

C HAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

7.1 MISSIONAL ECCLESIOLOGY AND AN EMERGING THEOLOGICAL PARADIGM

The investigation into the contribution of μαρτυρία in the Gospel of John guided us to the insight that *an emerging, missional ecclesiology at its core should be a narrative process*. Let us now attempt to conclude the discussion on the developing of such an ecclesiology as possible theological theory for the church's ministry in our day and age.

7.1.1 At its core, the community of believers finds its identity in the revelation of God's identity

God has made himself known as a Father, who created this world and loves this world. The purpose of Him reaching out to humankind is to invite them into his

family. God is doing this by embarking on a mission to bring light into the darkness that engulfed this world. This darkness is the result of humanity's sinful rejection of God. God's mission entails Him coming to earth as a person who can communicate his loving intention to humankind. In the Prologue to the Gospel, this person is introduced to us as Jesus.

Throughout the Gospel, Jesus teaches that faith is to accept his true identity and the purpose for which He came to earth and to put ultimate trust for life and death in Him. His own testimony was that the things He does and says are mere metaphors to drive home the fact that faith is acquired by a personal relationship with Him. If you don't know Him, you won't believe Him and then you don't have eternal life.

7.1.2 Faith Communities share in the testimony of the witnesses to Jesus

John's Gospel presented several witnesses to the identity of Jesus, most notably that of John the Baptist. It is somewhat unclear why the Baptist is introduced as a central figure in all the Gospels, apart from the fact that he served as a bridge between Jewish theology on the Messiah and that He had a ministry similar to Jesus, but without the miracles.

Yet, in John's Gospel, he is introduced from the onset as one of the most important bearers of knowledge about Jesus. He came to testify that Jesus indeed is sent by God, and that Jesus will take away the sins of the world, and that Jesus is to be worshiped because He is God.

Although The Baptist is the only person in whose mouth the word *μαρτυρία* is explicitly laid, the Gospel shows us a host of witnesses who not only support his testimony, but also elaborate on it: the disciples witnessing his first miracle; Nicodemus through his lack of understanding; the woman at the well in Sychar; the royal official and his family; the unbelief of the seriously ill man who got healed; the multitude receiving the miraculously multiplied food; the blind man who did believe; Lazarus who was raised from the grave; the soldier who slapped Jesus due to his supposed impertinence towards the high priest; Thomas the disciple who couldn't believe it before he saw it; and, finally, the writers of the Gospel themselves.

The golden thread weaving through these witnesses is the use of the word group, *μαρτυρία*, and how John's Gospel teaches its readers that these witnesses can only attest to events that they have seen and been part of, thus rendering it authentic. Thus, faith is communicated through people who, because they know Jesus, can testify to his reality and the necessity of his mission. This, in essence, means that testimony is communication. Nothing the church does have any meaning unless it is accompanied by the message of who Jesus is.

Nothing the church community says will have any testimonial value unless it is accompanied by the authenticating relationship to Jesus demonstrated by the lives of the witnesses.

7.1.3 Faith communities share in the attitude of Jesus

The absence of the use of the μαρτυρία lexeme in the telling of John's ministry to his disciples, is striking. It appears only in John 15:18-16:4. Yet this underscores the fact that the church's testimony is in fact rooted in the sharing of Jesus' identity. That is why The Paraclete is introduced to be present in the lives of Jesus' followers. On the one hand, His mission is to strengthen their faith in the midst of hardship and persecution.

On the other hand, He serves as witness to Jesus, since He was with Jesus from the very beginning of time. And the disciples also share in this witness, as they were with Jesus from the very beginning of his mission on earth. John's Gospel elaborates on this unity by first of all showing how Jesus' followers can be nothing less than what Jesus was.

Their lives should be inundated with the exact same value system of love and sacrifice as that of Jesus. Their behaviour towards each other and people outside the community of believers should show the same loving care as Jesus showed.

And, finally, the unity of their communion with each other is in essence a mirror of the unity between Father and Son.

