



EQUILIBRIUM BETWEEN ENGAGING IN PRACTICAL MISSIOLOGY AND SCHOLARLY ACADEMIC MISSIOLOGY: A DRIVING FORCE TO ATTAIN MISSIO DEI

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ABSTRACT: *There is no difference between the terms Mission and Missiology, as far as some are concerned, whereas to others, these terms have different meanings. The term "Missiology" is commonly used among the academia but not commonly used among the non-academic persons who are actively involved in missions. The latter is more conversant with the term 'mission' and "missionary". Some people are pure "Academic Missiologists" and "Non-Academic Missiologists", and fortunately there are several field missionaries today who double as Academic Missiologists. There is a perceived gap between the missiologists and the field missionaries. This paper is an extensive literature research on whether missiology is purely an Academic Discipline with no space for "non-academic missiologists" and whether there could be an equilibrium between engaging in practical missiology and scholarly academic Missiology as a driving force to attain missio Dei. Findings by the writer show that practical missiologists and scholarly academic Missiologists, complement each other and have the same thing at stake. They both want to see the work of mission carried forward. The study concludes with some recommendations to both practical missiologists and scholarly academic missiologists.*

KEYWORDS: Academic Missiologists, missio Dei, Mission, Missions and Missiology, Non-Academic Missiologists.



INTRODUCTION

“Missiology Summit 2024 is a unique opportunity to dive deep into the study, analysis, and application of Missiology in today's ever-changing world”. This was the key statement inviting mission practitioners to a proposed summit. The convener began to receive the following responses: why not “missions’ summit” instead of “missiology summit”. If it is a missiology summit, then it may appear it is only for academicians (missiologists). But if it is a missions’ summit then it is generally for both missiologists, local missionaries, mission stakeholders, churches, and organisations. Then came suggested themes:

1. The Place of Scholarship on The Accomplishment of The Great Commission: Nexus for A Viable Partnership between Academic Missiologists and Field Mission Practitioners in Today’s Contemporary Missional Practice.
2. Finding equilibrium between engaging in practical Missiology and scholarly academic Missiology: a driving force to attain *missio Dei*.

Then, someone said during the discussion “Looking at the suggested themes, “Missiology Summit” is preferred. The term “Missiology” is not meant to be a sole right for academia. This is one of the issues that this Summit wants to address.” Good said another mission practitioner but his fear is “I just imagine how the theme will sound to non-academic persons actively involved in missions. Will they feel inclusive or exclusive? Obviously, there is a gap between the missiologists and the field missionaries. The writer had an interaction with a field missionary in an African country. The moment he heard that the writer was a missiologist, he began to withdraw from him. The writer perceived he felt inferior or superior to him. He said, “Mission work is purely practical and not theory.” The missionary said the reality of the work is seen when you come down to the field”. There are people who are pure “Academic Missiologists” and “Non-Academic Missiologists”, depending on one’s definition of missiology. And there are several field missionaries today who double as Academic Missiologists. Yes, there exist inferiority and superiority complexes among the purely field missionaries who never had a degree in any discipline before becoming missionaries and those who are “Armchair-Missiologists.” Who is a Missiologist? Someone with a degree in Intercultural Studies, Missions, and related courses? Or a graduate (or non-graduate) who went through the regular basic school of mission training where the emphasis is not on certification but on discipleship and ability to make disciples among the nations? Is the statement “All missiologists are missionaries but not all missionaries are missiologists” true? Who is actually, a missionary? Is mission work a professional vocation or career like Engineering, Law, etc that needs a professional degree or licence to practice? This paper is an extensive literature research on whether missiology is purely an Academic Discipline with no space for “non-academic missiologists” and whether there could be an equilibrium between engaging in practical missiology and scholarly academic Missiology as a driving force to attain *missio Dei*.

