

Missiology at the School of Mission and Theology, Stavanger

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Missiology in Teaching, Exchange and Research

Missiological Orientation – a Common Focus

Missiological reflection and research penetrate the total activities of the School of Mission and Theology (Misjons­høgskolen, MHS), comprising the taught subjects, courses, the writing of master's theses and doctoral dissertations, as well as other research, networking and exchange programs. The institution was first founded in 1843, for educating missionary pastors for service abroad. Later it also became a training centre for missionary candidates and personnel in church and society in Norway. The focus of the MHS, however, has all along been the church's mission in the Two Third's World. Thus the study of religions, cultures and inter-cultural communication was an integral part of the curriculum long before history of religion became an academic discipline at the University of Oslo (1897). Missiological reflection has been part of the different theological disciplines, and these have in various ways contributed to missiological research in the institution.

In the following I shall first highlight how missiology is taught in the training of future pastors, missionaries and other church workers, and is an important focal point in most, if not all, the academic disciplines at MHS. Then follows a presentation of how missiology is reflected in the institution's exchange and networking programs. Finally I will show how missiology is reflected in our research work.

Missiology in a New Millennium

Nordic Missiology and Ecumenics was one of the main themes at the annual meeting and study days of the Nordic Institute of Missiology and Ecumenical

Research (NIME) in Uppsala in 2001.¹ An up-dated overview of missiology at MHS, Stavanger was then given by Professor Jan-Martin Berentsen and published in *Norsk Tidsskrift for Misjon* in the following year.² In my contribution I shall therefore not repeat what my distinguished colleague, now Professor Emeritus, then presented. Instead I shall focus on missiology at MHS since the turn of the millennium. The interested reader may also find it useful to consult the publication *Forskere i Misjonens Tjeneste* which was issued in connection with the 150th anniversary of MHS in 1993,³ for an overview of research at the institution during the period 1977-1993.⁴

As of the fall semester of 2001 the degree system of MHS became internationalised, and the institution has since offered bachelor, master and doctoral degree programs in theology.⁵ But also other degree programs are offered, such as the Bachelor in Intercultural Communication (from 2001),⁶ and the Bachelor in Bible Translation,⁷ a program which is conducted in co-operation with the Canada Institute of Linguistics at Trinity Western University (from 2006).⁸

¹ The key note presentation, by Professor Viggo Mortensen, "Nordic Missiology and Ecumenics", was published in *SMT* 89 (2001) 4, 439-453, and the following year three presentations concerning missiology and mission studies at the three theological faculties in Norway were published in *Norsk Tidsskrift for Misjon (NoTM)* 56 (2002) 1, 35-62, including MHS (41-50).

² Jan-Martin Berentsen, "Misjonsteologi ved Misjonshøgskolen", *NoTM* 56 (2002) 1, 41-50.

³ Tor Hauken & Arne B. Samuelsen (Eds.), *Forskere i Misjonens Tjeneste*, Stavanger: Misjonshøgskolens Forlag 1993.

⁴ Ingemar Öberg, Tor Hauken & Arne B. Samuelsen, "Forskning ved Misjonshøgskolen 1977-1993", in: *ibid.*, 145-185. The publication also contains other interesting essays on research relating to language and culture, sources for mission history and history of religion.

⁵ Already in 1994 the MHS started offering a M.Phil. degree program in theology in cooperation with the University of Bergen – a program especially offered for overseas students. The Ph.D. program was accredited by the Norwegian Government and launched in 2002.

⁶ For course description and curriculum, see http://www.mhs.no/pdf_doc/studieplan_BRIK.pdf.

⁷ For course descriptions and curriculum, see http://www.mhs.no/pdf_doc/studieplan_bibeloversettelse.pdf.

⁸ For further details regarding course descriptions and curricula for the different degree programs, see the MHS website: www.mhs.no ("Studietilbud" / "Study programs").

