

# Perspectives on family and youth ministry embedded in the *missio Dei* – an African perspective

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The largest part of the population in Africa is classified as youth, but most churches in Africa are still without a contextual African family and youth theology. In many instances, the first question which is asked by churches is *how* to reach families and youth, without understanding *who* the ones are that are involved and *what* the calling is of those who participate in the ministry, as well as who those families and youth are that are ministered too. This article will contribute to the theological understanding of why a family and youth ministry specific for Africa is important. Since identity is a key issue in family and youth ministry, the article takes a short reality check on African family and youth ministry in relation to identity. A missional hermeneutical key is proposed and attention is given to the *what* question. In the last part, family and youth ministry is discussed from the *missio trinitatis Dei* perspective to give perspectives on the *how*, *who* and *what* questions.

**Perspektiewe op 'n gesins- en jeugbediening vanuit die *missio Dei* – 'n Afrika-perspektief.**

Die meeste kerke in Afrika beskik nie oor 'n kontekstuele teologie vir 'n gesins- en jeugbediening spesifiek vir Afrika nie, alhoewel die grootste gedeelte van die bevolking in Afrika as *jeug* geklassifiseer word. Wanneer daar aan gesins- en jeugbediening gedink word, is die eerste vraag wat gewoonlik gevra word *hoe* dit gedoen word, sonder om duidelikheid te verkry oor *wie* by die bediening betrokke is en *wat* die roeping van die bedienaars is, asook *wie* die gesinne en die jeug is wat bedien word. Hierdie artikel wil 'n bydrae lewer tot die teologiese verstaan van waarom 'n eie gesins- en jeugbediening vir Afrika belangrik is. Aangesien die vraag oor identiteit wesenlik in gesins- en jeugbediening is, word oorsigtelik na omstandighede in Afrika gekyk om daardeur gesinne en die jeug se identiteit binne 'n bepaalde konteks te plaas. 'n Missionale hermeneutiek word as sleutel voorgestel om die roepings- of *wat*-vraag te beantwoord. Laastens word gesins- en jeugbediening in Afrika vanuit die *missio trinitatis Dei* bespreek as 'n perspektief om die *hoe*, *wie* en *wat*-vrae te beantwoord.

## Introduction

The problem that is attended to in this article is the fact that there is a lack of understanding within the church in Africa<sup>1</sup> of the importance of family and youth ministry. Very few material are available that are specifically focused on African families and youth. It is also important to notice that there are great diversities in African families and youth; thus it is not possible to discuss them as a homogeneous group without generalising.

To answer the critical question on how to reach the families and youth<sup>2</sup> who have an African worldview<sup>3</sup>, with the Good News of the presence of the trinitarian God amongst them, attention must be given to questions like *who* must reach them and *what* exactly the calling of African family and youth ministry comprises. The question arising from this is how one locates the point of contact in the relationship between the 'natural human' and the trinitarian God. Some general point of contact (sometimes external to the church) becomes necessary for the task of making God known. It is in this regard that a contribution to the *who* and the *how* of family and youth ministry can be made from the theological understanding of the *missio trinitatis Dei*. Flett (2010:4) states that 'Missio Dei theology illustrates well that the cleavage of church from mission derives from a cleavage within God's own life'. If the African family<sup>4</sup> and youth ministry does not

1. This article is written from a South African perspective and focuses on sub-Saharan Southern parts of Africa.

2. The debate on 'who are the youth in Africa?' continues (Chigunta 2002). In this article, *youth* includes all young people between 4–30 years of age who belong to a community in Africa, whether that community is a family, a group or a gang. Nel (2013:51–52) clearly indicates that youth are defined and viewed differently during different periods in (South) Africa.

3. It is too simplistic to talk about a homogeneous African worldview, as it is made up of African traditionalism, colonialism, modernism, post modernism and even post-post modernism.

4. In this article, the concept of *family* is used as an inclusive concept and is defined by narratives. A family might thus be described as follows: 'Any group who refer to and experience themselves as a family must be regarded as a family.' Family then becomes a functional concept (cf. Muller 2009:11).

have a sound theological founding in the triune God, it will only consist of humanistic programmes without enriching and transforming people's lives.

## A reality check

The 2010–2011 International Year of Youth gives the following overview of youth in Africa:

- Youth (aged 15–24) constitute slightly more than 20% of Africa's population.
- In 2009, the youth unemployment rate was 11.9% in sub-Saharan Africa and 23.7% in North Africa, mostly affecting young females.
- Literacy rates in the region have improved generally. Over the last two decades, rates for young females rose from 58% to 66.6%, compared with 72% to 78.4% for young men.
- In 2007, an estimated 3 200 000 young people were living with HIV in sub-Saharan Africa alone.
- More than one out of two deaths amongst young African females is as a result of AIDS or AIDS-related illnesses.

