

## MISSIONAL CULTURE CHANGE, RHYTHMS AND HABITS AND SPIRITUALITY

When I speak today about a product that the team for Missional Development in the Dutch Reformed Church are developing to help bring about a missional culture change in local churches, it is appropriate that it is part of a conference on spirituality. I intend to argue and show that missional transformation is essentially a spiritual transformation of the church.

A turning point in my thinking about missional transformation occurred 4 years during a conference of lead pastors of the Dutch Reformed Church. We were thinking about new strategies of engaging with our local neighbourhoods when a really respected colleague said: "I do not think I can generate any new energy for new projects."

What made all of us in that room sit up and take notice was that this was a highly respected missional leader and theologian and the church where he serves is an example of a missional church. What would cause him, of all people, to be despondent, even negative about raising the bar with regard to the missional calling of the local church?

The answer lies in the word "projects". For many years the DRC lived out its missional vocation by way of missional projects: projects to raise money for missionaries, local and overseas, projects to serve the poor, education projects, building projects, food and clothes projects, outreaches to neighbouring countries, rural areas, the far East. In most missional churches these projects multiplied, the cost escalated, but the number of members involved stayed more or less the same. And, in many instances, after a period of intense activity, their numbers even started to dwindle. The huge number of projects and the considerable amounts of money did not change the culture of the congregation. Relatively small portions of the members were involved, while the majority remained spectators or, at best, financial donors to the good cause.

For a lot of churches, it became clear: we need a change in approach. Not merely a new strategy for mission but a new missional paradigm. The DRC is by nature a church with a doing and thinking spirituality. We want to understand the Bible and we want to do stuff for the Lord. That is our comfort zone and culture. And that was the way in which we approached being a missional church: we listen to sermons, study the Bible and then go on and organize something.

The problem with this paradigm is that it is tiring. It usually involves only a small portion of the membership and it wears them down. In the long run it burns out devoted members and leaders. I can testify to that from my own ministry.

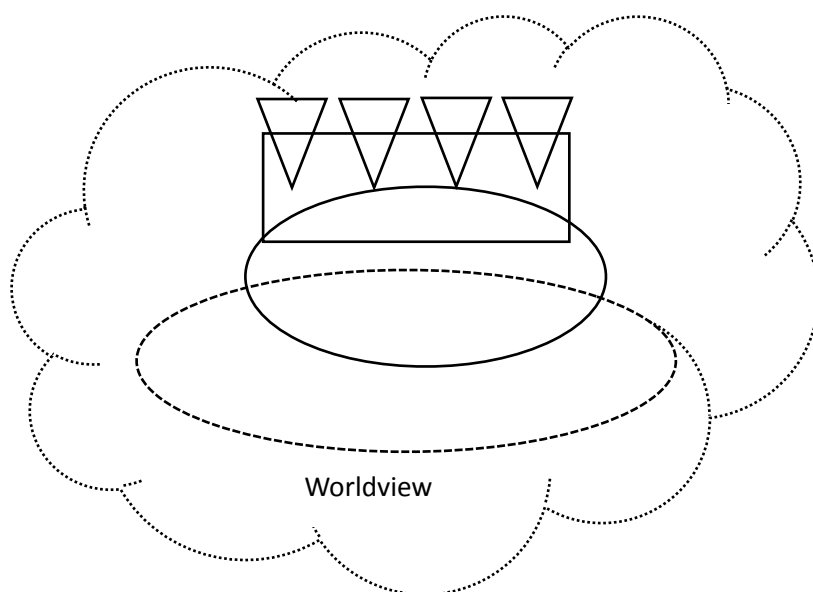
Let's not delude ourselves. Following Christ is not without its demands. The New Testament is quite clear about things like carrying your cross, bearing the burden, exhortations to endure and persevere. The book of Hebrews has this more or less as its main theme.

The transition towards being a missional church represents a profound paradigm shift for the western church. And that paradigm shift asks for a radical rethinking about how we go about being just that: a church that understands itself in a radical sense as being sent, following the missional God in engaging with the world He loves.

“Paradigm shift” in the sense of the word in which it was cast in by Thomas Kuhn, represents a very foundational change. In his seminal work: *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Kuhn shows that any science operates within a given set of presumptions, foundational beliefs, and that its methodology is developed and aligned within that paradigm. However, as a science develops, more and more instances occur where the methods cannot produce the desired outcomes. At first it is blamed on the competencies, or lack thereof, of the scientist. Slowly but surely, however, it becomes clear that the problems are more fundamental: it lies in the basic premises of the scientific discipline itself.

