a wide variety of secular goals, views, and values more or less separately from his or her faith. The result is that Pietism has combined with a wide variety of movements. It all depends on what combination Pietism makes. These two characteristics – its reduction tendency and its ability to combine with diverse and even conflicting movements – means that, in itself, Pietism cannot answer the question of how to respond to the spirit of modernism (Jonker 2008:37) –

3 In *De Kerkbode* (13 January 1898:22–23) Andrew shared their vision for the “Meisjes Arbeid School”: To provide young girls, mainly from impoverished homes, with a Christian home (hostel), and basic education and skills training for three years, where after they should be able to earn their own living. The school opened later that year and in April 1899 *De Kerkbode* reported as follows: “Het nieuwe gebou voor De Meisjes Arbeidsschool is nu gereed, en Maandag konden 20 leerlinge die vroegere woning gehuisvest waren, overtrekken. Er is nu ruimte oor 40.” [Ed, IM].

and, we can add to the questions of our own context. It contains no inherent defence against various dubious and even very destructive movements.

In the history of the Dutch Reformed Church, the combination between Pietism and a rather solid Afrikaner nationalism was dominant during the whole period of the church's missionary movement of the 20th century. This explains the view that Murray was the prime shaper of the piety that came to characterise the Afrikaner people in the twentieth century and helped to confirm it as the church of the Afrikaner volk, which eventually unfolded into the ideology that produced apartheid.⁴ Today, one can observe the combination of Pietism and materialism in some circles. Nearly 80% of South Africans are Christians, according to the national census. However, a survey found that the public opinions of regular churchgoers in South Africa do not differ significantly from those who never come to church. "Could this account for the meteoric rise in HIV/AIDS, crime, corruption, moral decay, et al.?" (Siaki 2002:48; Siaki is from Africa Ministry Resources).

The division between Christian faith and the life of the community in the African context is illustrated by Brian McLaren's experience in 2004, when he attended a gathering of 55 young Christians, mostly from Rwanda and Burundi, after the violence in which about a million people died in a few weeks. One of the people at the conference said that he had attended church all his life, and he had only heard the message of future personal salvation from hell – no mention was ever made of the hatred and distrust between tribes, of the poverty, suffering, corruption, injustice, the violence, and killing that caused the country to fall apart – even during the weeks when the killings were going on (McLaren 2007:19). This experience of McLaren is an indication that the division between Christian faith and life in the community – including politics – is a problem in Africa as much as anywhere else.

4 <http://www.bu.edu/missiology/missionary-biography/l-m/murray-andrew-jr-1828-1917/>

The goal of mission

For Murray, the goal of mission was the winning of souls that, if they die without Christ, fall into the precipice of darkness. It was also to save people who are born to worship God, but do not know him, from worshipping self-made gods such as the image of an animal. There has been a strong movement to broaden this focus on the salvation of the individual soul.

Two theologians, both with the surname Wright, namely Christopher J.H. Wright, an evangelical biblical scholar from the USA and N.T. Wright, a New Testament scholar and bishop of the Anglican Church in Scotland, have recently, in different ways, criticised this type of understanding of the Christian faith and, without totally abandoning it, took it up as one element in a much bigger vision. Both of them understand the New Testament in the light of the Old Testament, and present strong biblical evidence for their arguments to broaden the focus of mission – from the emphasis on the *soul* to the *whole person*, and from the *individual* to the *whole of creation*, or in other words, from a spiritual vision to a vision that includes all aspects of creation (e.g. Christopher Wright 2010:357–365).

On the cover of one of his books, *The mission of God's people* (2010), Christopher J.H. Wright is presented as a biblical scholar who “chairs both the Lausanne Movement’s Theology Working Group and the Theological Resource Panel of Tearfund, a Christian relief and development charity.” Christopher Wright emphasises that God’s history with the whole of creation, from the beginning to the end, is what the Bible is all about. Personal salvation is not at the centre of this history, although the forgiveness of our personal sins is accommodated within this vision. The church often preaches a reduced gospel, but

[...] the Bible itself will correct our tendency to reduce the gospel to a solution to our individual sin problem and a swipe card for heaven’s door and replace that reductionist impression with a message that has to do with the cosmic reign of God in Christ that will ultimately eradicate all evil from God’s universe (and solve our individual sin problem too, of course) (Wright 2010:31).