It is not within the scope of this article to give a detailed discussion of the context of Africa; it just wants to highlight some influential issues regarding African family and youth ministry. If the mainline missionary churches<sup>5</sup> want to talk about youth ministry in the African context, they must be prepared to move out of their theological comfort zone, which does not always address the socio-economic and spiritual questions that are asked by African family and youth ministry. Some of the mainline missionary churches, as well as some privileged mainline charismatic churches in Africa, will have to realise that their members are part of the richest 20% of the world population and that there is a huge social, economic and spiritual gap between them and the most people of Africa (Parratt 2004):

According to the World Bank figures, the gap between the richest 20% of the population of the world and the poorest has more than doubled in the last thirty years. Eighty percent of the world's income is consumed by the richest 20%, and at the other end of the scale the poorest 20% consume less than 1.5% of its wealth. [...] 50% of sub-Saharan Africa is living in poverty, and 37 000 children are dying each day of preventable or of poverty-related diseases. (p. 5)

It is in these circumstances of poverty that it must be realised that believing *in* God is not the issue. The real issue is believing God, believing that he is present and that he wants to, can and will make a difference. What does God expect from his church when 37 000 children die of preventable or poverty-related diseases each day? What does family and youth ministry entail in these circumstances? Kotze (2011:36) describes the influence of the AIDS pandemic on families and youth orphans as 'the fact that the rights of millions of children to be free of abuse, exploitation and violence are compromised in totality by the loss of a traditional family environment'. In this reality of the loss of family structures,

<sup>5</sup>Mainline missionary churches refers to the churches which came mostly from Europe to do missionary work in Africa.

youth ministry cannot simply be Christian information, Sunday school and catechism which are run in a legalistic manner.

Since Africa hosts one of the world's youngest populations (in 2010, 70% of the population was younger than 30 years of age according to International Year of Youth 2010:1), youth ministry in Africa needs to take the influence of globalisation through technology seriously. It needs to consider the process and influence of consumerism, secularity (which might look different and means something else in Africa), technology, and the struggle for human justice and dignity, which characterises the *historical moment* of nations in the Third World seriously (Parratt 2004:8). It is true that not only globalisation, but also African traditionalism, worldviews and the context of postcolonialism will codetermine the content of an African family and youth ministry.

With the influence of globalisation, today's urban African families and youth are less defined by geography than by technology, whilst there is no access to technology in many rural parts of Africa. In urban areas, most Africans are using technology like cell phones and Facebook to enhance their knowledge of and opportunities in the world. In many instances this leads to a culture shock, since it shifts perceptions and unfortunately in some instances it also encourages the culture of consumerism, which is so vibrant in the developed world (cf Joubert 2007:7–9; Nurnberger 2007:215). Nel (2013:52) asks the important question 'What does "youth" mean in the virtual spaces of social networking websites and applications?' The globalisation and social networks help the youth and families to ask important questions about their social lives and to become more aware of the *power* of democracy and prosperity. It teaches them about the kingdoms of the world and shapes their worldviews. But does it help them to find the meaning of their lives within an African context of traditionalism, postcolonialism, modernity and postmodernity? Does it help them to discover their identity in the kingdom of God?

## Identity

Floomsbee (2007) uses the term *reculturing* when he describes a new kind of youth ministry. Youth ministry must be transformational; the church must aim for Christian discernment to recognise and understand what God is doing at the moment with those who are being ministered to. Being aware of the western mind set of development when thinking about poverty and Africa (cf. Bruwer 2001) we must be aware that: 'Ministry is not something we "do" to someone else. It is a holy way of living towards God and towards one another' (Dean & Foster 1998:9). Doing theology in this context has the implication of continuously testing boundaries of tradition and sometimes even push them beyond the accepted orthodoxies (De Cruchy 2011:9). Reading Khauoe's (2011:1–12) description of the churches in Africa, he concurs with Dean and Foster that some churches in Africa '[...] traded holiness for effectiveness, charisma

for careers, and soulfulness for savvy. In the meantime, youth got lost. So did many adults' (Dean & Foster 1998:9). A family and youth ministry must help the youth, not only to gain knowledge about the world through technology, but also to gain wisdom in order to live life to the fullest in Africa with all its challenges by finding their identity in the trinitarian God.

African family and youth ministry is not about programmes or techniques that portrays an irrelevant Jesus to the context of Africa, but about people living in the covenantal-character of God. These characteristics must be visible and known throughout the local faith community. Hence, the character and identity of the faith community are not in the first place determined by its members or their circumstances, but (as new creation) are determined by Christ, the head of the church. The application of this covenantal-characteristics and identity in society will be influenced by the context and culture of the specific society.

