

Part 4

REFORMING MISSION

Chapter 19: Margins of God's Kingdom and Boundaries of the Church

19.1 Introduction

Part 1 of this research gave an overview of the eNkumane area and its history. Special attention was given to continuous movement of people migrating over generations into and out of the area, their transient lives determined by the search for places to stay and opportunities to work. While for some their homesteads in the eNkumane area became nodes in social networks stretching out as far as Durban or Johannesburg, others live vulnerable lives marked by poverty and sickness.

Part 2 gave an overview of missionary projects in areas around eNkumane. This overview was used as a context for the description of the Reformed Mission Enkumane in Part 3.

In Part 4, in the final three chapters of this research, a more theoretical analysis is given of missionary motives and themes, and questions are asked about the prospects and challenges of the Reformed Mission Enkumane among established church congregations. Chapter 19 concentrates in general on the Margins of God's Kingdom as a focus of missionary work. It explores some Biblical themes which may function as a motivation for missionary work. Chapter 20 explores the development from missionary work into more egalitarian relationships between churches. In chapter 21, the concluding chapter, the findings of this research will be summarized.

19.2 Biblical Motives in the Reformed Mission

Initially, the proclamation of the Biblical message was seen by the Church Council in Kampen as the main task of its missionary project, but little reflection on this premise has been documented.¹ A central point for the Mission was the independence of the local church being responsible for its own missionary work (Acts 13:1-3). If there was a debate about the Biblical foundation for missionary work, it centred around the question whether the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20, Mark 16:15 and possibly also Luke 24:47) was still to be seen as a command for the church (par.16.1 and 16.13). According to the Church Council of Kampen, the Great Commission is indeed a command for the church today to do missionary work. The letters of instruction for its missionaries include explicit references to Matthew 28:19-20 ("Go, then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples: baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you") and to Acts

¹ A recent summary of Biblical Missionary motives discussed in the Netherlands Reformed Churches can be found in the 2009 Mission Policy of the *Nederlands Gereformeerde Zendingvereniging*, the organisation which co-ordinates the missionary projects of the Netherlands Reformed Churches in Bunschoten-Spakenburg, Den Haag and Leerdam. The Policy lists five Biblical motives for missionary work (RMA: 2009b#, p.3-6):

- a. the motive of obedience to the Great Commission (reference to Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 24:46-48; Acts 1:8);
- b. the motive of *missio Dei* ("Zending als werk van God"; reference to John 3:16-20; Romans 1:16 and 10:14);
- c. the soteriological motive of holistic care (reference to Luke 4:18-19; John 11:25; Revelations 21:4);
- d. the ecclesiological motive of the partnership of sister churches under one Lord (reference to Ephesians 1:22-23);
- e. the eschatological motive of humble hope (reference to Psalm 2; Matthew 4:17).

The difference between the motives b. and c. seems to be rather gradual in terms of spiritual versus physical.

1:8 (“When the Holy Spirit comes upon you, you will be filled with power, and you will be witnesses for me in Jerusalem, in all Judaea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth”).²

In reality, the Kampen missionaries had a limited range of action after their arrival in the Richmond District and they were surrounded by other church denominations. Extension of activities was usually not in response to the command to go to all peoples everywhere but a consequence of the missionaries following church members who moved to other areas.³ Shortly after its arrival, the Reformed Mission started to spend a considerable amount of time training evangelists and ministers, most of whom already had previous experiences with Christianity and assisting church members in Sunday services, prayer meetings, classes and home visits. Much time and effort was spent by the Reformed Mission on the centre of the church establishing a solid foundation by equipping its leaders and members.

As a result, tension arose between the attention given to the centre of the church and the attention given to its periphery. The focus of the missionary work tended to move away from an orientation on the ‘margins of God’s Kingdom’ to a training of church leaders, especially ministers.⁴ However, it can be maintained that the main characteristic of missionary work is its centrifugal movement from the centre of the church towards the margins of God’s Kingdom.

