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THE FUTURE OF MISSIOLOGY

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Abstract

What is the future of missiology? Should missiology seek the status of a theological discipline? After a brief account of the history of academic missiology this paper argues that a trinitarian missiology is at the heart of all of theology. Missiology should (1) be part of all theology and (2) exist as a subject area to accompany the practice of mission. This will make theological education missiological to the core. 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.

Missiology as a separate focus of study is still fairly new in theological education. In many theological circles it is still on the edges. There are some, particularly in Europe, who argue that it will not develop further unless it gains more respect as an 'independent, officially recognized branch of theology'.¹

I would like to suggest, however, that missiology ought to celebrate its interdependence with the rest of theology, prod theological education to be missiological throughout, draw more on resources beyond the theological and accept that it is a field or focus rather than an academic discipline. As the global church in many ways recovers its sense of mission there is a need for missiology—both as a dimension of all theological studies and also as a subject area—to assist in providing a strong missional direction to the whole task of theology and theological education.

1. The Development of Missiology

The church has always reflected on its mission. Much of the theological debate of the first few centuries arose from the need to clarify doctrine as Christianity spread rapidly into different contexts and cultures. But although mission gave birth to theology,² missionary-oriented theology fell into decline during the long centuries of Christendom, when mission was paired with conquest or pushed to the edges of the empire.³

The separate study of mission began in theology only in the late nineteenth century, stimulated by the growth of cross-cultural mission from the West. Alexander Duff, usually regarded as the first professor of mission, taught 'evangelistic theology' at

¹ Hans-Jürgen Findeis, 'Missiology', in *Dictionary of mission: Theology, history and perspectives*, eds. Karl Müller et al. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1997), 302.

² David J Bosch, *Transforming mission: Paradigm shifts in theology of mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991), 16; Martin Kähler, *Schriften zur Christologie und Mission* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1971 [1908]), 190.

³ Loren B Mead, *The once and future church: Reinventing the congregation for a new mission frontier* (New York: The Alban Institute, 1991), 14.

Edinburgh between 1867 and 1878. Gustav Warneck pioneered the teaching of 'mission theory' at Halle in Germany from 1896 to 1910. And from 1910 Josef Schmidlin was the first Catholic missiologist, at Münster in Germany, promoting 'mission science'.⁴

This was a period of great energy for world mission, seen as the task of the whole church. The World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910, although dominated by Europe and North America, gave impetus to both ecumenism and the introduction of mission studies in theological education. It also led to the publication of what is now known as the *International Review of Mission*, a focus for ecumenical missiology for a hundred years now.

While in Europe there was an emphasis on mission studies being scientific or theoretical, in North America there has been a more pragmatic emphasis on the task and method of mission, as missiology grew rapidly after the Second World War. The American Society of Missiology was formed in 1973, with its journal *Missiology*.⁵

In recent decades, however, European and North American departments of missiology have been in numerical decline, perhaps matching the decline of western Christianity in general, but also competing with related enthusiasms such as religious studies, ecumenical studies, world Christianity and contextual theology.

Since the 1970s, some European universities, such as Nijmegen in the Netherlands, have begun referring to missiology as 'intercultural theology.' This appears to have been partly motivated by a desire of professional missiologists in secular universities to move beyond the European captivity of theology and to speak in terms acceptable to the wider academy.⁶ Intercultural theology appears, however, to be another term for contextualisation or inculturation,⁷ and is in danger of reflecting only on the life of the church rather than the world beyond the church.⁸ (The term 'intercultural studies', on the other hand, as well as being used in secular contexts, is used in schools of mission such as Fuller Theological Seminary to refer to cross-cultural mission studies without causing offence in hostile contexts.)

The various reasons for developing missiology as a branch of theological study have not served missiology well. On the one hand, there has been pressure from mission societies for cross-cultural missionary training. This has led to a merely practical 'how-to' approach. On the other hand, there has been a desire to establish mission studies as a scientific body of theory. This has led to the technical approach of a European university discipline.

We can see the desire to be academic in the rules for membership of the International Association for Mission Studies (IAMS). They require that a member normally has doctoral qualifications, is research active and is recommended by two other members.⁹ By contrast the Australian desire to be inclusive and equal is probably

⁴ Francis Anekwe Oborji, *Concepts of mission: The evolution of contemporary missiology* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2006), 41–45.