'African spirituality is characterised by presence' (Nurnberger 2007:47), therefore African family and youth ministry is all about finding identity in a relationship with the trinitarian God (cf. Nel 2000:28–48). Choosing a god is fundamental in the process of identity formation and soon people discover that not any god will do. Many youth (and adults) direct their lives to things like power, status, money, education, drugs alcohol, and technology. A good example is the *Skothane*<sup>6</sup> sub-culture amongst the youth in South Africa. These are common gods, but people hunger for a god that is bigger than the self, even more so in Africa's traditional culture of *fear* (cf. Kiamu 2011:102; Oduro *et al.* 2008:21). If a god is chosen who is too small to transcend human's limitations and who, therefore, can neither save nor transform, people will keep on seeking (Dean & Foster 1998:16). Whilst appraising the political changes in South Africa, Pityana (1995:89) questions the influence of the church ministry in the personal life of members who gather on Sundays. African family and youth ministry must present an incarnated God (Parratt 2004):

... a God whose 'robe is covered with dust', who somehow shares in the marginalisation of non-people, and pain of the oppressed: but further, a God who is active in doing something about it in the process of human liberation. (p. 12)

This ministry is not only about the liberation of people from bad circumstances, because circumstances will not save people, they must be lead to faith and obedience in Christ (Wright 2006:287). African family and youth ministry must be a redemptive and restorative ministry liberating people to find a new identity of freedom in 'giving' (cf. Volf 2006:7–9) within the context of Africa.

6.'Izikhothane (or Skothane or Ukukhothana) refers to South African showmanship or dance battles in which individuals or groups of individuals compete against each other in front of large crowds to determine which party is wealthier. These 'battles' are performed using material items such as money, mobile phones, clothes, and/or alcohol. In most instances a battle is won by the intentional destruction or wastage of one's own expensive items in order to demonstrate the lack of concern for such material possessions due to the ability to afford more of the same. A competitor's chances of victory are improved by having items that are more expensive than those of their opponent' (Wikipedia).

One of the main questions for African family and youth ministry is: How is it possible to speak or teach about a God of love in a broken world which is scarcely human? According to Parratt (2004:5), the church will have to analyse and reflect upon the social and political situation in which people live before daring to speak and teach about the presence of God. Without analyses and reflection (discernment), churches may dehumanise people even more if they engage them in unsustainable development, creating expectations that cannot be met. Churches can do the 'right thing' for the youth to liberate them from their circumstances, preaching a new life and lifestyle to African families and youth without listening to their real needs.<sup>7</sup> African family and youth ministry must participate in the *missio Dei*, sitting with families and youth, listening, and discovering the presence of God in their midst discerning his will in their specific context.

Christian faith was present in ancient Africa long before the mainline missionary churches' missionaries came to Africa (Oduro *et al.* 2008:4). The truth is that the social and political situation of African families and youth will only change when people are able to discern the work of the Holy Spirit Who is not only confined within the official structures of the church or society (cf. Nel 2013:41). Transforming and saving people is the purpose and the reason for the *missio Dei*. One of the ways in which the church participates in the *missio Dei* is through African family and youth ministry.

## A missional hermeneutical key for African family and youth ministry

Different contexts and a constantly changing world demand from the church to take a new look at the hermeneutics that are used, especially in African family and youth ministry, since youth culture is always changing. Nel (2000:28) states that 'in youth ministry, it is one of the central concerns to understand and know the youth and their "reigning" culture well'. The hermeneutical key that is used will determine the ministry to the youth (cf. Senter 2001). Swart and Yates (2012) describes a new appreciation for a 'hermeneutics of listening' when working with children. Indeed, this hermeneutical key can enhance the youth ministry, since it focuses on the individual or group and the context. However, this article will plead for a more holistic hermeneutical key, described as 'missional hermeneutics' (Wright 2006:33–47).

### Missional hermeneutics is more than a 'biblical foundation for mission'

Nel (2000:9) describes the Bible as giving direction to youth ministry and not as a manual or programme for the 'how to do' of youth ministry. Therefore, to work with individual texts when trying to establish a hermeneutical foundation

7. When writing about the needs of Africa, Oduro *et al.* (2008:22) states that ancestors, magic and impurity, must be taken fully into account, otherwise the church can't maintain the Good News that has been proclaimed effectively.

for family and youth ministry in Africa is risky. Bosch (1993) observes:

What is decisive for the Church today is not the formal agreement between what she is doing and what some isolated biblical text seems to be saying, but rather her relationship with the essence of the message of Scripture. (p. 440)

The essence of the message of Scripture, according to Wright (2006), is that God wants to make himself known to the people and this is the proposed hermeneutical key for an African family and youth ministry. In Africa, the church must function as a 'hermeneutic lebensraum', focusing on making the presence of God known through Word and deed within the specific context of the community.