This movement can be described in at least three aspects: an eschatological, an ecclesiological, and a soteriological aspect.⁵

² RMA: 1990c#, p.1: The missionaries were sent by the Church Council of Kampen “... voor de prediking van het evangelie overeenkomstig de woorden van onze Here Jezus Christus tot Zijn apostelen, zoals we lezen in Mattheüs 28:19 en Handelingen 1:8.”

³ For example, around 1970, farm labourers removed from their farm in kwaBambinkunzi, moved to eMbumbulu, where they became the centre of a new Reformed congregation. Likewise, during the 1970's, farm labourers removed from the farm Greenhill, north of Richmond, moved to eNdalen, where they became the centre of a new Reformed congregation. And inhabitants of kwaNompofane, who left their area during the violence in the early 1990's, formed the centre of a new congregation in eMlazi.

⁴ The term ‘margins of God’s Kingdom’ refers to the presence of ‘others’ in God’s special attention for ‘some’. For example, in the stories of God calling Abraham and Jacob, His concern for the nations is explicitly implied: “You will be a blessing... through you I will bless all the nations” (Genesis 12:3); “through you and your descendants I will bless all the nations” (Genesis 28:14). Furthermore, the prophecies of Amos (1-2) and Isaiah (21-25) against the nations imply God’s relationship with them and the possibility to take them to account although they seem to be outside the centre of God’s direct attention. The nations are accused of breaking God’s law and breaking His covenant: “The people have defiled the earth by breaking God’s laws and by violating the covenant he made to last forever. So God has pronounced a curse on the earth. The people are paying for what they have done” (Isaiah 24:5-6). Also, for example, God’s intervention in the crisis of the exile has immediate implications for the nations: “He will save His people and all the world will see it... many nations will marvel at him and kings will be speechless with amazement. They will see and understand something they had never seen before” (Isaiah 21:10, 15). According to G. von Rad (1968, p.288): “Die Gottesknechtlieder sprechen von einer Bedeutung des Knechts, die weit über Israel hinausgeht; sie konfrontieren ihn mit dem Universum der Völker.”

⁵ K. Livingstone, 1990. The three aspects are present in the letter of instruction by the Church Council of Kampen for its missionaries (RMA: 1990c#): eschatology: “Daar het de wil van de HERE is, dat dit getuigenis van Jezus Christus zal uitgaan tot de einden der aarde, opdat de kerk des HEREN zal worden geplant, Gods uitverkorenen zullen worden vergaderd en de volkomenheid van Gods Rijk kome, waarin Hij alles zal zijn in allen - 1 Cor.15:28”; ecclesiology: “ook wij, die vroeger heidenen waren zonder Christus. Zonder hoop en zonder God in de wereld - dichtbij gekomen zijn door het bloed van Christus en medeburgers der heiligen en huisgenoten Gods geworden zijn - Ephesians 2:12,13,19”; soteriology: “hen die de Vader tot Christus zal trekken.” The letters do not refer to the

19.3 Mission and the Aim of History

Several Bible texts suggest that God's work cannot merely be defined as maintenance. His involvement with the world has a purpose. His history is evolving towards a pre-planned end. In Ephesians 1:9-10, it is mentioned that God has a secret plan to unite His whole creation under Jesus Christ: "This plan, which God will complete when the time is right, is to bring all creation together, everything in heaven and on earth, with Christ as head." Paul formulates the final stage of the plan as follows in 1 Corinthians 15:28: "When all things have been placed under Christ's rule, then he himself, the Son, will place himself under God, who placed all things under him; and God will rule completely over all."

In other words, several Bible texts suggest that God is not satisfied with the stabilisation of His Kingdom somewhere on earth. He wants to extend it in order that it ultimately includes His whole creation. In the Gospel according to Matthew, the expansion of God's Kingdom is described in terms of the incorporation of the nations who have been living so far in the margins of his Kingdom. According to Matthew, Israel is a conduit, a starting point for God's involvement with the whole world and, accordingly in Matthew, special attention is given to the people outside Israel. It is the 'people from the east' who are the first ones to honour the child Jesus (Matthew 2). The child counted several women from the nations among his ancestors (Matthew 1:3-5) and found refuge in Egypt, while the then king of Jerusalem, Herod, resembled the Old Testament king of Egypt, Pharaoh.⁶ In Matthew, the prophecy by Isaiah (60:3-5) is

anticipated relationship between the missionaries and the local population.