⁵ American Society of Missiology, 'Missiology', *American Society of Missiology*, www.asweb.org/content/missiology, 2012; James A Scherer, 'Missiology as a discipline and what it includes', in *New directions in mission and evangelization 2: Theological foundations*, eds. James A Scherer and Stephen B Bevans (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1994), 175.

⁶ Werner Ustorf, 'The cultural origins of "intercultural theology"', *Mission Studies* 25 (2008), 230.

⁷ Walter J Hollenweger, 'Intercultural theology', *Theology Today* 43.1 (1986): 29.

⁸ Ustorf, 'The cultural origins of "intercultural theology"', 237.

⁹ International Association for Mission Studies (IAMS), 'IAMS Governance Manual', *International Association for Mission Studies*, <http://missionstudies.org/archive/0manual/5a%20Membership%20criteria.htm>, 2000, #5a.

at work in the Australian Association for Mission Studies (AAMS), which is open to all who are interested in mission studies.¹⁰

A widely accepted account of missiology as a 'discipline' was written by James Scherer in 1987. He argued that it engages with all the theological questions that are relevant to God's mission and the mission of the church; in other words it is part of theology. Missiology also properly draws on the social sciences in its task of proclaiming and living into the Reign of God. Despite the title of his paper—'Missiology as a discipline and what it includes'—Scherer was cautious about the extent to which missiology is itself a discipline, preferring to emphasise its interdisciplinary nature.¹¹

2. Trinitarian Missiology

In the last few decades most missiologists have come to agree that Christian mission is not just speaking the Good News, not just seeking peace and justice, not just one job among many, not merely one aspect of practical theology, not something done only by cross-cultural workers and not something that happens only at the frontiers of Christendom. It is much deeper, much broader and more encompassing.

Christian mission has come to be seen as participation in the mission of God (in Latin, *missio Dei*).

Karl Barth was the first to say this. Theology had often spoken of God the Father sending the Son, and the Father and the Son sending the Spirit. Barth said we should speak of another movement: the Father, Son and Spirit sending the church.¹²

Lesslie Newbigin also insisted that mission should be seen in trinitarian terms. He suggested that the church is not so much the one who does the mission, but more the community through whom God engages in mission.¹³ Newbigin's key text was John 20:21–22, where Jesus says, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you', and then breathes on them and says, 'Receive the Holy Spirit'.¹⁴

This has several implications.

First, *God is viewed as outgoing love*. God's purposes are the reconciling of the cosmos to Godself (2 Cor 5:19) through the sending of Jesus Christ and the activity of the Holy Spirit. Christian mission originates in the activity of God. So the impulse for mission is not primarily the converting of souls or the expansion of the church but participation in God's cosmic purposes for a new order of relationships at all levels in the universe governed by justice, love, peace and grace.

Second, as Jürgen Moltmann puts it, 'It is not the church that has a mission of salvation to fulfil in the world; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the church'.¹⁵ As is often said today, it is not so much that the church has a mission but that *God's mission has a church*.¹⁶ This means that the church

¹⁰ Australian Association for Mission Studies, 'About AAMS', *Australian Association for Mission Studies*, <http://www.groupsthatclick.com/aams/index.php?type=page&ID=1220>, 2012

¹¹ Scherer, 'Missiology as a discipline and what it includes', 180–182, 185.

¹² Bosch, *Transforming mission*, 390.

¹³ Lesslie Newbigin, *The gospel in a pluralist society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 119.

¹⁴ Lesslie Newbigin, *The relevance of trinitarian doctrine for today's mission*, CWME Study Pamphlet #2 (London: Edinburgh House, 1963), 32–34, cited in Timothy Tennent, *Invitation to world missions: A Trinitarian missiology for the twenty-first century* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010), 67.

¹⁵ Jürgen Moltmann, *The church in the power of the Spirit: A contribution to messianic ecclesiology* (London: SCM, 1977), 64.

¹⁶ For example, Stephen B Bevans and Roger P Schroeder, *Constants in context: A theology of mission for today* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2004), 8.

neither shapes mission nor bears full responsibility for it. We are partners with God in God's mission.