Mission, Missions, and Missiology

Mission refers to *Mission Dei* (God’s mission); that is, God's self-revelation as the one who loves the world, His involvement in and with the world, and His nature and activity which embraces both the church and the world. *Mission Dei* emphasises the good news that God is for all people (Bosch, 2011). When we think of mission, we think of the all-encompassing mission of God to redeem mankind and bring healing to the land (Andrew, 2020). While



missions, also referred to as *mission ecclesiae*, are the missionary activities of the church (Hoekendijk, 1967). Missions relate to the specific work of the church and agencies in the task of reaching people for Christ by crossing cultural boundaries (Andrew, 2020). *Mission ecclesiae*, missionary activities of the church, to actualize God's mission (*mission Dei*) include among others, Evangelism, explained as the proclamation of salvation in Christ to those who do not believe in him, calling to repentance and conversion, announcing the forgiveness of sin and inviting them to become living members of Christ's earthly community and to begin a life of service to others in the power of the Holy Spirit. The missionary task as formulated by various international conferences since the 1950s is stated as “the whole church bringing the whole gospel to the whole world” (Bosch, 2011). Since the spiritual or the personal sphere in the series of integrated relationships in which people live, cannot be divorced from the material and social sphere; it follows that God's mission to the world is primarily directed at all spheres. This will be, to a large extent, in the church's missionary engagement in respect of the realities of injustices, oppression, poverty, discrimination, violence, and other vices. Mission, in the Biblical sense, therefore is the purpose of God which is to be accomplished in relation to His plan of salvation for mankind (Matthew 28.18-20).

“Missions” is the totality of all efforts and activities involved in the process of taking the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ to the different people groups in diverse cultures, and making it understandable, acceptable, and applicable in their context so that it will stay and stand with the people (John.4.34-35). It entails, according to the scriptures, sending and senders, going and goers, an assignment or a task to be accomplished, a context, a place, a target group, within which [or among whom] the assignment or task will be accomplished, a time frame or period during which the task will be accomplished, some form of partnership, team-work, and complementarities of roles (Romans.10.13-15). “Missions”, has been generally related to the specific work of the church and agencies in the task of reaching people for Christ by crossing cultural boundaries. At its core, it involves evangelism, baptizing, discipling, and church planting, but it may also focus on the poor, the defenceless, and those suffering from injustice” (Andrew, 2020).

Missiology as an Academic Discipline

Owens (2004), describing missiology, points out that it is an English word that had its origin in “*missio*” and “*logia*”. “*Missio*” is a Latin derivation of a Greek verb that means the act of sending. “*Logia*” is a Greek derivative of the sense of reason, inference, or study. However, this is more descriptive rather than definitive. The scholar goes further to define missiology as “The science of missions; It includes the formal study of the theology of mission, the history of missions, the concomitant philosophies of mission and their strategic implementation in given cultural settings” (Owens, 2004). Sense of reason, inference, or study (“*Logia*”), though is an academic exercise, it may not be an exclusive preserve of the academia. However, describing missiology as “The science of missions which includes the formal study of the theology of mission, the history of missions, the concomitant philosophies of mission and their strategic implementation in given cultural settings” may restrict missiology to being an academic exercise.

Science is defined as the systematic study of the structure and behaviour of the physical and natural world through observation, experimentation, and the testing of theories against the evidence obtained. If a graduate (or non-graduate) who went through the regular basic school



of mission training where the emphasis is not on certification but on discipleship and the ability to make disciples among the nations can do a systematic study of the behaviour of humans through observation, experimentation (not necessarily in the physical laboratory), and the testing of theories against the evidence obtained, can he by this definition be referred to as a missiologist?. Formal study of the theology of mission, the history of missions, and the concomitant philosophies of mission are majorly academic exercises that will inputs from the field to have their strategic implementation in given cultural settings.

The term *missio* first appeared in the sixteenth century, when the Jesuit and Carmelite orders of monks dispatched hundreds of missionaries. Naturally, this raises the question of whose mission it is. The terms, *missio Dei* (God's mission) and *missio ecclesiae* ((missionary ventures of the church)) emerged from the world missionary conference held in Willingen, West Germany in 1952. The council concluded that "the missionary movement" has its source in God Himself and there is a relationship between *missio Dei* and *missio ecclesiae*. The conference concluded that "There is no participation in Christ without participation in his mission." That is, mission and missiology is all about God's mission (*missio Dei*) and missionary ventures of the church (*missio ecclesiae*). Another scholar corroborated this when he said, "The Church exists by mission, just as fire exists by burning. Where there is no mission, there is no Church; and where there is neither Church nor mission, there is no faith: (i.e. no theology)" (Brunner, 1965). Other studies corroborated this fact that theological education needs both a missiological dimension, *missio Dei*, and a missiological intention, both the study of God's mission and the furthering of the study of the church's mission (Bosch, 2011). The study opines that there is no need to regard missiology as a subdivision of one of the classical theological disciplines or self-asserting it as an autonomous subject. Neither is there a need for a third option of having other disciplines amend their own courses slightly by including some threads of mission. What is needed, according to the study, is a combination of these three options. Others point out that to be faithful to the Scriptures, one should refer to *missiones Dei* rather than *missio Dei*, which emphasizes the historical data in the Bible that God involved Himself in the various activities of believers who were called upon to perform the innumerable ministries of compassion and reconciliation in his name (Romans 10:13-15). Whether we use *missio Dei* (God's mission) or *missiones Dei*, we are saying the same thing, the latter is only explaining that the mission of God is the multiple ministries of compassion and reconciliation, carried out by His servants in His name. Mission Training is one of them. Missiology is the academic study of the Christian mission, history, and methodology, which began to be developed as an academic discipline in the 19th century (Kollman, 2011). The church has always considered its mission. Much of the early theological debate arose from the need to clarify doctrine as Christianity spread rapidly into new contexts and cultures. However, although mission gave birth to theology (Bosch, 1991), missionary-oriented theology experienced a decline during the long centuries of Christendom when missions was paired with conquest or relegated to the outskirts of the empire (Mead, 1991).