Theology of Mission(s) – Academic Discipline and Taught Subject

Berentsen was himself the creative force behind establishing the discipline *misjonsteologi* – ”theology of mission” – at MHS. He in particular has formed the content of this discipline in the institution during the last 25 years, has written a number of text books related to the subject,⁹ and advised numerous students of missiology in their writing of theses in missiology, master theses and doctoral dissertations.¹⁰ As retired professor (since March 1, 2006) Berentsen enjoys his *otium*, not in a leisurely fashion, but engaged in continued missiological research and teaching, recently in Kobe Lutheran Theological Seminary, Japan.

As Berentsen has clearly pointed out, missiology at MHS is both covered by a specific systematic theological discipline, Theology of Mission (*”Misjonsteologi”*), and represents at the same time a thematic focus on theology of mission, reflected in most, if not all of the theological disciplines taught at MHS.¹¹ These include the biblical, historical, systematic and practical disciplines of theology. Hence Church and Mission History covers the historical aspects of missiology, dealing with the motivation factors and historical reasons for the expansion of Christendom. Practical Theology deals with the methodological applications of missiology in the practical theological subjects. Also in the disciplines History of Religion and Culture and Intercultural Communication, a focus is put on missiologically relevant matters, such as religious expansion and religious encounters, and factors which further or prevent dialogue, interreligious encounters and intercultural communication.¹² The discipline Theology of Mission itself deals with the systematic reflection on such topics as the foundations of and motivation for Christian missions,

⁹ For an updated bibliography of his literary production, see Arne B. Samuelsen ”Jan-Martin Berentsens litterære forfatterskap” in: Thor Strandenæs (Ed.), *Misjon og kultur. Festskrift til Jan-Martin Berentsen*, Stavanger: Misjonshøgskolens Forlag 2006, 329-334.

¹⁰ For Prof. Berentsen’s contributions as teacher of theology of mission, as missiologist and interpreter of Japanese culture, see Knut Holter, ”Jan-Martin Berentsen som lærer”, Akio Hashimoto, ”Jan-Martin Berentsen som japansk kulturfortolker – et japansk perspektiv”, and Tormod Engelsviken, ”Jan-Martin Berentsen som misjonsteolog”, in: Strandenæs (Ed.), *Op.cit.* 2006, 301-307, 309-316, and 317-328, respectively.

¹¹ Berentsen, *art. cit.* 2002, 42-49.

¹² The subject Paedagogy of Religion (*”Religionspedagogikk”*) – though not compulsory for all students – is also offered as course.

theology of mission, symbolics, ecumenics, theology of religion(s), and the interaction between Christianity and culture – the motivation for and methods of contextualization being an important topic. But some of these themes are equally reflected in the discipline Systematic Theology.

A recent publication, on the theme mission and culture,¹³ illustrates this point, namely that missiology and theology of mission(s) constitute a dimension¹⁴ of the curriculum and academic research at MHS. In this study twelve colleagues in the academic *collegium* at MHS have contributed – as well as other Nordic and Asian colleagues – each using method(s) and perspectives from his/her own academic discipline to study the interaction between mission and culture(s), in either biblical, systematic or historical light.

Thus, Theology of Mission at MHS is a discipline, which interacts with other disciplines. This can also be seen from the curricula of theology at MHS. For instance, in the first year of the bachelor degree, students are introduced to biblical, historical and systematic, as well as religious and cultural aspects of missiology:¹⁵ the biblical background and motivation for Christian mission(s);¹⁶ theology of mission – contemporary and historical aspects;¹⁷ and mission in cultural and religious context(s).¹⁸

In the fourth year of theology, that is, during the first year of the master program,¹⁹ Theology of Mission is first taught interdisciplinarily together with history of religion, intercultural communication and culture studies. The students here meet the theological aspects of Christian missions as well as the bearings of social sciences on the reflection on, and implementation of missiological thinking. In the second year of the master's program a student may choose Theology of Mission as a field of specialisation and

¹³ Strandenaes (Ed.), *Op. cit.* 2006.

¹⁴ Cf. Berentsen, *art. cit.* 2002, 42-45.