Other Biblical motives for missionary work are mentioned by, for example, J. Bavinck (1954, p.25f), who discerns in the Old Testament a universalistic motive (the whole world belongs to God: Genesis 1:10, Deuteronomy 4:39), a doxological motive (the whole world must praise God: Psalm 24, 33 and 47:1; Jeremiah 10:10), and a soteriological / eschatological motive (Isaiah 2:2-3; Zachariah 8:23; Joel 2:28). In the New Testament, he points at a universalistic motive (Luke 2:32; Matthew 2:1-12), the motive of being sent (John 20:21), an eschatological motive (Acts 2, referring to Joel 2), and a reconciliation motive (2 Corinthians 5).

J. Verkuyl (1981, p.124), more or less following J. Bavinck, points out four missionary motives in the Old Testament: an universalistic (eschatological) motive, a soteriological motive, a missionary (witness) motive, and an antagonistic (doxological) motive, while in the New Testament, he points at the motive of command.

D.J. Bosch (1991, p.172-178), concentrating on the letters of Paul, discerns five missionary motives: an ecclesiological motive, mission to the Jews, God's immanent triumph, transformation of society and the motive of mission in weakness.

The seemingly arbitrary lists of Biblical motives for missionary work may be summarized with the aid of the main features of the letters of Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles (Galatians 11.13). According to J.C. Beker (1980, p.351), "Paul's theological thinking is characterized by two fundamental features: the contingent particularity of his hermeneutic and his sure grasp of the coherent centre of the gospel. The latter focuses on Christ as the proleptic fulfilment of the triumph of God, that is, the redemption of the created order, whereas the former manifests itself in the occasional and opportune character of the letters." The church, united by Christ under his reign of reconciliation (Romans 8:1-16), moves towards God's final triumph (Romans 8:17-39), which already becomes manifest in Christ's reign. The ecclesiological, soteriological and eschatological aspects of this process (Romans 8:30: set apart, put right and share in His glory) become evident, when the church moves beyond its original centre (in Paul's days: the Jews) and becomes manifest in its margins (in Paul's days: the Gentiles).

⁶ Compare Exodus 1:22 with Matthew 2: 16.

actualized in that, at the end of times, the nations will come together in Jerusalem.⁷ Accordingly, Matthew gives full attention to, for example, a Roman officer's belief in Jesus, culminating in Jesus' prophecy that the people from far will take the central position in God's Kingdom (Matthew 8:5-13). It is Matthew who refers to 'Galilee of the nations' and to Jesus' care for people in Syria and Decapolis (Matthew 4:15, 23-25). It was Pilate's wife who calls Jesus 'just' and again a Roman officer who said about Jesus: "He really was God's son" (Matthew 27:19, 54), while the Jewish authorities asked for his death. The central demand in Matthew is to do God's will, to do His Justice (Matthew 5:20; 6:33; 7:21). The church is not merely asked to preach a perfect life, but to be perfect itself (Matthew 5:48). This includes an active involvement with the world (Matthew 28:19-20).

In a similar way, Paul saw himself as a servant of Christ committed to the Gospel with the task to reach out to the nations (Romans 15:16). For Paul, the secret truth behind the salvation of the nations is that their salvation is the final step towards the salvation of Israel (Romans 11:25-36).⁸ For God's people, God's reconciliation with the world is the final step towards their resurrection from death (Romans 11:15). God's focus on the margins of his Kingdom is a sign that the present existence is coming to an end. For both Matthew and Paul, these margins are the nations, the non-Israelites. They take the lead in the final phase of history which starts for Jews and Gentiles alike at the cross (1 Corinthians 1:23-31).