Third, *the mission of God is at work beyond the church*. Cross-cultural workers often say that they do not bring God to unevangelised peoples; they discover God at work there and strive to make explicit, in Christian terms, what is implicit. The Vatican II document *Gaudium et Spes* also saw the Spirit at work in a hidden manner in the history of the world.¹⁷ For a period some in the World Council of Churches took this to mean that because God is at work in the wider world the world sets the agenda for mission and the church is not needed. As a result, some evangelicals and the Catholic church were wary of the term *missio Dei* at first. But now it has gradually gained almost universal acceptance.¹⁸

Fourth, the trinitarian basis for mission *evokes images of community, dynamism and mutuality* which enrich and shape mission. The diversity-in-unity implied by trinitarian talk profoundly affects our understanding of God's dealing with humankind. It underlines the importance of contextual mission and the church's calling to be radically inclusive and relational.¹⁹ Reflecting on the role of imagination in mission, Stephen Bevans writes, 'If God as a triune communion-in-mission might be imagined as Dance, mission might be imagined as joining in'.²⁰

Fifth, this trinitarian basis *brings missiology into the centre of theology*. Whereas once missiology was located on the edge of theology—as part of our understanding of the church or of salvation—it is now squarely at the centre of our talk of God. We can call God missionary and say that Christian mission flows from the very nature of God from eternity (2006).²¹ As Klaus Schulz puts it, 'theology is the study of God, but it is the study of a God who is motivated by the purpose to redeem the world' (2009:87).

This last implication clearly affects not just missiology but also theology, to which I will now turn. (Here I am considering for the moment missiology's engagement with theology; later I will discuss its engagement with resources beyond theology.)

3. The Interdependence of Theology and Missiology

If God is a missionary God, then the whole of theology ought to be about this sending God. To put it another way, if the Christian faith is centrally about God's Son Jesus Christ being sent to transform relationships through forgiving love, then the task of God-talk is to seek to understand it in order to take part in it.

¹⁷ Second Vatican Council, 'Gaudium et Spes (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World)', in *The documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M Abbott (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1966), #26, p. 226.

¹⁸ Bosch, *Transforming mission*, 390; Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants in context*, 291; Justice Anderson, 'An overview of missiology', in *Missiology: An introduction to the foundations, history, and strategies of world missions*, eds. John Mark Terry, Ebbie Smith and Justice Anderson (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 2, 10.

¹⁹ Elizabeth A Johnson, *She who is: The mystery of God in feminist discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 223; Catherine Mowry Lacugna, *God for us: The trinity and Christian life* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), 401–402.

²⁰ Stephen Bevans, 'Reimagining God and mission', in *Reimagining God and mission: Perspectives from Australia*, ed. Ross Langmead (Hindmarsh, SA: ATF Press, 2007), 11.

²¹ Stephen R Holmes, 'Trinitarian missiology: Towards a theology of God as missionary', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 8.1 (2006): 72–90.

‘The first task of theology is to make sense of the whole of life by reference to God’, suggests Bernhard Ott. ‘The second task of theology is to be an agent of transformation, so that the whole of life may reflect God’s intention’.²²

Theology, speaking broadly, exists ‘critically to accompany the *missio Dei*’.²³ In an overall sense, all of theology is missiological. The biblical revelation is the story of God’s outgoing and transforming love. The history of the church is the history of the mission of God through the ups and downs of the followers of Jesus. Systematic theology is orderly reflection on who God is, who Jesus Christ is, God’s creative and redemptive purposes and the hope we hold because of who God is. We could go on. Christian education is the enterprise through which we pass on and grow faith so that the church may grow into mature followers of God’s call to be the church in the world. Similar things could be said of the study of pastoral care, ethics, liturgy, spirituality and so on. It is not to say that each focus of theology should immediately serve the purpose of proclamation, rather that in an overall sense theology is faith seeking understanding in order better to praise and serve the God who above all reaches out and invites us to join the movement.