¹⁵ This degree program is offered in Norwegian only. For program description and curriculum in Norwegian for the first year of theology, see http://www.mhs.no/pdf_doc/studieplan_KRL_BTeol-1aar.pdf.

¹⁶ In the course 10-bib-103 "Bibelen som utgangspunkt og rettesnor for kristen misjon".

¹⁷ In the course 10-kth-107 "Misjonens teologi i historie og nåtid".

¹⁸ In the course 10-rol-111 "Misjon i kulturell og religiøs kontekst".

¹⁹ For the curriculum of the M.Th. program, see http://www.mhs.no/pdf_doc/master_of_theology.pdf.

write his/her master's thesis in this discipline.²⁰ Finally, the Ph.D. program at MHS includes the option of studying Theology of Mission, enabling students to achieve a doctoral degree in this field as well as in four others fields – Old Testament, New Testament, Church and Mission History, and Systematic Theology.²¹

From the very beginning the Ph.D. program at MHS has been characterised by interdisciplinary research, which is also a characteristic of the M.Phil./M.Th. theses which have been submitted to the institution since 1996.²² As I will later return to missiological research at MHS – including the doctoral projects –, I refrain from further comments here. Suffice to sum up that missiologically relevant themes and problems are not dealt with in the field Theology of Mission alone, but also in the other fields of study in both the master and doctoral programs in theology.

Networking Missiology – Missiological Exchange

How Networking Benefits Missiology

Next I wish to underline the importance of networking for missiological education and research at MHS. MHS is engaged in various networks – both relating to the Nordic countries (e.g., NIME), and to Africa and Asia.²³ The

²⁰ Prior to the internationalization of academic programs and degrees at MHS all theological students wrote a compulsory thesis ("spesialoppgave") in Theology of Mission. A bibliography of such theses written in the period 1983-1994 is found in Arne B. Samuelsen, "Oversikt over spesialoppgaver i misjonsteologi ved Misjons-høgskolen 1983-1994", *Misjon og Teologi* 2 (1995), 138-148.

²¹ For details about this degree program, see http://www.mhs.no/pdf_doc/phd_program.pdf.

²² E.g., two master projects in Theology of Mission during this academic year: (1) Denis Bétaré Ndoé, "The Gbaya Ritual of Enthronement of the Chief of the Village in Light of Biblical Theology: A Description and Analysis of the Gbaya Ritual in the Garoua-Boulai Precinct in Cameroon, together with a Discussion of Its Relevance for Developing a Christian Liturgy of Blessing the Chief of Village in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon (E.L.C.C.)"; (2) Enoch Emmanuel Mlyuka, "The Enactment of Social Justice for Orphans and Vulnerable Children as a Contemporary Challenge to the Mission of the Church in Dar Es Salaam, with a Special Focus on the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, Eastern and Coastal Diocese".

²³ For the two networks with Africa (Network of Theology and Religious Studies) and Asia (TINET), see <http://www.mhs.no/> ("Network"). The website also gives information on other networks and related activities.

motivation for engaging in such networks is partly that they facilitate research co-operation and publication, faculty and student exchange, as well as the production of textbooks. Partly it is because they offer an opportunity of continuous internationalisation of teaching and research at MHS. Due to its orientation, the institution maintains a special focus on the theological development and reflection in the Two Third's World. Although theological students came from Africa to MHS already in the 19th Century, the focus today is much more that of a mutual exchange in studies and research, and of sharing with one another the concerns and challenges of missiology worldwide, with particular focus on the North, East and South. Hence, during the last decade, many students from the Two Third's World have been enrolled in the master and doctoral programs at MHS.