The way out of this impasse is not working harder or refining the methodology. The way out is by way of a revolution – a shift in paradigm - that changes the science and its methodology on a far deeper level. The use of the word REVOLUTION is intentional: this is not an evolutionary process where the old paradigm slowly and seamlessly evolves into a new paradigm. It rather happens by way of jolt, leaving the old paradigm behind and starting to work in a new way that is, as of yet, not proven. But with the promise of new insights and new results.

The following diagram shows how a science is built up from being situated in a worldview up to its actual field word practices. The one is rooted in the other and together should form a coherent whole.



In the development of a new scientific paradigm, the hard work lies in developing new research practices and applying them in real life research.

The analogy to research is helpful because it reminds us of the slow, careful and repetitive circular work of experimenting, testing, refining, experimenting, recording, testing, refining. Through this slow process a new science develops, opening up a new corpus of knowledge and new solutions. Within that science a new scientific community with a new culture emerges.

In the case of the western church, we are experiencing such a paradigm shift.

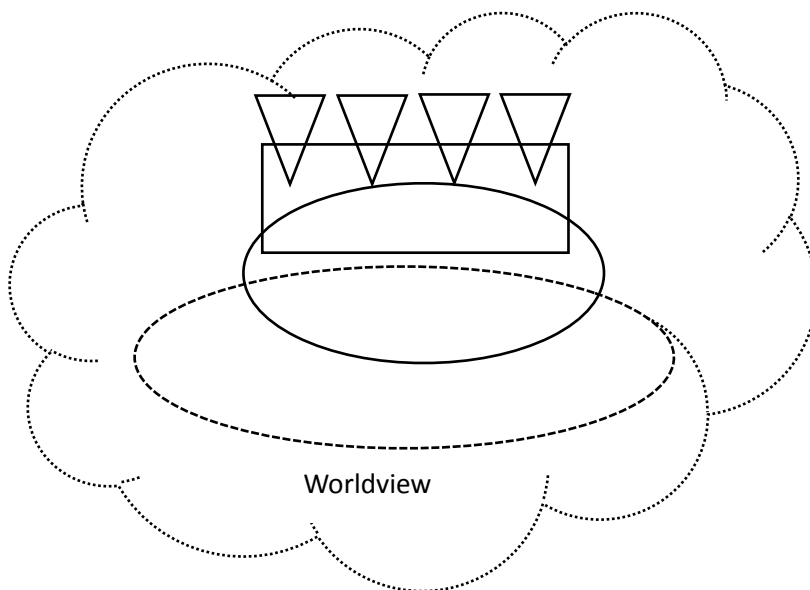
Seminary after seminary has reconfigured its core curricula to take the model of a church on mission seriously, and to train pastors and other leaders to understand themselves as

missionaries first, “keepers” of the faith a distant second. What so many have dismissed as a fad or a trend, substantial and growing numbers of people are recognizing as a paradigm shift.

This means reconfiguring the way we see the church and its calling and finding new appropriate ways to operate, new ways of doing things. That is why it is appropriate to talk about a culture shift. It is not about the refining of old methods within the old paradigm. It has indeed become clear that the problems of the western, mainline church is not about the competencies of its pastors and will not be solved by new techniques within the old way of thinking about the church. A new approach, a new paradigm is needed.

To implement a new paradigm for being church is not an easy or simple task. It cannot be solved by better management skills or more visionary leadership. It needs to come from rethinking who we are and what we are here for.

In reading the diagram below it should be remembered that the relationship between theology and worldview is dynamic. On the one hand all theologies are, and should be, contextual. On the other hand, it should always also be critical. Moltman expressed this relation in the tension of being true to the identity as mined from Scriptures and tradition, as well as being relevant for the world.



The first solutions in the paradigm shift towards becoming a missional church, were borrowed from the economic and management sciences. I refer to practices of strategic planning and management so as to change the course of the church.

A quite substantial corpus of thinking and writing about ways to make a vision stick and get strategies executed was produced in business and church literature and there is much to be learnt from it.

John Kotter is probably the most prominent writer about change. The process set out in his book *Leading Change*, remains the gold standard for bringing about deep change in an organization. My good friend and mentor says about this process: “Ignore at your own peril.”