I am not arguing that we should collapse theology and missiology into one thing. Missiology has a double role in theology, to permeate theology with a missiological dimension and to serve mission praxis with specific intention. In practice this means that missiology should both infuse the whole curriculum and offer separate subjects with a specific focus on mission practice.²⁴ Missiology needs to integrate theology and also complement theology in a curriculum.²⁵

In insisting on the missiological dimension in theology, missiology is—in Bosch’s delightful words—‘a gadfly in the house of theology, creating unrest and resisting complacency’.²⁶ Missiology accompanies other theological disciplines, learning from them and putting questions to them. To take two simple examples, missiology may help theology not to become inward-looking or complacent, by keeping a focus on the world and its deep needs; theology, on the other hand, may help missiology not to become too confident, with reminders that God is a mystery and we ‘know only in part’ (1 Cor 13:9).

In providing intentional, specific study of mission, missiology also draws on contexts, secular disciplines, missionary practice and the stories of cross-cultural engagement. Missiologists are partners alongside all those on mission, prodding them to reflect theologically and learning together in reflection and action.

4. Theological Education as Missiological

If there is a flow from a missionary God to a mission-oriented theological education then all types of theological schools ought to feel the challenge. A mission-shaped theological education will exist primarily to form and mobilise disciples in mission.²⁷

²² Bernhard Ott, ‘Mission oriented theological education: Moving beyond traditional models of theological education’, *Transformation* 18.2 (2001): 84.

²³ Bosch, *Transforming mission*, 494.

²⁴ Bosch, *Transforming mission*, 494–496.

²⁵ Klaus Detlev Schulz, ‘The development of missiology in theoretical curricula: Historical survey and recent developments’, *Missio Apostolica* 17.2 (November 2009): 86.

²⁶ Bosch, *Transforming mission*, 496.

²⁷ J R Rozko, ‘Toward a mission-shaped vision of theological formation: Implications of the *missio Dei* for theological education’, Paper given at the American Society of Missiology Annual Conference, Techny Towers IL, June 15–17 2012, Available at http://www.asmweb.org/assets/1_ASM_Paper_2012_Area_1_Theol_Dis%20JR%20Rozko.pdf, 18, 20.

Whether a school is a seminary (training professional ministers), a university divinity school (pursuing critical inquiry in an academic setting), or a Bible school or mission-training centre (mainly preparing lay Christian workers for mission service), there are factors that make it difficult for a missiological perspective to act as a unifying centre for theological study.²⁸

One is the classical fourfold division of theology, since the European 'Enlightenment', into three areas of 'theory'—biblical studies, church history and systematic theology—and 'practical theology', the last being further divided into specific aspects of church-related ministry. Missiology is one of the practical theology subjects. This division, which we owe to Friedrich Schleiermacher,²⁹ has grown and spread into many branches.

How is it possible to experience theological education as a process of formation for mission and ministry when having to study so many fragments? How do we overcome the split between theory and practice implied in this division? How do the 'practical theology' subjects avoid becoming the mere application of the 'weightier' theological subjects? When the Bible, history, theology and philosophy are the sources at the centre how does theological education engage actively with factors such as experience, the world, context and life stories? How do the voices of the poor, the uneducated and the marginalised get to be heard in the academy?

Another factor making it difficult for missiology to be a unifying factor is the power of academic accreditation to shape theological education in ways that do not help missional formation. Students become consumed with essays, books, theories, technical skills and assessment. Their learning happens in classrooms, divorced from church, work, home and places where people meet across boundaries. Teachers work long and hard to gain higher qualifications, publish in academic journals, speak at conferences and run complex institutions. The academy trains educated elites. It fragments knowledge. It values critical inquiry over integration and praxis.³⁰

Despite these tensions, many theological institutions have tried to swim against the tide, with thorough curriculum revisions that aim to integrate study and form disciples for mission and ministry.