Similarly, in the Gospel according to Luke, Jesus' birth inaugurates the final era in history: God's focus turns to the margins of His Kingdom. Yet, for Luke, these margins are not so much the non-Israelites, as they are the poor, the prisoners, the blind, and the oppressed (Luke 4:18-21). Luke actualizes the prophecy by Ezekiel (34:16): "I will look for those who are lost, bring back those that wander off, bandage those that are hurt, and heal those that are sick; but those who are fat and strong I will destroy, because I am a shepherd who does what is right." In this Gospel, the people marginalized in society take the lead in God's Kingdom. It is not the 'people from the east', but the shepherds who are the first ones to honour the child Jesus and who spread the Gospel about the new born Saviour (Luke 2). In his teachings, Jesus holds up the people on the margin of the society as examples, such as a Samaritan (Luke 10), a run-away youth (Luke 15) and a tax collector (Luke 18). The end of time is marked by the coming of the Holy Spirit over all people, irrespective of their position in society (Acts 2). Repentance and forgiveness of sins must be preached to all people, beginning in Jerusalem (Luke 24:47).

19.4 Mission and the New Community

Through God's attention to the outsiders, the margins of his Kingdom, a new community is established (John 10:16). Paul calls the new community 'the unity of Christ' (1 Corinthians

⁷ The notion of the nations being incorporated into God's people is also found in the book of the prophet Zechariah, e.g. 2:1-5; 8:18-23; 9:5-8.

⁸ L. Newbigin (1992, p.125): "In Romans 9-11... Paul gives his most fully developed theology of mission, and here the centre of the picture is the eschatological event in which the fulness of the Gentiles will have been gathered in and all Israel will be saved."

1:9) or ‘the body of Christ’ (Romans 12:5; 1 Corinthians 12:12).⁹ In this community all people may take part: “Hurry out to the streets and alleys of the town and bring the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame... so that my house will be full” (Luke 14:21, 23). The new community is principally different from the world, but still fully in the world. According to John (15:19), the world will hate this new community, so it will become a community of witnesses, literally: ‘martyrs’ (John 15:27).¹⁰ The new community is characterized as protected by God and based on unity and mutual love (John 17:9-11; 1 John 2:7-17). Its task is not to stabilize itself but to focus on and move into the world (John 17:18-21; 20:21). The community is a God-made nation glorifying Him in mutual love (1 Peter 1:22-23; 2:9-10). It reflects and is transparent to God’s being (John 17:11).¹¹

19.5 Mission and Reconciliation

Another aspect of missionary work is reconciliation. In God’s plan, there is no place for hate or revenge (Luke 9:51-56). The crucial difference brought about by Jesus’ death is that people no longer live for themselves but for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:14-15). They have their own experience of Christ and do not need other people to be mediators between them and Jesus (John 4:42). Yet, they should not isolate themselves, not even from people thought to be unclean or dangerous (Acts 10:9-17, 34-35). In the newly found community, it is not only the outsiders who change. In Acts 10-11, the person affected most in the contact between Peter and the Roman officer, is Peter (Acts 11:17-18).¹² The church is not merely asked to preach reconciliation. It has to live it (1 Corinthians 5:16-21), and it will be taken to account if it fails (Galatians 2:11-14). In the process of being saved, people are not only freed from human-made burdens which separate them from God, they also cross human-made borders which separate people.

19.6 Living on the Margins

To understand the Great Commission as a command by Jesus to the church (implicated in His disciples), raises questions about the relationships between the three entities involved: Jesus; the church and the disciples; all nations. The question is to what extent the church is the object or the agent of the command, in other words, whether the church is being sent, or whether it is implored to send others. The Free Reformed Church of Kampen understood the Great

⁹ ‘Unity is the translation of *κοινωνία* in 1 Corinthians 1:9; ‘body’ is the translation of *σῶμα* in Romans 12:5 and 1 Corinthians 12:12.