For those not familiar with Kotter's thinking, it consists of 8 clear and easily understandable steps:

1. Establish a sense of urgency
2. Form a powerful guiding coalition
3. Create a vision
4. Communicate the vision
5. Empower others to act on the vision
6. Plan for and create short-term wins
7. Consolidate improvements and produce more change
8. Institutionalize new approaches

In the reflection on cultural change in organizations there usually is a sharp focus on the vision - a clear and simple picture of where we are heading. Then follow strategies to move the organization in this direction. Kotter calls it to PLAN FOR SHORT TERM WINS. The human psyche works so that people want to see a new way of doing succeed before they start walking on the road themselves.

The Achilles heel of the strategic planning and management paradigm is the importance of leadership in these models:

- The ability to develop a clear vision
- The ability to develop strong and influential coalitions in the organization
- The ability to communicate vision clearly
- The ability to facilitate conflict
- Toughness to sustain despite resistance
- persuade
- Distinction to make the right strategic decisions

These are not abilities that spiritual leaders necessarily have, and neither are they trained for it.

We are fairly sure, therefore, that strategic planning alone is not going to get the job done. The reason is simple: it doesn't change the culture and culture eats strategy for breakfast. Every competent and diligent pastor or church leader discovers that at some time or another. You spend a good deal of energy on preparation, planning and formulating, but the outcomes eventually land in the File of Good Intentions. The reality of being a church comprised of volunteers, overwhelms the most carefully laid out strategies.

The core problem with this is the top-down approach. Who does it all? The powerful and influential leader, the CEO, the pastor and his /her leadership group. Eventually it may lead to culture change in a business, but in a church, where you workforce consists of volunteers, you had better pay more attention to inner conviction that will carry the culture when the pastor is no longer there.

The truth is, it's not as simple to make change happen as is sometimes pretended. Especially not in the church where we have deep-rooted beliefs and habits. David Newby warned us in one of the first lectures on Church Facilitation that many congregations line of thought is something like this: We would rather perish than change. This is unfortunately true.

In our reflection on missional transformation, we are guided by the fundamental insight that the mission of the church originates primarily from God's mission to the world. It is not something that the church does, but what God does and the church, congregations, believers come into line with the living God himself who is involved from creation to now and with the world. Who loves the

world and is constantly repairing and recreating the world. The church must therefore reflect in the world who God is.

We believe that a more biblical paradigm would be to cultivate practices that express this inner conviction in the everyday life and rhythms of the church as organisation and in the lives of its members. It is all about new habits.

### Why habits?

I sometimes still conduct wedding services, and last week I was doing marital preparation with a couple. Our subject was expressing love by tending to your partner's needs. I suggested that to cultivate habits to fulfil each other's needs, can make a huge difference. I was surprised to experience quite a bit of resistance from them, something to the tune of: it doesn't actually sound like love. It is too calculated, not spontaneous enough.

However, what we know nowadays, is that if you want to change your life, you should change your habits. There actually a book with exactly that title: Change your habits, change your life.

And we also know that your habits cultivate your love. You tend to grow in your love for your spouse, your children, for reading, for Jesus if you cultivate loving habits. Couples who kiss each other goodnight at bedtime and goodbye in the morning, are happier. When parents read to their children at night, those children tend to love reading later on in their lives. The places where you go on holiday as a family, tend to be the places that your children will love. Your habits shape your love.

Habits are the expression of identity, it is the practices of our theology, life theory and values.

### What kind of habits are we looking for that will cultivate a deep cultural shift towards being a missional community?

We identified, by revisiting previous work done in local churches by the South African Partnership for Missional Churches, 5 rhythms that can bring about missional transformation. However, we did not call them missional rhythms, but rhythms that will help us to get in step with the living God. The metaphor is from learning to dance where we get in step with the triune God, Father Son and Holy Spirit as God moves through this world.

This metaphor is rooted in some foundational beliefs:

- (i) We believe that God loves this world, as John refers to it: this cosmos, referring to this imperfect, broken, chaotic, sinful, self-destructing world that is at the same so tremendously beautiful and good.
- (ii) We believe that God is living and active in this world, saving and healing, providing and creating.

This stands in opposition to the current working theology (not the confessed theology) of deism, that think of God as the one who created the world and then stood back. It is beautifully expressed in the song: From a distance:

From a distance the world looks blue and green  
And the snow-capped mountains white  
From a distance the ocean meets the stream  
And the eagle takes to flight

From a distance there is harmony  
And it echoes through the land  
It's the voice of hope  
It's the voice of peace  
It's the voice of every man

From a distance we all have enough  
And no one is in need  
And there are no guns, no bombs and no disease  
No hungry mouths to feed'

God is watching us  
God is watching us  
God is watching us from a distance

- (iii) We believe that God calls to follow Him into this world, to engage in this world in a loving, caring, healing way. And we believe that if we open our eyes and live attentively, we will find the loving, caring, healing, saving, reconciling God in his world.