Missiology is part of practical theology, praxis-based and oriented to specific contexts. It draws on both theological and other disciplines (particularly the social sciences) as an interdisciplinary enterprise rather than as a discipline in its own right. There are suggestions that as the global church grows in understanding of its sense of mission there is a need for missiology, both as a dimension of all theological studies and also as a subject area. This will assist in providing a strong missional direction to the whole enterprise of theology and theological education. The original reason for giving "missiology" academic attention in



European universities was to gain public recognition and theological respectability for the new discipline. Another reason was to secure its place in institutions of higher education through regular coursework and the needed university examinations. Scholars were then expected to present their findings in a systematic and comprehensive manner, considering methodology (Scherer, 1971). Missiology as an academic discipline as was described earlier, is a multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary course that includes but is not limited to four disciplinary groups: church history, systematic theology (biblical studies), social sciences, and world religions. According to the "Biblical Studies and Missiology (BISAM)" project of the International Association of Missions Studies (IAMS), Missiologists must be trained and equipped to handle hermeneutical matters with depth and expertise, (exegetical and hermeneutical matters being fundamental) in developing valid biblical models or paradigms for mission, hence the interdisciplinary nature of missiology and Biblical studies. The relationship of missiology with Systematic Theology is best captured in the statement "Missiology today is more than the "theology of mission," narrowly understood, but it is surely not less, for mission cannot dispense with theological criticism and analysis" (Scherer, 1971).

Social Sciences in itself is first, a family of related disciplines, and secondly stands as the newest adjunct to the missiological family. Caution is necessary during reflection on mission through the social sciences to avoid substituting issues in the social sciences with related issues in missiology but to treat them rather as complementary or supplementary, taming the orientation of their secular values and making them serviceable to missiology. World religions ("comparative religion," "history of religions," etc.) is another discipline that has an interdisciplinary relationship with Missiology. Though Missiology is not the same as the history of religions, the study of and response to human religions, particularly in light of divine revelation, is central to missiological reflection. History of religion, as a secular discipline, is "value-free" and theologically "neutral," but missiology is theologically committed and goal-oriented. This is a point of manageable tension between the two.

Summarily on whether missiology is an independent or an integrative discipline, the answer is both or and. Missiology cannot function in isolation from other theological disciplines, social science, and world religions. However, integration with these disciplines is unlikely to occur unless an "essential missiology" exists to set the norms and raise the integration criteria. Every missiologist, therefore, should be prepared to integrate and do it without losing a sense of independence. Studies have shown that early continental missiology was built largely on the "independent model," which sought to establish the autonomy and worth of the then-unproven discipline alongside more venerable and recognized fields of theological instruction (Myklebust and Guttorm, 1955). Nonetheless, continental missiology has taken a decidedly more integrative and interdisciplinary approach, for example, missiology in the United Kingdom, showed a preference for complete integration into the field of church historical studies on the assumption that when ecclesiology is properly understood it would generate missiological reflection (Hermelink & Margull, 1987). Because of the global nature of missiology's primary task which is the study of *mission Dei* (God's mission) and within that of the mission of Jesus, the apostles, the church (es), and mission-sending bodies, it means that missiology is the study of God's mission everywhere—in all six continents, "from everywhere to everywhere", not restricted to the United Kingdom or the USA, world mission being global, even cosmic, in scope. It follows therefore that missiology is expected to render service to programs designed globally hence the need for sending of academics and theological students into the world to emulate God sent Jesus into the world as a witness.