### Missional hermeneutics are more than multicultural hermeneutical perspectives

Missional hermeneutics must at least include the recognition of multiplicity of perspectives, contexts and cultures from which, and within which, people in Africa read the biblical texts. The 'hermeneutics of listening' (Swart & Yates 2012) in youth ministry is very important in this regard. If the church only listens to the *children*, though, it is inadequate hermeneutics, since she must not only understand the context of the youth, but also discern the revelation of God within that specific context. Wright (2006:41), argues that 'the words of Jesus "opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures"' (Lk 24:45). The church must also listen to the Word; Jesus himself provided the hermeneutical coherence within which all disciples must read the Bible. The hermeneutical key for the church in Africa is in need of the *missio Dei*, in other words the story that leads *up to Christ* (messianic reading) and the story that leads *on from Christ* (missional reading). Only when the Word opens the minds of the families and youth in Africa to understand God's revelation in their specific context, they will experience new purpose in life.

### Missional hermeneutics are more than contextual theologies<sup>8</sup> and advocacy readings

Missional hermeneutics read the Bible with the intention to liberate people from oppression and exploitation, and to save them from selfishness and sin. Missional hermeneutics reads the Bible with the conviction that my personal life story is part of the biblical of God's purpose for the nations (Wright 2006:44).

Understanding African family and youth ministry from this mission of God and as the church's worshipping response to all that God is and does, it is clear that the whole church is advocate for God before it is advocate for others. Hendriks (2004:30–32) refers to a 'theology of discernment' when questions are asked about the way in which to participate in God's missional praxis and how critical it is for faith

communities to participate. Describing discernment, he uses Van der Ven's terminology of 'correlational hermeneutics'. This is a two-dimensional exegesis of the world and the Word that takes place in a gathered faith community that relies actively on God's presence and guidance. African family and youth ministry cannot be a separate ministry from the other ministries or even the ministry of a few of the local faith communities; all ministries must accommodate the family and the youth. Family and youth ministry is not only founded in God, but also in a local faith community (cf. Dean & Foster 1998; Nel 2000). Therefore, youth ministry is not something the church do only *to* and *for* the youth, but also *with* and *from* the youth into the world.

### Missional hermeneutics are more than postmodern hermeneutics

Within 'missional hermeneutics', there is room for plurality, but not for relativism. In the postmodern, relativist pluralism:

[...] ideology allows for no absolute or universal truth. While tolerating truth claims, it views them as no more than cultural constructs. (This position is logically self-destructing, for it affirms as a single absolute truth that there is no single absolute truth.) Such pluralism asserts 'tolerance' as an ultimate value, but it can take oppressive forms in countries where secularism or aggressive atheism governs the public arena. (Lausanne Movement 2010: The Cape Town Commitment)

In the Old Testament, Israel wrestled with the need to relate the faith of YAHWE to changing cultural and religious contexts, but within the story of the Bible, there is at work the God whose mission is evident from creation to new creation. 'In the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Christian faith offers a centre that holds not just one, but more alternatives from which to choose' (Dean & Foster 1998:15).

In Africa, with its rich oral tradition of different creation stories and traditional beliefs, family and youth ministry needs to work with the grand narrative of the triune God within all the different African contexts. Although the plurality in the context must influence the hermeneutics, the context can never determine the hermeneutics. The grand narrative of God stays authoritative.

### African family and youth ministry as a paradigm of the trinitarian *missio Dei*

This article argues that African family and youth ministry is an activity of the triune God himself, and part of the *missio Dei*.<sup>9</sup> God is not to be treated as an object or force that can be used or manipulated, but as a Being (Erickson 2001:94). God is an end in himself, not a means to an end. Therefore, a missional hermeneutical paradigm is used in reading the Bible as the grand narrative of God's mission.

8. This term itself betrayed the arrogant ethnocentricity of the West, for the assumption was that other places are contexts and they do their theology for those contexts; we, of course, have the real thing, the objective contextless theology' (Wright 2006:42).

9. Barth was the first clear exponent of a new theological paradigm which broke radically with an Enlightenment approach to theology. It was at the Willingen Conference of the IMC (1952) that the idea, not the exact term, *missio Dei*, first surfaced clearly (Bosch 1991:390).