This is what it means: getting in step with the living God. The habits that we want to help churches and individuals to cultivate, are like learning new dance steps: the waltz, the swing, rumba, the twostep and so forth.

It is really important to notice that the new rhythms are grounded in the relationship with God. It is not simply designing a new programme.

The most important shift in a missional culture is therefore not directing the church's face towards the world, how important this may be. It lies in recognizing and experiencing God as alive and active in the world, in the church and in your life.

However, in this missional transformation, the practice of the presence of God is seamlessly integrated in a life for others, for the world. Therefore, we start out from a trinitarian theology. At the heart of the culture change that we would like to see taking place, is God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

I think that Andrew Murray would have liked an approach like this. His book "The deeper Christian Life" starts with the words: "The first and chief need of our Christian life is, Fellowship with God."

And further on: "We have not only Christ's life in us as a power, and His presence with us as a person, but we have His likeness to be wrought into us. He is to be formed in us, so that His form or figure, His likeness, can be seen in us."

Cultural transformation of the church is firstly about God's work in us to transform us to think, feel, see and act more like God himself. Without a deep transformation of the hearts of individual believers, the missional movement will fail, it will never progress beyond the efforts of a handful of

enthusiasts with a certain spirituality. It will never become the habit of believers to follow God in his mission into the world.

The trinitarian theology that we work with, is summarized in 6 confessions about God and the consequence these have for the life of the church

1. God calls us to live in deep community with the Father, Son and Holy spirit and to share in what God is doing (Theosis, being transformed to the likeness of Christ, being in Christ).
2. God exists in a deep community between Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Perigoresis).
3. God is involved with the world and sends the Son and Holy Spirit to the world (Missio Dei).
4. Jesus empties Himself in becoming human and sacrifices himself for the world (Kenosis).
5. God became human flesh and lived bodily amongst humans (Incarnation).
6. God reigns as King of all and establishes his reign over all of creation (Kingdom).

The consequences of these beliefs for the church is as follows:

1. Theosis, being in Christ and transformed to the likeness of Christ call us to deep devotion to God, to represent Christ in this world.
2. The unity within the Trinity calls us to a deep unity in the body of Christ. This is a prerequisite for our own credibility in the world, but even more: for the credibility of Christ.
3. Missio Dei calls us to be part of God's mission in the world.
4. The self-sacrifice of Christ calls us to give ourselves for others.
5. The incarnation of Christ calls us to be bodily and concretely present in the world.
6. The kingship of God calls us to discipleship and to take part in the realisation of the reign of God in all aspects of reality.

We wanted to develop an instrument that is simple enough so that it can easily be explained and that won't need a facilitator to use in a congregation. But at the same time, it should be effective to bring deep levels of change. Deep enough to bring about a change in culture.

A change in culture takes place when you start to do the familiar things, the things that you already do, in a new way. We do not want to fill churches programmes with new projects, we want to help them to do their usual stuff in a new way, a way that expresses a new culture. A good friend and mentor once asked me how I would know what the culture of an organization is. His answer was: It is the things that happen that does not surprise you.

In thinking about a change in culture, we had to think about two levels.

- i. What are the things, activities that you must bring into a system that will bring about a change in culture?

For this we used Aristoteles' insight into Culture Shifters. There are five:

<p>A minimum level of KNOWLEDGE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimum doesn't mean as little as possible, it means as much as necessary.</li> <li>• Reformed members will not change their views or ways of doing unless they are convinced that it is grounded in Scripture.</li> <li>• We know very well, however, that more knowledge will not by itself bring about change.</li> </ul>	<p>A Change in ATTITUDE and OUTLOOK.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uncover unbiblical and sinful attitudes (and conduct).</li> <li>• God changes people through his Word and Spirit.</li> <li>• Leaders must model new attitudes and</li> <li>• Remind people constantly about new attitudes .</li> </ul>
<p>Learn new SKILLS AND PRACTICES.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People must actually learn new ways of doing things: how do we read the Bible, do Sunday school, have meetings, make decisions, conduct Sunday worship services.</li> </ul>	<p>Develop new, transferrable HABITS.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A new culture is expressed in the things that we do over and over, in the new habits.</li> <li>• It is not primarily about new things, but rather about our usual doings in a new way</li> </ul>
<p><b>INTEGRATION THROUGH THE WHOLE SYSTEM</b></p> <p>This is the point of transferrable habits, that they would spill over through the whole life of the church: eg decision making based on discernment in all of the meetings, reading the Bible in a new way in meetings, during worship, in Sunday school, small groups and private devotions</p>	

There is a certain logical sequence in these culture shifters: Understand → experience a change of heart → learn the skills → get into the habit → repeat. However, this is definitely not a strict sequence. Most churches find that they could start with new habits and explain them afterwards.