People have been on Mission before Missiology appeared as an academic discipline

Missiology is the academic study of the Christian mission history and methodology, which began to be developed as an academic discipline in the 19th century (Myklebust and Guttorm, 1961). It was the Scottish missionary Alexander Duff who first developed a systematic theory of mission and was appointed in 1867 to a new chair of Evangelistic Theology in Edinburgh (Kollman, 2011). Missiology became recognizable first of all within the study of Christian theology. On the other hand, over the centuries of missions the missionaries encountered various cultures and attitudes to accepting the Gospel by the different peoples. This caused theologians to reflect on issues of society and Christianity, and anthropology and Christianity. Communicating the Gospel and comparing the Christian teaching with other religious or secular teachings made the task of the missionaries even more difficult. They needed a solid theoretical framework within which they could more efficiently find their mission and succeed in spreading Christianity (Kollman, 2011). There is, therefore, the need to pay close attention to the reasons that gave rise to what we refer to as Missiology today. The encounters missionaries have over the years, with various cultures and responses to the Gospel by the different peoples made theologians to reflect on issues raised and proffer solutions to make the missionary task of communicating the Gospel easier. So, missiology actually came to complement and improve mission practice.

SUMMARY

Missiology and missiologists, have something at stake. They want to see the work of mission carried forward, but they frown at zeal without knowledge and both seek to reform or reshape missionary theory and practice, missionary strategy, and to refine missionary self-understanding in ways that will enhance missionary effectiveness (Walls, 1998).

Missiology and general mission studies are related but are functionally different. The latter is the basic curriculum of studies one has to pass through to be able to carry out missionary practice. It offers numerous examples of instructive investigation of missionary practice that record the results of research into cultural, religious, organizational, and other dynamics illuminated by missionary practice, but without any intrinsic concern to see the ends of mission carried forward. This is what most missions training institutions offer and it is very adequate being the basic training that has afforded many Nigerian missionaries exploit opportunities among the unreached people groups. Missiology, on the other hand, is the interdisciplinary 'legs' of history, theology, and anthropology upon which the 'seat' of general mission study rests (Andrew, 2020). The effectiveness of missionary practice which is a function of the quality of the general mission study will depend on how strong the 'legs' of history, theology, and anthropology are. So, the outcomes of good or bad missiology have consequences on the effectiveness of missionary practice. Missiology as a field draws on the techniques and data of the disciplines of history, theology, and anthropology. Missionary practice in turn supplies abundant and at times unique data to these fields. It has something to give as well as something to gain (Baker, n. d).



CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Academic missiologists have something at stake. They want to see the work of mission carried forward, but they frown at zeal without knowledge. They seek to reform or reshape missionary theory and practice, missionary strategy, and to refine missionary self-understanding in ways that will enhance missionary effectiveness. The practical missiologist considers the basic curriculum of studies he has passed through, as enough for him to be able to carry out missionary practice. The basic curriculum of studies he has passed through offers numerous examples of instructive investigation of missionary practice that record the results of research into cultural, religious, organizational, and other dynamics illumined by missionary practice, but the fact that he has no intrinsic concern to see the ends of mission carried forward is a gap to be filled by academic missiologists, missiology, being the interdisciplinary 'legs' of history, theology, and anthropology upon which the 'seat' of general mission study rests. The practical missiologist supplies abundant and at times unique data from the field of practice which the academic missiologist can draw on for research to reform or reshape missionary theory and practice, missionary strategy, and to refine missionary self-understanding in ways that will enhance missionary effectiveness. Feel inclusive or exclusive are natural human phenomena which can worked upon by both the non-academic mission practitioner and the academic missiologist in the light of the scriptures admonishing Christ followers to be humble, thinking of others as better than themselves, looking out not only one's own interest but that of others too (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12). Urgency of *Missio – Dei* places an important demand on Christ followers to synergize for what matters most; getting people saved across the globe. Kingdom priorities are not "either us or them" issues. Kingdom priorities are "all of us" issues. Christ followers must overcome the human tendency to put themselves into different camps on theological issues. Finding equilibrium between engaging in practical missiology and scholarly academic missiology could therefore be by promoting the significance of both practical missiology and scholarly academic missiology. And following the scriptural principle of "two are better than one" (Philippians 2:3-5), this could provide a driving force for achieving the mission of God.

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