7.1.4 The church has no message if she does not accept the reality of Jesus' glorification

In the final part of John's Gospel, the proof of Jesus' Divine identity is given. Throughout the Gospel, Jesus staked his godly claim on the fact that He will be able to show He is indeed God, and that will be done by dying and conquering the grave. In the mind of the Gospel, this final act of humiliation is the exact opposite of its intended purpose. While the Jewish adversaries thought they would get rid of Jesus by killing Him, He presented it as the high point of his self-revelation as God.

That is why, in the telling of the Passion story, John's Gospel used the μαρτυρία-lexeme twice – initially to conclude the thread of teaching on how one should testify (by presenting the challenge to testify on Jesus' lies to the aggressive soldier in the high priest's house, and secondly to attest to the fact that Jesus indeed is quite dead.

Why, then, did John not use this word to also tell of Jesus' resurrection? As the focus with one's testimony is on not seeing and believing but on knowing and believing, John utilised the story of doubting Thomas as demonstration of the communication

of faith. The church will have no other claim than that which is based on the testimony of those who actually were there. And if they cannot believe, their testimony is absolutely fruitless.

Thus it is simple: If we fail to accept the resurrection, like Thomas, we fail to accept the testimony leading up to this event. And then nobody will believe our ongoing testimony either. We have absolutely nothing but the conviction of the primary witnesses to Jesus mission, who believed in Jesus' bodily resurrection. This conviction provides the ongoing energy the church needs to live in a relationship with Jesus: After all, the testimony of the witnesses is that He is alive.

7.2 DID THIS STUDY REACH ITS INTENDED RESEARCH PURPOSE?

The study aimed to achieve better understanding into the changing cultural paradigm of which the contemporary church forms part of. The stated premise was that an investigation into the word-group pertaining to testimony, in the Gospel of John, will be able to contribute to the developing of an emerging, missional ecclesiology.

As such, the study conclusively showed the wider, non-legal use of this word-group in John's Gospel. It also demonstrated John's Gospel's instructive aim by

interspersing the word-group into the narrative with the pertinent motive to equip its readers to their own better testimony of the identity and ministry of Jesus Christ.

The study wanted to contribute to the theological epistemology through the development of a theological theory of a missional ecclesiology. The hermeneutical investigation greatly aided in the conversation of a missional ecclesiology. In conclusion, we should explore three ecclesiological paradigm shifts necessary to continue our testimony to Christ into a changing culture.

7.2.1 A shift from exposition to narrative

Wright (2009:25) calls for this shift in reaction to current culture's *"failure to read Scripture for all it's worth."* McKnight (2008:22-25) uses the metaphor of a blue parakeet appearing between wild sparrows and causing confusion to explain how our inadequate reading of the Bible leads us down a different path as the one intended by Scripture writers. The relevance of this paradigm shift lies in the way all theology is practiced. It is necessary to liberate the reading of the Bible from a simplistic cause-and-effect approach to personal piety, or a naive realism and positivism (Deist 1994:363).

By reading the books of the Bible according to their literary genre, for example, or by understanding the social world of the ancient mid-East, or by incorporating contemporary psychological, sociological and other human science perspectives into

theological deliberation, or finally to accept Scripture's authority as faith document and not as scientific metatheory, will enable the contemporary faith community to engage its immediate environment with authentically humble credibility. This shift then has the potential to contribute to the conceptual thinking of people reading the Bible.

The context, in which this must happen, is that of engaging in narrative. Martoia (2008:140) states this excellently:

... Our story will change when it is laid inside the larger, grander, more compelling and completing story of God ... A fuller understanding of the story will change the conversation with those interested in starting the journey ... When we invite people to come to Jesus through a transaction of buying into certain expositions and reciting a prayer, the mechanical feel of such an exchange makes it hard to feel as though we are entering into a relationship.

7.2.2 A shift from cognitive teaching to holistic faith formation

Starting with the pastors of a congregation, this shift moves the focus of congregational ministry away from understanding to life formation. As the pastor uses his/her training to equip and deploy God's people in ministry (Ogden 1990:97), the congregation moves from listening to messages of edification to intentionally practicing life skills aimed at strengthening their relationship with Christ.