- ii. The second dimension that we had to think about, was this: What are the actual habits that need to be developed? We identified 5 main groups. We call these rhythms, they are like 5 new dance steps that must be mastered.
- A. Reflect and celebrate: What can we learn from the ways in which God is already using us? And to celebrate who we are, and the gifts God gave us.
  - B. Listen and discern: How can we hear what God is saying to us from his Word, listening to one another and to other people.
  - C. Dare and discover: How does God challenge us to cross boundaries and discover what God is doing in contexts that we previously didn't dare to go?
  - D. Clarify and focus; How can we discern God's call for us: here, where we are now and being who we are?
  - E. Implement and practise: how can we put God's call / vocation for into action so as to make a difference and live up to our full potential?

These different rhythms or dances are made up of different steps and turns. To go through all of it will just be overload and would not make sense. I would though, like to point out the golden thread



that runs through it all. This golden thread is what is unique to this approach differentiates it from the regular approach to facilitating culture change.

The regular approach is intentional, it is strategic, it comes from the business world. Kotter's design for facilitating change is well designed, well researched and it proved its mettle in the real world. But it lacks one foundational aspect without which we cannot do in the church: it lacks spirituality, it lacks an awareness of God.

This is the golden thread which runs through the rhythms and steps of our approach: practicing the presence of God. This is of course not something we suddenly came up with now, it is as old as thinking about spirituality and the practices that shape us as followers of Christ. Brother Lawrence wrote about it as far back as the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

But this is the golden thread, this is the spiritual basis for the culture change that underlies our thinking about what it means to be a missional church, following God into his world.

#### A few examples.

An important step in the rhythm of looking back, reflection and celebration is to learn from the journey. Looking back on a regular basis to learn from what we have been doing up to here, to learn from incidents that affirm and those that disrupt. This is not a self-congratulatory exercise, one that will lead to a celebration of how great we are, how well we are doing things. No, it is an exercise in which we will discover how God was present in our successes and in our failures. How God is using us, directing and shaping us, how He equips his body with gifts that we are not always able to see at first glance, we actually have to sit and reflect on it.

This is the daily examen for faith communities who want to get in step with the living God.

Listening and discerning is at the heart of missional culture. The habit of listening to God as present, living and acting in the church and in the world. It would be a gross reduction to limit listening and discerning to Bible reading. One of the best practitioners of this habit is our editor and main writer in the development of these booklets, Dr Gert Cordier. I am always amazed to hear how he thinks and speaks. He practices the discipline of discerning the presence of God in everyday life and he taught the congregation in Randfontein where he served, to do the same.

Another practice of listening and discerning is listening to each other. How does God reveal himself to this other person, what can I learn about the presence and voice of God in listening to someone else.

This is really important in cultivating a missional culture because it reminds us that as people sent into God's world, we do not do it individually. We do it corporately, as the Body of Christ and that we find wisdom and direction together.

It breaks down the culture of the super-leader who discerns God's call for the church and to whom the rest of the church must defer. That is a dangerous culture from the world of business, it leads to powerful leaders who lead on their own and are not aware of their vulnerabilities. This culture is one that needs to be resisted, it has done grave damage to churches and to God's mission.

We must not be surprised if the biggest resistance to a missional culture change as we propose, comes from leaders. Thomas Kuhn pointed out that the biggest resistance to new science paradigms usually comes from those scientists who benefit the most from the old paradigm, the

professors with high academic standing and good salaries. In the church it is the people with power who are used to being influential who will resist listening for the presence of God in the voices of others. Change may come from the margins, from churches without power or social standing. Perhaps they will be the first to learn to listen carefully for the voice and presence of God in those who are usually without a voice.

#### In closing

Returning to the issue of strategic planning and change. Tom Rainer in his book Breakout Churches on impasse-breaking congregations, makes the following remarkable and, somewhat disturbing remarks. In many of the churches that broke out of the impasse of a plateau or decline there was no written vision statement on the wall, sometimes not even a formulated vision statement. Their observation was that the vision lives in the people's hearts. The leaders of these churches have vision because they stay in touch with God.

That is what we aim for in a missional culture change.