*Missio Dei* understands that the mission is derived from the very nature of God (World Council of Churches 2013). The faith community is the 'human imaging of the Trinity' (Volf 2006:6; World Council of Churches 2013). According to Flett (2010):

Barth's alternative formulation held that God is who He is in his act. 'The essence of God which is seen in his revealed name is his being and therefore his act as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.' (p. 2)

No human action sets the conditions necessary to God's acting; God alone makes himself known. Mission is then understood as God, making himself known to the people since his works in us does not work without us (Volf 2006:6; cf. Wright 2006)

Family and youth ministry is now seen as not only participating in this mission of God, but as grounded in the Being of the trinitarian God and not in ecclesiology or soteriology (cf. Senter 2001). African family and youth ministry, as described above, is not understood as a geographical expansion of Christianity from the West to the non-Christian world, or as church growth, but as a theological expansion through inculturation, as an activity of the Father, sending his Son, and the Father and the Son sending the Spirit, and the Father, Son and Spirit sending the church to the world (Bosch 1991:390). It is thus about the kingdom of God.

### God the Father and African family and youth ministry: To love and be loved

The church is not the place of origin or the goal of African family and youth ministry. The origin is the trinitarian God himself and the goal is the glorification of God. The family and the youth originate in and are sustained by God the Father's own action in creating and calling the world to himself. *Missio Dei* is the very mission of God in creation, redemption and continual sanctification (Flett 2010:7; World Council of Churches 2013). God the Father's mission to this cosmos is through his covenant with his people. It is about the Father's unconditional love, his commitment to be the God of his people and their descendants and to bless them, so that they will be a blessing to the cosmos, as is described in his covenant (Gn 12:3) and administered in the sacraments (Baptism and Holy Communion). As *immitatio Trinitatis* the church must show the same unconditional love commitment to families and youth (Mt 5:43–48; 18), who must realise that the covenant of the Father makes their life story part of God's story. In communion with the Trinity the ministry will at least participate in creativity, generosity, reconciliation and identity (Volf 2006:7).

The implications and importance of a good Pateriology for African family and youth ministry must be emphasised, especially as the One who provides within the reality of evil that is also found in Africa (cf. Migliore 2014:121–142). The trinitarian God is different from the distant Supreme Being who is worshipped in Africa (Marumo 2013:45–46). God as revealed in the Bible is the personal and present God who is involved with people's daily lives. When Jesus calls God

his Father, he uses the word *Abba*. Joachim Jeremias (1971) shows that this is a sign of trust and security. Others talk of closeness and intimacy. Our Father in heaven is not the absent Father who is faceless and distant; he is a good Father who wants to be known by all people, as he knows everyone. He wants to live in a relationship with every human being, in every stage of their lives. In a world, where so many fathers are absent, this must be an integral part and focus of African family and youth ministry, namely to make God known as the ever present, caring Father.

Burger (1997:9–68) describes God as a Father who takes care of people because he loves us. God's love can be described as grace and as embracing, liberating and sanative. Those who believe are God's children, because he adopted them in love and gave them the right to become his children (Jn 1:12). To realise the greatness of the love of God, people must look at the cross. God loves all people purposefully. His love is holy and he is jealous, because he who has created us knows our real identity. He knows what we can be and can do and he wants all people to live in their real identity and to their full potential.

God is also described as the Almighty who created man with a free will and gave him responsibility. That is why he even allowed people to crucify his Son. It is strange that God's power is shown in his 'weakness' for us (Hs 11:8–9), but he is also the Creator Father who has the right to our lives. African family and youth ministry must be careful not to focus only on the ability of the Father to take care of every need, but must also remember that he is the righteous Father who wants obedience to him (cf. Wright 2010:69, 78, 85). In this regard, the church must be especially aware in her ministry of sin as *incurvatus in se*, because the Father does not only love the faithful, the youth or the family, he loves the cosmos (Jn 3:16).

One of the implications of a good Pateriology is that youth ministry is not about the 'church of tomorrow', but about the church of today that is taking part in God's mission. When youth ministry is not reduced to a vague involvement with the youth in their socio-political sphere, it soon becomes a pure image of the church's general direction, with the effect that it provides theological legitimation and enhances the ecumenical emphasis on the church. As a consequence, youth ministry then focuses on making God known to and through young people, because he loves them, and not for ecclesiological (to get them into church) or soteriological (to save their souls) reasons in the first place, but to glorify God. In Africa, which is viewed as a youth continent, with its traditional views on authority, youth, must not only be seen as the object of the ministry, but also the subject of youth ministry, as part of the *missio Dei*.

The church is worshipping God through participation in his involvement in the lives of (young) people, regardless of their reaction. Family and youth ministry is thus about helping (young) people to understand that they are part of

the God story in this world. 'Children are not a surprise to God. God knows about their existence, even though the ones from whom they spring are not even aware of their moment of conception' (Nel 2000:11). The Bible is portraying the Father as the trustful one whose home is open and safe for lost people (cf. Lk 15).