Networking has become increasingly important for MHS for several reasons. Firstly, because the church is a universal community, and its missiological reflection is done worldwide and within all its different denominations and local churches. Since Christian mission is regarded as a responsibility of the church on all continents, it follows that missiological reflection must be done everywhere and shared, both between nations and ethnic groups, and within the church as a worldwide body. Secondly, we live in a post-colonial era, a situation that has obvious bearings on the theological agenda. The voices of the formerly and presently oppressed peoples of the earth are now heard more clearly, also in missiological thinking. The experience and insights they have gained from their many years as oppressed and usurped peoples create new terms of reference for biblical exegesis and theological reflection and are indeed valid and valuable parameters for missiology as well. The former colonisers are not only made aware of our/their past misdeeds but are becoming increasingly conscious of the fact that much of the theological and missiological thinking in the past centuries was done in a colonial manner and based on colonial presuppositions, with obvious consequences.. Therefore the North-South and the North-East Exchange is necessary in order to rectify the wrongs and to create a balance within missiological reflection within the church. Thirdly, the present globalisation processes represent a new and subtle kind of colonialism, where not only the political super-powers but also the multinational companies create centres and margins in the world, as well as within continents and individual countries. In this situation post-colonial theory and research insights may render valuable assistance for a missiology which aims at being relevant and adequate in a time of globalisation.

An Example: The Africanization of Biblical Studies Project

As an example of how such networking is mutually rewarding for both North and South I wish to present the outcome of one of these – the *Network of Theology and Religious Studies*. This is a network of seven institutions of theology and religion in Africa and Norway,²⁴ initiated by Professor Knut Holter (Old Testament) and until recently co-ordinated by him.²⁵ It aims at co-operation within theological education and research and provides student and faculty exchange as well as opportunities for producing theological textbooks and joint research projects by the member faculties. A *Network Newsletter* has been published online since January 2001,²⁶ enabling member institutions to exchange information about ongoing activities, inform one another about ongoing research projects, and to initiate joint projects. Through this network North and South institutions are brought in regular contact with each other. As part of this network a special project (2002-2006) – *Africanization of Biblical Studies in Three Eastern African Research Institutions* – has been successfully completed this year, one of its outcomes being three doctoral dissertations, which I will present below.

Before doing this, however, I wish to draw attention to the enabling function of such a network. It brings people together, enabling joint North and South scholarly co-operation in reflection and teaching. It also stimulates cross-continental research interests and projects – drawing the attention of scholars in the North to ongoing research in the South, and vice-versa. Moreover, it creates awareness in the South for local resources and research questions, and for developing methodologies relevant for their own research. Holter

²⁴ The network includes the following institutions: Institut Luthérien de Théologie, Meiganga, Cameroun; Mekane Yesus Theological Seminary, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; Lutheran Graduate School of Theology, Fianarantsoa, Madagascar; School of Mission and Theology, Stavanger, Norway; Lutheran Theological Seminary, Mapumulo, South Africa; Makumira University College of Tumaini University, Usa River, Tanzania; Department of Religious Studies, Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda.

²⁵ Holter has also been the initiator, editor and publisher of the *Bulletin for Old Testament Studies in Africa (BOTSA)* since 1996. (From 1996 to 1999 (issues 1-7) *BOTSA* was published under the name *Newsletter on African Old Testament Scholarship*). *BOTSA* is available online at the following address: http://www.mhs.no/article_204.shtml, and aims at being a forum for exchange of ideas and information about Old Testament studies in Africa, and is freely accessible at the MHS website.

²⁶ All issues are available online at the following website address: http://www.mhs.no/article_295.shtml.

himself – presently the MHS rector – in recent years has focused on the reading of Old Testament in Africa. This approach is highly relevant both for revealing the effects (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) of Western missions to Africa and for initiating post-colonial biblical studies in Africa. It draws Western attention to African scholarly research but also enables African biblical scholars and theologians to partake of and benefit from the research work done in other African theological institutions and to develop contextually relevant methodology and research methods.