N.T. Wright’s book, *The day the revolution began*, presents a different interpretation of the missionary problem: one in which Murray’s devotion

is part of the problem. The book consists of exegetical arguments against the reduction of the Christian message as “going to heaven”. It aims to convince the reader that we are called to serve the coming of the Kingdom in this life, which involves all of creation. With many Christians withdrawing their involvement with the affairs of the present world, and the world having banished God to a distant heaven, the world was now free “to move under its own steam and in its own chosen direction” (Wright 2016:358–360). The world did not remain free; however, it gave itself to the spell of destructive powers such as political power, money, and sex (Wright 2016:393–400). Wright presents countless arguments from the Bible to show that the reduced vision of the gospel, which focuses on the salvation of souls, leads us astray. However, he makes it clear that, as opposed as he is to the reduction of the gospel, he is not against personal evangelism: “Many contemporary mission organisations are well aware of the need to advance a holistic mission without losing the cutting edge of personal evangelism. My hope is that a fresh appraisal of what the cross achieved will undergird this new vision and give it biblical and theological depth and stability” (2016:361).

The missionary problem

I agree with Murray that the church, in general, has the potential to do much more than it is doing at the moment. However, the missionary problem in our context today must be formulated differently from the one that Murray presented. One of the significant changes that has taken place over the last century is that the comfortable relation between faith and modernism in Murray’s spirituality has become untenable. Consequently, we cannot take it for granted that hospitals, schools, and other vehicles of modern development are sufficient ways to render the service to society that was so important for Murray. Modern development itself, on a global scale, has become ecologically unsustainable, and it has failed to solve the problems of Africa. It has become part of the problem in significant ways. The solutions that are generally presented for the problems of Africa are mostly imported from the West (modernisation, development) or from communist countries (political revolution and liberation). Some initiatives originated in Africa too, such as Negritude, Ujamaa, African socialism, and African

Humanism. None of these diverse efforts succeeded in eradicating poverty. For large numbers of people in Africa, neither their Christian faith, nor modern development, nor political liberation, nor their traditional religion could meaningfully help to solve the problems of daily life.

Modern development has made it possible for the population of South Africa to increase tenfold from 5 972 757 in May 1911 (SESA 1973:1) to 59 457 154 on September 13, 2020 – but it did not succeed in providing the growing population with a decent quality of life. In 2013 a survey indicated that only 45.6% of the national population were food secure while 28.3% were at risk of hunger and 26.0% did experience hunger; 25.9% of children of 0–3 years of age were stunted (Human Sciences Research Council, 2013:18, 145–6). In 2020 more than 60% of children aged 0–17 was multidimensionally poor; that is, they were living in households where they were deprived of at least three out of seven dimensions of poverty (Health, Housing, Nutrition, Protection, Education, Information, Water and Sanitation).

While the Christian faith played a key role in the struggle for political freedom (e.g. Mandela 2010:53, 223–227), it often had little impact on African believers' struggle with the issues of their daily lives: generating an income, building stable families and communities, coping with sickness and other adversities. The churches have not achieved what traditional African religions have or had: being fully integrated with the respective traditional cultures and lifestyles. The Christian faith has not become yeast and salt as it is supposed to be.

The lack of attention to daily life has left the church weak: in every group, devote Christians allow their respective cultures rather than their faith to determine their lifestyles: rich and poor, modern, and African. And we do not have practices that enable us to express our Christian convictions in our lifestyles. It is a dilemma that the Christian churches have grown strongly in Africa while they have had little meaningful impact on the severe issues with which the continent struggles. Or to formulate it positively: how can the Christian faith become like yeast that works through all the dough and gives life a new structure in contemporary Africa? One of the missionary problems of today is: how can the church get involved in the daily struggles of communities without becoming, as Murray said (1902:29–30), like any

human institution? What would be a meaningful role for the church in this respect?