If the church in Africa does not commit unconditionally to an African family and youth ministry, the assumed covenant will become a contract, which in essence will become a conditional ministry. By the grace of God, he is not committing himself to Africa conditionally, but unconditionally. In sub-Saharan Africa, with its history of violence and distrust, it is important for the church to commit itself unconditionally to families and youth for no other reason than the fact that God loves them. This unconditional love of the Father is shown in the fact that he sent his Son, Jesus Christ.

### The Lord Jesus Christ is a graceful God, teaching to forgive and to be forgiven

Within the traditional African context with its animism and dynamism (cf. Nurnberger 2007:9–10; Oduro *et al.* 2008:17–31), it is important to make the triune God known as he reveals himself in his Son, Jesus Christ as Redeemer. For African family and youth ministry, the importance of Jesus as revelation of the triune God is only recognised when the love of and for the Father is shown in Jesus ethical obedience. The fact that God sent his Son gives everybody the opportunity to become a new person in Christ, living with hope in our circumstances.

Scripture states in John 1:18: 'No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared him' (KJV). On the other hand, Mbiti (1990:29) remarks that God is no stranger to African people and in African traditional life, there are no atheists. He quotes an Ashanti proverb that says: 'No one shows a child the *Supreme Being*. That means that everybody knows of God's existence almost by instinct, and even children *know Him*' (the author's emphasis<sup>10</sup>). Seemingly, the theological view of God who sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to save us, needs to be further developed in the African understanding of God (Supreme Being) (cf. Beyers & Mphahlele 2009). It might indeed be asked whether Africa believes in a trinitarian God or in a Tritheism (cf. Nyamiti 2007:369). Mbiti (1990) explains:

As for the love of God, there are practically no direct sayings that God loves. This is something reflected also in the daily lives of African peoples, in which it is rare to hear people talking about love. A person shows his love for another more through action than through words. (p. 38)

In compliance with this understanding and the general living conditions in Africa, an African family and youth ministry will focus on Jesus Christ's crucifixion as an act of the love of God the Father.

10. The author wants to show that Mbiti is using the terms *Supreme Being* and *God* as synonyms. According to my understanding and discussion, it is not the same subject we are talking about.

It is also important to focus on the relationship of the Father with the Son. It is the Father's unconditional relationship with the cosmos, which has been fulfilled when he give his Son to die on the cross so that all people can be saved through forgiveness. In Africa, where people live with the fear (Oduro *et al.* 2008:21) of disturbing the 'forces or relationships', it is crucial to make it known that in Christ, all forces are conquered.<sup>11</sup> He has 'disarmed the powers and authorities, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross' (Col 2:15). There is no longer any sacrifices needed, 'since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand' (Rm 5:1–2). In this regard, we have become a new creation in Christ.

A Christocentric African family and youth ministry will emphasise our freedom in Christ, and the grace of God who gives us the ability and responsibility to forgive, since we are forgiven (Volf 2006:7). The new identity and freedom in Christ will also give families and youth the courage to stand against the misuse and cruelty happening in families, especially against women and youth, since giving includes forgiveness. The grace of God is that he is not curved in on himself or concerned only with himself, but that he is concerned with the cosmos. He gave his Son to 'normalise' our relationship with him and he makes himself known to us through love and forgiveness.

The best picture of God's love is found in the crucifixion at Golgotha. The question about God's presence in this world and in Africa can be answered best from the cross. Today, those African people who hold to their traditional beliefs find themselves with this narrative problem that for them, the story of Jesus ended at the cross; therefore he is viewed as one of the ancestors,<sup>12</sup> since the resurrection of Christ is not believed. Others, even believers, want to be part of the resurrection without the cross; they want a new life without sacrificing the old life (Moltmann 1973:7). In Africa, many people think the ancestors, or development, education, science and technology will help them. As reformed Christians, we are aware that the problem is much deeper – it is not just ignorance. Christian faith is not in the cross, because there is nothing good about the cross. Christians believe in the One who was crucified. Christian faith is all about the Christ who was crucified, but Who was also raised from the dead (1 Cor 15).

The resurrection of Christ is more than just a literary understanding of resurrection. He did not just 'wake up' from sleep; he did not only become alive again.<sup>13</sup> 'So the risen Christ has to be seen as a spiritual reality and Paul says as

11. In discussing the consequences for the fellowship of believers Nurnberger (2007:124) writes: 'This means that those who still fear and try to please the ancestors (Sotho: *go phasa badimo*) are welcome in the Church if they want to be part of the community of believers'.