¹⁰ The verb *μαρτυρεῖν* is frequently used in the Gospel of John. Its meaning ‘to witness’ carries the connotation of ‘standing for the truth even in the face of death’ (John 18:37), “im Sprachgebr[auch] der Märtyrerkirche Zeugnis ablegen, (Blut)zeuge sein, das Martyrdum erleiden... Auch 1Ti[motheus] 6:13 gehört wohl hierher” (W. Bauer, 1988, p.999).

¹¹ S. de Cruchy (2008, p.7): “Mission is not about making connections. We are already connected. Mission is about transforming that connectedness so that it resonates with the connectedness within the trinity, made known to us in the incarnation. Everyone is sent everywhere, within His movement to bear witness to other ways of being connected.”

¹² L. Newbigin: “Mission will not only be a matter of preaching and teaching but also of learning.”

Commission to imply that the church is both an object and an agent of the command to proclaim the Gospel.¹³ The church is sent and, at the same time, it functions as sender on authority of Jesus. In other words: the church is sent to send. Accordingly, the Free Reformed Church of Kampen sent missionaries, to proclaim the Gospel to people who had not yet heard about it. It was left to the missionaries to identify those people, who they were and where they lived.

Alternatively, the church as part of the nations may be seen in the first place as the object of the Great Commission, as the entity being sent.¹⁴ From this point of view, the church is not sent to send a message. The message is conveyed by living, and forming relationships, with those who live on the margin of God's Kingdom. In this sense, mission becomes the process in which the church moves beyond its own boundaries. God's involvement with the church and via the church with the world serves a purpose for the whole of creation. To be part of this process includes an orientation on the margins of His Kingdom, a new unity based on love and an ongoing process of reconciliation.¹⁵ It may be true that in the past, missionaries stressed the gain and the risk of accepting or rejecting their message to the receivers. The gain would be life (John 10:10). The risk would be disaster (2 Peter 3:12). Yet, the trap for the missionaries is the assumption that they are on the giving side, while 'the world' stands on the receiving side and that the missionaries use this dichotomy as a legitimization for their activities. For example, to read Acts 16:9 ("Come over and help us") as an encouragement for paternalistic love, is a misinterpretation of the story about giving up one's personal plans, giving up one's control over the situation (Acts 16:7).

If mission is the process in which the church moves beyond its own boundaries and involves itself with the margins of God's Kingdom, if the church is being sent itself, just as Jesus was sent (John 20:21), then it will need the same serving and humbling attitude as Jesus had (Philippians 2:1-11). It will have to re-evaluate its position on a continuous basis in order to maintain a servant-like attitude for the spreading of God's Kingdom. The danger for the church is that, in the course of its existence, it distances itself from the margins of God's Kingdom and starts to think in terms of 'we' and 'them', instead of realising that it is called to be part of the

¹³ B. Wielenga (1998, p.243-282) redefines the terms *missio Dei* and *missio ecclesiae* within the context of God's Covenant. Defining *missio ecclesiae* as a response of the church on the *missio Dei*, he uses the term *missio ecclesiae* to explain the active missionary task of the church as object and agent. In this view the church is sent to deliver a message: "In deze zin kan het getuigenis van Gods ingrijpen in de geschiedenis [*missio Dei*] de kern genoemd worden van zending als *missio ecclesiae*" (idem, p.251).

¹⁴ J.H. Bavinck (1954, p.13): "De kerk is gezonden." Idem (p.63): "Zending is niet een gaan op uitnodiging, maar het is een gaan op bevel van Hem, die ons zond. We worden gestuwd, niet getrokken."

¹⁵ The focus of the church on the margins of the Kingdom implicates that the margins become part of the centre of the church. For example in a socially engaged approach, this means that the poor become part of the centre: "[Die 1981 Weltmissionskonferenz in] Melbourne ist in der Frage nach der Rolle der Armen in Kirche und Mission einen Schritt weiter gekommen, insofern die Konferenz in den Armen die vorrangigen Träger der Mission Gottes erkannte und dies christologisch begründete" (L. Bauerochse, 1996, p.129). Similarly, F. Chikane (1988, p.6), writing from the perspective of the struggle against Apartheid, writes: "The church... must reject the dominant ideology of the powerful and take the side of the cross. This... will mean that it will have to take the side of the weak, poor and powerless in the world."

margins.¹⁶ Its message is not primarily a verbal but a relational one. Its primary message is the relations it establishes.