At Whitley College, where I teach, the great majority of students are lay Christians equipping themselves for ministry and mission, studying alongside a smaller group of candidates for ordination as Baptist pastors. Courses from diploma to doctoral level are available through the MCD University of Divinity, an ecumenical consortium. In a recent thorough review of the student experience and the curriculum, Whitley has adopted a three-year cycle of themes, aiming to form disciples in faith, hope and love. Each year the theme is paired: Faith and ministry, hope and mission, and love and justice. The themes are carried in specific units but also are found in all existing units and college events. A story-approach to theology is emphasised through the use of case studies, biographically-based units, field-based reflective practice and the regular invitation for

²⁸ On types of theological education, see David Kelsey, *Between Athens and Berlin: The theological education debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993); Edward Farley, *Theologia: The fragmentation and unity of theological education* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983); Robert J Banks, *Reenvisioning theological education: Exploring a missional alternative to current models* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); Bernhard Ott, *Beyond fragmentation: Integrating mission and theological education: A critical assessment of some recent developments in evangelical theological education* (Oxford: Regnum, 2001); and Brian Edgar, 'The theology of theological education', *Evangelical Review of Theology* 29.3 (2005): 208–217.

²⁹ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Brief outline on the study of theology* (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1966 [1881]).

³⁰ Ott, 'Mission oriented theological education', 77.

students to reflect on their own stories in their assignments. A vision of theological education as formation for discipleship is being worked out in several internship programs, a commitment to involve every student in some form of reflection on practice and developing college community life. There has been a recent emphasis on interdisciplinary teaching, locating classes in local churches, intensive teaching modules and embedding theological education in internships where the three dimensions of serving, learning and growing as leaders are integrated (Cronshaw 2011).³¹

As a missiologist at Whitley College I am fortunate not to be on the edge of my college as many missiologists are. Mission has always been a strong dimension of the college's ethos and teaching. The faculty are all 'rowing in the same direction' and all faculty integrate missiological perspectives into their teaching.

Among the units on offer are many with an explicit missional theme. For example, among the offerings in New Testament is 'Mission in the New Testament.' In Hebrew Bible there are units on land and identity, on war and peace and on prophetic justice. Mark Brett, who teaches the Hebrew Bible, links it to postcolonial justice issues, Indigenous land claims and biblical economics. Systematic theology includes units on 'Resurrection, justice and discipleship', 'Economics, justice and theology', 'God of hope' and 'Agents of reconciliation.' There are biblical studies units on the Bible and ethics and on the theologies and practices of love. History is largely about the history of the church's mission; it also includes units on Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Martin Luther King Jr. And so on. Missiology does indeed permeate the whole curriculum, and before we begin to think about subjects badged as missiological the whole theological curriculum is engaging with faith-sharing, justice issues, peacemaking, sociology, anthropology, politics, economics, interfaith dialogue and cultural theory.

As well as the missionary dimension to Whitley's theological teaching there are also about twenty specifically mission-oriented units, from evangelism to justice, from peacemaking to ecological mission and from local missional church to global mission. Contextual mission is a strong theme, with the Australian and Asian contexts highest on the list.

At Whitley College we aspire to a theological education that is missiological at the heart and praxis-oriented. We want it to be about formation rather than information. We seek an integrated educational experience for students. I freely admit that as long as we remain in the standard accreditation stream for academic theological education it can be difficult. Sometimes it feels like swimming upstream. We are, however, on the way.

Robert Banks, in *Reenvisioning Theological Education*, would want to push us further than this. He argues that theological colleges should not only teach mission but be engaged in mission. Teachers should be like mentors, and students like apprentices, just like the relationship between Jesus and his disciples. Students should not be separated from their churches and families but learn through in-service education.³² I feel we need to move in this direction to some degree, but it is very demanding and difficult to do while the current systems of education are in place.

The college-based (or seminary-based, or university-based) approach to theological education is here to stay in my judgement. But it will always need to be prodded strongly by the Banks's approach to missional theological education.

³¹ Darren Cronshaw, 'Reenvisioning theological education, mission and the local church', *Mission Studies* 28 (2011): 91-115.

³² Banks, *Reenvisioning theological education*, 74, 94-111, 130.

In response to Banks' provocative challenge to missiologists and other theologians, I count myself committed to a theological education that is at least missiological and on the way to becoming missional.

5. Missiology as (at Least) Practical Theology

I have suggested that missiology should be seen as both a dimension of all theology and also a subject area which covers specific mission practice. In this subject area we find all sorts of units, from evangelism to interfaith dialogue, from church planting to cross-cultural understanding. Specific mission studies such as these are usually grouped in 'practical theology.'