In his research Holter has published a number of books in the series *Bible and Theology in Africa* (Peter Lang), of which he is also the editor. He has made various attempts to understand how Africa has been, is and may continue to be an important context for doing biblical interpretation and related research. Also he has made an effort to introduce already existing African Old Testament research to the rest of the academic world. In this sense he has been a bridge builder between South and North, enabling cross-continental research contacts, exchange and other co-operation. His own research publications comprise the following books: Knut Holter, *Yahweh in Africa. Essays on Africa and the Old Testament* (2000);²⁷ Mary Getui & Knut Holter (Eds.), *Interpreting the Old Testament in Africa. Papers from the International Symposium on Africa and the Old Testament in Nairobi, October 1999*. (2001);²⁸ Knut Holter, *Old Testament Research for Africa. A Critical Analysis and Annotated Bibliography of African Old Testament Dissertations, 1967-2000* (2002);²⁹ and Knut Holter (Ed.) (2006), *Let my People Stay. Researching the Old Testament in Africa*. (Report from a Research Project on Africanization of Old Testament Studies), Nairobi: Acton Publishers 2006.³⁰

²⁷ (Bible and Theology in Africa, 1), Peter Lang: Frankfurt am Main, New York *et cet.* 2000.

²⁸ (Bible and Theology in Africa, 2), Peter Lang: Frankfurt am Main, New York *et cet.* 2001. (Also published in the Biblical Studies in African Scholarship Series, Nairobi: Acton Publishers 2001).

²⁹ (Bible and Theology in Africa, 3), Peter Lang: Frankfurt am Main, New York *et cet.* 2002.

³⁰ The articles published in this volume have also been published in *Old Testament Essays. Journal of the Old Testament Society of South Africa* 19 (2006) 2, (Section A) pp 377-557.

Also in the *Africanization of Biblical Studies* project mentioned above Holter has been the generating force.³¹ One of the outcomes of the project – three dissertations successfully submitted in 2006 for the doctoral degree at the University of South Africa (UNISA) – will now be briefly presented. In addition to writing their dissertations, the three doctors have published two articles each, wherein they present the most significant research results from their projects. Likewise their thesis advisors have each written one article where they highlight the research results and comment on these as well as on methodological issues.³² Each of the three doctoral dissertations has had a distinctive focus: 1) using Africa to interpret the Old Testament; 2) using the Old Testament to interpret Africa, and 3) finding Africa in the Old Testament.

1) L. Peter Kimilike presents main findings from his research work in two articles, namely: "Using African Proverbial Folklore to Understand the Holistic Poverty Eradication Framework in the Book of Proverbs", and "'The Poor Are Not Us': An Exploration into the Transforming Possibilities of Old Testament and African Proverbs on Poverty".³³ In his study Kimilike advocates 'a methodology from the African grassroots' – or 'a methodology from below'. The widespread conviction in dominant Old Testament biblical studies is that the Book of Proverbs has a conservative status quo framework, even giving the impression that the structural poverty in society is divinely sanctioned. Kimilike argues that when the Book of Proverbs is approached from an African perspective, one discovers the underlying transformative potential of its poverty texts and recognises their transformative framework.³⁴ Kimilike holds that it is fruitful for Bible readers regardless

³¹ The project was initiated by the Network of Theology and Religious Studies and has been funded by the Norwegian Programme for Development, Research and Higher Education (NUFU). For further details, see Knut Holter "Let my People Stay! Introduction to a research project on Africanization of Old Testament studies", *Old Testament Essays (OTSSA)* 19 (2006) 2, 377-392.

³² Highlighting and commenting on methods and findings in the dissertations by Kimilike, Razafindrakoto, and Lokel, respectively, are the following contributions: (1) Madipoane Masenya (ngwana' Mphahlele, "Challenging poverty through proverbs: An African transformational hermeneutic", (2) Magdel Le Roux, "Using the Old Testament to Interpret Africa: The Malagasy religious context", and (3) Willie van Herden, "Finding Africa in the Old Testament: Some hermeneutical and methodological considerations", *Old Testament Essays (OTSSA)* 19 (2006) 2, 393-404, 441-454, and 500-524, respectively.