In the course of the 20th century, 'mission' was increasingly understood as *missio Dei* (par.3.15; 14.1). The formula *missio Dei*, derived from especially the Gospel of John, emphasizes that mission is not to be understood as the self-expansion of the church, but as the participation of the church in God's involvement with the world. The central process leading to God's Kingdom is constituted by the Father sending the Son into this world, by the Father and the Son sending the Holy Spirit, and subsequently the church being sent into the world.¹⁷

In practice, however, the applicability of the term *missio Dei* is not very clear. A first disadvantage of the term *missio Dei* is that it obscures the difference between 'church' and 'mission'. In a more 'ecumenical' tradition the term *missio Dei* is used to emphasize God's involvement with the 'world'. God's main concern is thought to be the 'world' and every aspect of His involvement with the 'world' can be called 'mission'. In this approach, there is hardly any identity left for the 'church' outside the involvement with the 'world'. In a more 'evangelical' tradition, the term *missio Dei* is used to emphasize God's urge to establish the 'church' in the 'world'. God's main concern is thought to be the 'church' and the term 'mission' is thought to be the word for God's realisation of His 'church' in the 'world'. In this approach, the possibility that God is involved with the world outside the 'church' is hardly considered and 'mission' tends to become the term for the relationship between overseas churches. In both application of the term *missio Dei*, there is little difference left between 'mission' and 'church'.¹⁸

A second practical disadvantage of the term *missio Dei* is that it suggests unity and an all-enfolding plan of God without expressing the diversity in the human struggles for meaning and direction. A definition of 'mission' should take the tension between unity and diversity into account, for example, by stating that "Mission is the effort to localize and actualize the promise that God is constructing one heaven and earth for a diverse and pluriform humanity."¹⁹ Both the engagement with human suffering in its different forms and the hope for final redemption should be part of 'mission' authorized by Christ. God uses the church to reach out to the world.

¹⁶ B. Obama (1995, p.284) refers to one of the guiding principles of Trinity, Chicago, called 'A disavowal of the pursuit of Middleclassness', warning church members against the danger of becoming socially upwardly mobile, "the psychological entrapment of Black 'middleclassness' that hypnotizes the successful brother or sister into believing they are better than the rest and teaches them to think in terms of 'we' and 'them'." Reflecting on 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, a similar warning is given by Mission and Public Affairs (2004, p.87-88): "The gospel can only be proclaimed in a culture, not at a culture." L. Newbiggin (1989, p.119): "The church is not so much the agent of the mission as the locus of the mission."

¹⁷ Reference to e.g. John 5:36; 14:26; 15:26; 20:21; Act 1:8.

¹⁸ L.A. Hoedemaker (1988, p.173): "De formule *missio Dei* markeert een overgang naar een nieuwe discussie, naar een poging om zending en kerk in een nieuwe theologische samenhang bij elkaar te krijgen. Maar het is te open naar alle kanten om vruchtbaar te kunnen zijn... Aan de ene ['oecumenische'] kant verdampt de continuïteit met zendingsbeweging, doordat alles wat God in de wereld doet zending genoemd wordt - de georganiseerde 'zending' blijft dan een merkwaardige rest te midden van bemoeienis met diakonaat, ontwikkeling, bevrijding, dialoog - en aan de andere ['evangelische'] kant wordt het eigen [kerkelijk] gehalte van zending zozeer beschermd tegen de implicaties van de nieuwere wereldervaring(en), dat de hele integratieproblematiek [van kerk en zending] eigenlijk blijft liggen."

¹⁹ B. Hoedemaker, 2000, p.178.