A Redefined Practical Theology

Missiology can own the practical theology label if we are clear about what we mean by it. Schleiermacher's classification of theology into biblical studies, church history, systematic theology and practical theology has been very influential. But as Don Browning argues:

At its best, practical theology in this model simply applied the results of exegetical, church historical and systematic theology to the concrete operations of church life or, more narrowly, to the activities of the clergy. At its worst, especially in more recent times, practical theology has been used as a catchphrase to refer to the practical training of candidates for the clergy—a training ... largely divorced from theological foundations and dominated by assumptions, knowledge and technologies taken over from the social sciences.³³

Browning and others have reclaimed practical theology as theology which self-consciously places itself in the midst of practical concerns.³⁴ It is shaped by immediate issues and, ideally, shapes our response to those issues. Practical theology is situation-based and lives in interplay with other theological disciplines.³⁵ While all theology is ultimately practical in nature, argues Browning, theological reflection lies at the most practical end of it.³⁶ It places itself in the two-way crossfire between ideas and the pressing choices we have to make in ministry and mission. It does not isolate itself from biblical, historical and broader theological concerns; indeed it is constant interplay with them, depending on them in order to be truly theological and not merely practical.

Practical theology brings to all of theology the method of praxis, the dialectical interplay of action and reflection. Its concern with human liberation and growth, whether pastorally or politically, is deeply missional. It is willing to begin with specifics and move to broader questions, though it stays grounded in events and stories. It begins with particular people, cultures and events in their variety.³⁷ It tends to move through

³³ Don S Browning, 'The revival of practical theology', *Christian Century* 101.4 (1–8 February 1984), available at <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=1373>, 13.

³⁴ Stephen Pattison and James Woodward, 'An introduction to pastoral and practical theology', in *The Blackwell reader in pastoral and practical theology*, eds. James Woodward and Stephen Pattison (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 1–19.

³⁵ Alastair V Campbell, 'The nature of practical theology', in *Theology and practice*, ed. Duncan Forrester (London: Epworth, 1990), 18.

³⁶ Don S Browning, *A fundamental practical theology: Descriptive and strategic proposals* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 230.

³⁷ Tite Tiénou and Paul G Hiebert, 'Missional theology', *Missiology* 34.2 (2006), 230.

phases similar to the simple framework of ‘see, judge, act’—followed by the Young Catholic Worker movement—which begins with the situation, uses theological and other resources in forming a response and then engages in action.³⁸

Missiology as a subject area clearly fits comfortably within practical theology as long as we follow Browning rather than Schleiermacher.

Drawing on the Social Sciences and Other Secular Disciplines

Practical theology, more than biblical studies, history and systematic theology, draws on the social sciences. All theological branches have conversation partners. Theology particularly uses philosophy, while biblical studies uses linguistics, hermeneutics and archaeology amongst others. In practical theology, preaching uses communications theory, while pastoral care uses psychology, sociology, counselling and systems theory just to name a few.

Missiology as practical theology draws heavily on anthropology, sociology and cultural analysis to better understand culture, context and how people act in groups.³⁹ It draws on linguistics and communication theory to better understand the dynamics of translation and faith-sharing. In its commitment to justice, peace and the integrity of creation it draws on politics, economics, law, international relations, peace studies and ecology. In its commitment to understand and work with those of other faiths it draws on religious studies. In its practical outworking in mission situations it may draw upon community development, international aid, health sciences, education, agriculture, language teaching, aviation—and on it goes. These are only illustrative, as there is no limit on the academic disciplines and areas of expertise that potentially assist Christian mission in participating with God in transforming the world towards the fullness of life in God.

The conversation between missiology and the social sciences needs to be an ongoing, critical and open one. Tensions between missiology and anthropology, for example, have cropped up regularly, as anthropologists have accused missiologists of only studying cultures in order to change them and missiologists have accused anthropologists of naively believing that they only observe and do not change the people they are watching.

It is possible for missiology to distort social sciences in the process of using them.⁴⁰

It is also possible to import into missiology values or methods from the social sciences which are at odds with the gospel.⁴¹ Take, for example, the Homogeneous Unit Principle of the Church Growth Movement, which observes that people become Christians most easily when they don’t have to cross racial, linguistic, or class barriers.⁴² Critics have argued that this sociological description of human behaviour should not

³⁸ Cyril Hally, ‘Missionary discipleship’, Paper given at the Australian Association for Mission Studies (AAMS) Conference, Canberra, 2–5 October 2008, Available at http://www.csu.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/94733/Hally.pdf.