Scazzero (2003:19) stated: *“Unless we integrate emotional maturity with a focus on loving well into our discipleship, we are in danger of missing God’s point completely – love.”*

Being disciples of Jesus, our goal should be to learn to be like him (Willard 2006:24-30). This is a process starting with knowledge, continuing through changing attitudes and ending with changed behavioural patterns. This process can be described by utilising the metaphor of a triangle:

- One side of the triangle is the faithful acceptance of everyday problems. Through faithful endurance of life’s trials, the community of believers reaches an assurance of the fullness of heaven’s rule in their lives.
- The second side of this triangle is the interaction with God’s Spirit in and around us. The presence of the Paraclete can always be recognized by the way He moves the Gospel community toward what Jesus would be and do.
- The third side of this triangle is found in the intentional practice of spiritual disciplines. This almost mechanistic effort enables the members of the believing community to engage in practical faith formation by introducing into their daily routines spiritually oriented behaviours to emulate the life of Christ in their own.

7.2.3 A shift from designated offices to missional leaders

In the context of the unity of the church and her dependence on Christ, the paradigm shift that is as necessary today as it was twenty years ago, is the shift from institution to organism. Whereas “church” still refers to a building and not to a group of individuals called to carry the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world, the concept of people brought together in Christ by God as a Gospel community invites visions of community, of the missional nature of this community, of good news to the poor (Hamman 2005:13).

This shift requires missional leadership. A leader is someone in whom the future shines through in support of the present in spite of the past, making it an art (Sweet 2004:11). Our understanding of leadership needs to be turned upside down as we have to learn to listen more than to what we see.

Missional leadership, then, is the process where leaders lead from spiritual discernment by daily engaging in faith forming practices, listening and communicating with each other and the members of the community in the context of the Biblical narrative, confirming an atmosphere of risk, is sold out to the challenges of a missional era and have the competencies necessary to lead teams (Keifert 2006:96).

Smit (2007:600-601) identified the following shifts in the discourse on the paradigms of leadership:

- Leadership is more about behaviour that can be acquired than natural instincts.
- Ecclesial leadership differs qualitatively from organisational leadership, necessitating a theological-ecclesiological base theory first.
- Leadership in the church must increasingly focus on calling, as this is derived from the church's dependence on the *missio Dei*.
- Church leadership functions in a time of transition and should thus be focused.
- A necessary question in the ecclesial leadership discourse involves the matter of spiritual gifts and its functioning in the church.
- The matter of organisational management needs to be addressed by the church, not on an ad hoc basis, but through interdisciplinary networking with management sciences.
- Finally, church leaders need to be personally developed through coaching and mentoring.

7.3 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF THIS RESEARCH

The following suggestions can be made:

- The less-than-frequent use of the μαρτυρία-lexeme in John 13-20 is rather striking. It is therefore suggested that further investigation be conducted in this part of the narrative, specifically with a view of broadening the understanding of John's Gospel's implicit ecclesiology.
- The Johannine epistles continue the frequent use of the μαρτυρία-lexeme. Thus it is suggested that a similar study be undertaken into the use of this lexeme as well as its interrelation with the Gospel of John, and possibly also John's Revelation, since these all form part of the *corpus Ioannum*.
- It is finally suggested that the praxis be further investigated in view of the ecclesiological markers that were developed in this study.
- If Christ is standing at the foundational core of an emerging, missional ecclesiology and this is demonstrated through a life of worship, more research is necessary in the forms of public expressions this life of worship should create.

7.4 RETURNING TO THE PARABLE OF THE OTTERS

To conclude this study, I want to return to the parable about change with which we started the conversation. It was originally penned by John and Linda Friel (1990:117-120) as an aid in their practice of helping people psychologically grow from co-dependency. Yet, taken from this original context, this parable serves as a metaphor for the current future the church of Christ is facing: Everything around is different; we can go on as always, trying to provide old answers to new problems, becoming obsessed with survival. Or we can learn to adapt, learning to relax about the incomprehensibilities and in the process acquire new skills from the answers we get because we started asking different questions at the new problems we are facing.

The Otters serve as a reminder that we, the church, too, could be extinct soon, replaced by another species, and left to the memory of fading history.