³³ *Old Testament Essays (OTSSA)* 19 (2006) 2, 405-417, and 418-428, respectively.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 405-417.

of status, to use African heritage "to work at a meaningful interpretation in the struggle against poverty today." He also discovers in ancient Israel a similar holistic world view to that of most African cultures informing the poverty proverbs. This world view was situated in a popular social context which opened for the holistic transforming powers of poverty proverbs.³⁵

2) Two aspects of Georges Razafindrakoto's dissertation, *Old Testament Texts in Malagasy Contexts* have been dealt with in the following articles: "The Old Testament and the Malagasy *famadihana* Ritual", and "The Old Testament outside the Realm of the Church: A Case from Madagascar".³⁶ The author has made use of qualitative research methods as part of his Old Testament dissertation, providing case studies from Roman Catholic, Lutheran and traditionalist contexts, and focusing on Malagasy traditional rituals. The Malagasy Roman Catholic Church has adopted the traditional ritual of *famadihana* ('the turning of the dead'), and three Old Testament texts are used to legitimise the inculturation of this traditional ritual.³⁷ The Malagasy Lutheran Church uses Old Testament texts with a view to contextualizing the robes and crowns of Nenilava, one of the charismatic leaders, or shepherds (*mpiandry*), of the revival movement (*fifohazana*).³⁸ In his study Razafindrakoto demonstrates how the Bible is a common heritage for Christians – Roman Catholics as well as Lutherans – and traditionalists in Madagascar. In fact he shows that the Old Testament, when used outside the realms of the church, is used with an aim to "legitimize Malagasy traditional religion" vis-à-vis Christianity, and that traditional religion thereby "attracts many followers".³⁹

3) Philip Lokel presents major findings from his research work in two articles: "Previously Unstoried Lives: The Case of Old Testament Cush and its Relevance to Africa", and "Moses and his Cushite Wife: Reading Numbers 12:1 with Undergraduate Students at Makerere University".⁴⁰ Lokel's project is a recounting of the Old Testament story of the African

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 418.

³⁶ *Old Testament Essays (OTSSA)* 19 (2006) 2, 455-472, and 473-485, respectively.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 455. The three OT texts are as follows: Gen 49:29-50:13 (the account of Jacob's death and burial), Exod 13:19 (the transfer of Joseph's bones from Egypt to Canaan), and Exod 20:12 (the Fourth commandment).

³⁸ The OT texts made use of are Ex 28 and Deut 28, Le Roux, *art.cit.* 2006, 447-449.

³⁹ *Old Testament Essays (OTSSA)* 19 (2006) 2, 433.

⁴⁰ *Old Testament Essays (OTSSA)* 19 (2006) 2, 525-537, and 538-547, respectively.

people of Cush with a view to offering valuable insights in the quest for African history and identity.⁴¹ The author argues that the Cushite woman in Numbers 12:1ff is of African ancestry, and black, and that God takes her side and punishes Miriam for her ‘racist’ remarks (v 1)⁴², thus showing the impartiality of God over against the partiality often shown by his people.

All three dissertations have missiological implications, in that they bring an African, post-colonial perspective to the reading of the Old Testament. Thus they rediscover the African rooting of some of its texts and widen the horizons of biblical interpretation. Further, they demonstrate how the African perspective is relevant and necessary when contextualizing rituals and cultural symbols in churches today (Razafindrakoto). Finally, they show how the experience of poverty and discrimination may have a transforming potential – both for the reading of biblical texts and when applying them to life in contemporary society.⁴³ For a missiology which aims at assisting the Christian church in promoting world peace and justice, and in improving life conditions of the world’s poor peoples, the rediscovery of the transforming potential of Scripture is highly important and relevant, and in this regard also the contributions of Kimilike and Lokel.

Missiological Research

Theology of Religion(s)

Jan-Martin Berentsen has worked with theology of religion(s) over a number of years. The meeting between Christian faith and traditional Japanese ancestral practices was in fact the topic of his doctoral dissertation (1985).⁴⁴ His textbook, *Det moderne Areopagos: Røster fra den religionsteologiske debatten i vårt århundre* (1994)⁴⁵, has been a valuable resource book for theologians and theological students in Scandinavia. But in recent years he

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 525.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 538.