³⁹ Charles R Taber, *To understand the world, to save the world: The interface between missiology and the social sciences* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000), 93–102.

⁴⁰ Scherer, ‘Missiology as a discipline and what it includes’, 182.

⁴¹ Edward Rommen and Gary Corwin, *Missiology and the social sciences: Contributions, cautions and conclusions* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1996).

⁴² Donald A McGavran, *Understanding church growth*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 163.

override the biblical call to proclaim the gospel across all barriers.⁴³ (And then the missiological discussion begins.)

6. A Field Rather Than a Discipline

Can missiology claim to be an academic discipline, with its own ideas and ways of testing them? Is it mission science, as Schmidlin argued a century ago?

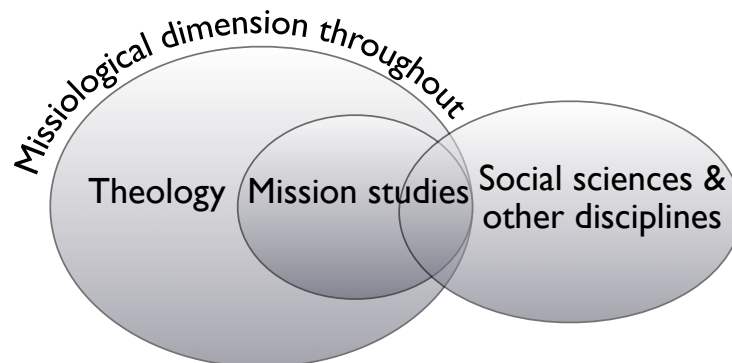
Philosopher Paul Hirst argued that you have a form of knowledge, or an academic disciplines, when you have distinctive concepts, a network of relationships between them, testable propositions and techniques for testing these propositions against experience (1974).⁴⁴ If this is what is required, it is clear that missiology is not a discipline because it is so intertwined with other disciplines.

Using Hirst's language, missiology is closer to a field of knowledge, unified by its common interest and a community of scholars, drawing readily on a range of disciplines. In the case of missiology it is driven not only by the desire to understand but also by the desire to change the world (praxis). It is as interdisciplinary as you could imagine.

So far, I have argued that missiology ideally both permeates a broad missionary theology and acts as a focus for exploring mission practice in specific mission studies. In neither case, I would suggest, should it pretend to be a distinctive discipline. When there are specific mission studies, they are still merely a focus, not a science or a form of knowledge.

In the form of a diagram the relationships could be set out as follows:

Figure 2



7. Conclusion

In suggesting to the whole of theology that it is essentially missiological in character missiology is not mounting a takeover bid. Rather, it is simply reminding theology, particularly where it has lost its missional edge, that the whole of Christian faith is a response to a missionary God and that faith's search for understanding is a response in

⁴³ Orlando E Costas, *The church and its mission: A shattering critique from the Third World* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1974), 138.

⁴⁴ Paul H Hirst, 'Liberal education and the nature of knowledge', in *Knowledge and the curriculum: A collection of philosophical papers* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974).

worship and mission by the whole community of faith. Theological education is privileged to be a part of that response and, properly understood, has a permeating missiological dimension. That is, it is full of the recognition that the church is called to participate in the mission of God.

While reminding theology of its missiological character, missiology recognises its own need to depend on and learn from all other areas of theological study. On one hand, the missiological dimension will be embedded in biblical subjects, church history, systematic theology and the whole range of practical theology subject areas. On the other hand, mission studies will serve missionary-praxis by drawing on both the rest of theology and on the social sciences and other academic disciplines.

Its disciplinary standing in academia is of little concern. But its role in calling the church to participate in the mission of God in a reflective and active way is its central concern. Let us not worry about whether we will become a more respectable academic discipline in the future. Rather let us, both in theology and missiology, call followers of Jesus to join God's mission to transform the world.

[This lecture, along with others given at MIT, can be downloaded in PDF from the Resources page at www.rosslangmead.com.]