Nova's role

Murray maintained that the believer's life must accord with the believer's faith (Brümmer 2013:38). But how do we achieve this if our lives are shaped by the cultures of the diverse communities we live in rather than by our faith? This question has become much more complex and urgent than it was 100 years ago when the modern lifestyle was generally regarded as the ideal lifestyle for a Christian.

Lifestyle is becoming very central to mission. Christopher Wright maintains:

[...] ethics stands as the mid-term between election and mission. Ethics is the purpose of election and the basis of mission [...] the ethical quality of life of the people of God is the vital link between their calling and their mission. God's intention to bless the nations is inseparable from God's ethical demand on the people he has created to be the agent of that blessing. There is no biblical mission without biblical ethics (Wright 2010:93–94).

Biblical ethics includes the way that we relate to other people and to creation. Large sections of these relations are actualised in the daily practices that shape our lifestyle: the food we eat brings us in relation with a whole network of workers such as farmers and traders, and with the use of resources such as land and water and animals. All of this is relevant if we think of an ethical quality of life. Nova originated in the conviction that the relationship between faith and life and the search for meaningful and sustainable practices could not be solved in an emotional activist or a theoretical way or by merely implementing solutions that have worked elsewhere: one would have to engage in a pragmatic search for contextualised solutions together with those in the situation, people who know it from the inside, the members of families that are struggling and overwhelmed by their daily struggles. And modern science is essential in the process of developing such practices. Lack of dedication is one problem. A related problem is that we do not really know how to shape our

lifestyles differently in practice. Nova only focuses on a small part of the perceived problem: finding ways, with low income-households, to improve their quality of life. It aims to assist churches, industries, authorities, knowledge institutions who want to get involved in the daily lives of their communities to do so in a meaningful way. Communities have to deal with complex issues, such as care for vulnerable children, joblessness, and living an ecologically sustainable life, and, to do so in a meaningful way, they need well-researched strategies. The same can be said about the church's response to other complex issues, such as caring for the creation of God, ensuring justice for all, fighting hunger, and promoting food security.

The key to the missionary problem

For Murray, the solution to the missionary problem as he saw it, namely the low spiritual state of the church, is, as can be expected, entire dedication, prayer, revival, being filled with the Holy Spirit. Nova, on the other hand, was initiated to search for practical solutions for the daily lives of believers and communities. Two important questions need to be answered: how can South African Christians' faith find expression in a meaningful and sustainable lifestyle, and what practical and workable solutions can the church present to its members who cannot find work, who cannot care for their children, who fall back on the destructive utilisation of the ecology that they see in their own communities and that they emulate from what they see among more affluent Christians?

The agents of mission

Andrew Murray put a very high premium on the agency of the individual believer, to the extent that he states that Christ is "actually and entirely dependent" on the believers to reach his goal with the world. This is in line with the emphasis on the human agency of modern culture. I do not want to enter into a discussion about this approach. I feel more comfortable with a statement of NT Wright: "[...] redemption, when it comes, will come through the personal, powerful work of Israel's God himself" (Wright 2017:138). But that does not exclude the responsibility of the believer to respond to God's call to serve the coming of the Kingdom. However, the

role of the missionary as it was in the 20th-century missionary movement to which Murray contributed so much is changing. This missionary movement has dissipated. “The total number of DRC missionaries (ordained as well as lay, both foreign and home missionaries) shrunk from 1078 to 551 in four short years between 1973 and 1977; and the total number of ordained missionaries dipped from 308 to 192 during the same period” (Van der Watt in Saayman 2007:108). The rest of the movement collapsed afterwards. By the end of the 1980s, there was little left of what was once a strong movement. Today’s missionary problem and the goal of mission, as formulated above, again requires every believer to become involved, just as in Murray’s time, but now to attend, not only to our relationship with God in Christ, but also to our relationship to others and to God’s creation, as it finds expression in the practices that shape our daily lives.

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