12. For different perspectives on whether Jesus can be viewed as ancestor or not, read Beyers and Mphahlele (2009).

13. For a full discussion on the difference between the risen Christ and the belief in ancestors, please read Nurnberger (2007:89–96).

much (2 Cor 3:17f.)' (Nurnberger 2007:93). According to the witness of the disciples, they witnessed the difference in Jesus after the resurrection. The resurrection of Christ is described as the first fruits of the *parousia*. In this sense, the Bible says that Christ was 'already' raised, as would all believers at the second coming of Christ. This gives Africa hope that we will be with God in his fullness one day. It is not a 'pie in the sky' theology, though. God is not absent from the present Africa that we live in; we are not left behind as orphans. Africa is not just another 'child-headed household'. Jesus is ruling heaven and earth from the right hand of the Father, and the Father and the Son sent the Spirit who is with us, in us and amongst us, and Who empowers us.

This is the grace of God in Jesus Christ that is made known to all people, through the church, so that their self-centeredness is forgiven and that, as new people in Christ, Christians have the ability to forgive other people. In Africa with its brutal wars, genocides, colonialism, violence, HIV and AIDS, poverty and economics, and everything else that breaks up families (Kotze 2011:36), African family and youth ministry must be embedded in the grace and forgiveness of God as it is revealed in the *missio Dei*. This is a ministry of reconciliation and forgiveness, of hope, new possibilities and a new life in Christ. African family and youth ministry is about helping people, families and youth to realise that they belong to God in spite of who they are, or what they have become, but only because of who God is. Indeed God reaches out to people, even before they reach out to him.

If a (African) family and youth ministry is not based on grace, it will become a ministry of laws. In the African context, where fundamentalism<sup>14</sup> and traditionalism with its authoritarianism and laws are sometimes ruling families and youth brutally, the grace of forgiveness is still a strange concept in many instances.<sup>15</sup> The church needs to commit her to African families and youth unconditionally and make known the God of grace and forgiveness, whilst the church itself accepts the forgiveness.

## God the Holy Spirit Who empowers us to serve and to be served

In Africa, Mbiti (1990) states:

... it is commonly believed that God is Spirit. Even if, in thinking or talking about Him, African peoples may often use anthropomorphic images. As far as it is known, there are no images or physical representations of God by African people: this is a clear indication they consider Him to be a Spiritual Being. (p. 34)

It seems that traditional Africans, must work hard, bring offerings and do certain rituals to keep the Supreme Being

14. For a discussion of *fundamentalism* in African Traditional religion, see Sakuba (2008).

15. When Ezigbo (2008) discusses the development of Christology in Africa it is noteworthy that he does not refer to forgiveness and Jesus as the Savior from sin. This relates with his view to use the sources from the African context as equally or more important than the revelation of Scripture.

and ancestors happy. This might be described as a worship of fear (cf. Kiamu 2011:102; Oduro *et al.* 2008:21).

The Holy Spirit is not to be feared,<sup>16</sup> because he is our Comforter and Counsellor (Jn 14:26). In 2 Corinthians 3, the Holy Spirit is described as 'the Spirit of the living God' (2 Cor 3:3) and it is stated that this 'Spirit gives life' (2 Cor 3:6). The Spirit is the Lord and the Lord is the Spirit (2 Cor 3:17), and where 'the Lord, who is the Spirit' (2 Cor 3:18) is working, 'there is freedom' (2 Cor 3:17), competency (2 Cor 3:6) and amazing righteous glory (2 Cor 3:7–11), which gives 'hope' (2 Cor 3:12). The Spirit of the living God does not write his Word on paper or tablets of stone any longer, but on the hearts of people and they become living letters from Christ (2 Cor 3:1–6).

The Holy Spirit is the living God that gives life in creation (Gn 1:2), in the lives of believers, in their thinking, their convictions and their behaviour. The Spirit also gives life to the church (Acts; Ephesians; 1 Peter), but the most amazing of the Spirit is that it also gave life to Jesus Christ as Redeemer (Lk 1:35).

It is the Holy Spirit that calls people to preach the Good News (Is 6, 61). It is also the Holy Spirit that convicts people of sin, guides people into all truth and makes God known (Jn 16). It is the Spirit who strengthens believers and reveals the richness of the love of Christ known to them (Eph 3). The Holy Spirit makes God known, not through knowledge (*gnosis*) or certain texts, but through the fullness of God's Word. According to Romans 10, believers may confess that they live *ex auditi verbi* [from hearing the Word]. The Spirit, which goes out from the Father and the Son, gives families and youth a new life through the truth, the Word.

Through the gifts to the church, the Spirit empowers families and youth to lead a new life. One of the first visible fruits of the working of the Spirit was the church. The mainline missionary churches confess that they believe in one, holy, apostolic church (Nicene Creed). In Africa with its traditional communal view, the many independent (family) churches contribute to the experience that the church is divided and this contributes to a lack of *koinonia* and trust. The Holy Spirit gives gifts to individuals for the benefit of the church, not for the benefit of the individual (1 Cor 12). As the body of Christ, the church in Africa is equipped and empowered by the Spirit. The church must be the 'new' family where people learn to serve and to be served.

In Africa, as in most places, there are many power struggles. A common and conventional understanding of power is to influence another person (Balswick & Balswick 1989:27–30). This influence happens in most cases in Africa through

16. When the Bible refers to the fear of the Lord or Spirit it has to do with 'reverence and awe' (see Louw & Nida 1993:541). 53.59 φόβος<sup>δ</sup>, ου m; δέος, ους n; profound respect and awe for deity – 'reverence, awe.' φόβος<sup>δ</sup>: και πορευομένη τῷ φόβῳ τοῦ κυρίου 'and (the church) lived in reverence for the Lord' (Ac 9.31).

fear: fear of sorcery, fear of death and fear of 'powers'<sup>17</sup> (Oduro *et al.* 2008:21–23). Many of the mainline churches and leaders of the independent churches have also used power in a way which has assured the maintenance of their own more powerful position (Cochrane 2007:32). Empowering, though, is a biblical model for using power which is completely contrary to the common use of power. 'Empowering can be defined as the attempt to establish power in another person' (Balswick & Balswick 1989:28). It has to do with servant hood. This does not necessarily mean to give in to the other person's wishes or to give up your own power. Empowering is the active, intentional process of enabling another person to acquire power. Whilst human power is a commodity with limited supply, empowering is available in unlimited supply, because God's resources are inexhaustible and he gives freely for those who ask. This is the very character of God.

### The church as place of intimacy: To know and to be known

One of the major themes that runs through the Bible is that God knows us and that he wants to be known by us (Wright 2006). It is clearly argued by Van der Walt (2008:13–48) that the meaning of *sola Scriptura* must not be misunderstood as meaning that the Bible is the only source of God's revelation. His revelation must also be recognised in all its fullness as it is manifested in creation and incarnation. This continued interaction between the scriptural Word, creation as ordered by God's Word and the believers who are saved by the Word under the guidance of the Spirit is stressed. Therefore, we need the communion of believers to revise our imperfect understanding of God's creation, so that we may not misunderstand the Scriptures too (Van der Walt 2008:24). All four Gospels report that after the resurrection, Jesus commissioned his disciples to go and tell that he is alive. Christ creates and calls the church, as his body, to make him known through their presence in relationships in this world. 'The church is commissioned to celebrate life, and to resistant transform all life destroying forces, in the power of the Holy Spirit' (World Council of Churches 2013).

In his covenant (Gn 12:3), God has called the faith community to be a blessing to the nations. In a distrusting community, organisations, families and youth are playing deceptive games with each other. Through her participation in the *missio Dei*, the church will have to be open to, as well as reach out to, people who are hiding behind masks and are expressing fear and hate. The faith community must position herself in such a way that she knows and is known intimately by the African families and youth. As part of the *missio Dei*, the church will have to make an effort to listen, understand and want what is best for the families and youth in Africa, accepting differences and respecting uniqueness in a way of confirming their humanness. In this, the church is both a hermeneutic and an agogic 'lebensraum' (Nel 2000:18–25).

17.Nurnberger (2007:14) writes: 'In traditionalism ancestors are deemed "real" because their existential impact on the living is pervasive and decisive. Their reality is not located in their vitality, ..., but in their authority. Authority depends on power.'

Communication and relationships are built on trust and commitment. Where these two features are experienced, families and youth will share and be intimate. Where there is a lack of trust and commitment, instead of intimacy in relations and family, the church will experience a distance in its relation to the community.

## Conclusion

In answering the *how* question this article argues for a missional hermeneutical key for an Africa family and youth ministry with its diversities in worldviews; traditionalism, modernism, postmodernism, and its contextual theologies; black-theology, liberation-theology, African-theology, and different socio-historical backgrounds. This hermeneutical key views both the Old Testament and the New Testament as missional and founded in the *missio trinitatis Dei*. The *what* question is answered from the *missio Dei*. An African family and youth ministry embedded in the *missio trinitatis Dei* empowers people to live relationship-centred lives. All families and youth from Africa even those without fathers or mothers can live as God's representatives in the presence of the Father of the cosmos. Embedded in the *missio Dei*, African families that were bounded by fear of the 'spirits' can live in the freedom of Christ. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, African families and youth become witnesses of the great deeds of God, empowering the poor and the marginalised. As the body of Christ the church must participate in creating opportunities to listen to each other within families, and help families to listen to the world within the African context, and to listen to the trinitarian God, discerning his will. Within these spaces of listening the church functions as a hermeneutical community being an agogic sphere where it is normal to change and keep on changing, becoming more like Christ.

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