⁴³ I have argued for the importance of the perspective held by the poor and marginalized in biblical interpretation in my article, Thor Strandenes, ”Fattiges og undertrykte bibelforsåelse – villedende eller veiledende? Bartimeus ved Jeriko – i Markusevangeliet og på Filippinene”, *Misjon og Teologi* 2 (1995), 30-49.

⁴⁴ *Grave and Gospel*, (Beihefte ser Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte 30), Leiden: Brill 1985.

⁴⁵ Stavanger: Misjonshøgskolens Forlag 1994.

has pursued the theme in several articles, focusing particularly on missiological reflection in the wake of pluralism.⁴⁶ Here he has advocated the importance of dialogue, both as a means by which to be able to live in peaceful co-existence with the Other, as a way to understand him/her, and as a way of sharing with the Other the Gospel and one's own faith. Focusing on the sharing aspect of dialogue, between equal partners, he argues in line with Daniel B. Clendenin⁴⁷ the importance of sharing in theological modesty.⁴⁸ Such modesty is called for in a situation where people of different faiths and ideologies live side by side in a society, and where no-one has all the answers, but where the Christian is bound by his/her obligation to share the Gospel freely, and without losing confidence.⁴⁹ As Norway is itself developing into a more pluralist society, where an increasing number of religions co-exist, the theology of religion is not an exercise of relevance for the South and East only, but required for a missiology which wishes to have some relevance for the Christian church at home. One way of doing this is by increasing the theological understanding of non-Christian religions, such as Islam. A recent published study on Islam and the comparative theologies of Kenneth Cragg and Wilfred Cantwell Smith by Professor Bård Mæland is an example of this.⁵⁰ He demonstrates how Christian theology both provides resources for understanding Muslims and Islam, and at the same time how it is deeply informed, and itself more deeply understood, by such an encounter.

Missional Church and the Missional Identity of the Missionary Vocation

In his authorship Berentsen has repeatedly emphasised the missional dimension of both the lay and ordained ministries of the church. He has pointed out the danger of creating a dichotomy between a static (so-called

⁴⁶ Jan-Martin Berentsen "Theology of Religions: What Comes after Pluralism?" in: Viggo Mortensen (Ed.), *Theology and the Religions: A Dialogue*, Grand Rapids Mich.: Eerdmans 2003, 414-418.

⁴⁷ Daniel B. Clendenin, *Many Gods, Many Lords: Christianity Encounters World Religions*, Grand Rapids: Baker Books 1995, 31-33.

⁴⁸ Berentsen, *art. cit.* 2003, 417f.

⁴⁹ See also his article "Kristendommen og religionene" in: Jan-Martin Berentsen, Tormod Engelsen, Knud Jørgensen (Eds.), *Missiologi i dag*, Oslo: Universitetsforlaget (2nd Ed.) 2004, 220-241, especially 240f.

⁵⁰ Bård Mæland, *Rewarding Encounters: Islam and the Comparative Theologies of Kenneth Cragg and Wilfred Cantwell Smith*, London: Melisende 2003.

Petrine) and a more mobile (so-called Pauline) apostolic ministry in the church.⁵¹ As he sees it, the identity of the Gospel is also the identity of the missionary vocation – a gift from God to the world. As the Gospel is God’s message to the world, so the missionary ministries serve this message with the world and share it with its people holistically.⁵² But this means that both the more mobile and the more static ministries have their service with and on behalf of the Gospel in common. The Gospel is shared widely with new people and in new contexts geographically, and also by crossing other kinds of borders, as well as being shared vertically from one generation to the next. And hence both the mobile and the static aspects of the ministry with the Gospel share in the same identity of being sent by God, and by being ministered on behalf of God. This means that one may well distinguish between more static and more mobile ministries, but not divide them. The Great Commission (Matthew 28,18-20 parr.) is both a missional and a baptismal mandate, and both mandates serve the message and intention of the Gospel itself, that of being shared with others. In his current research Berentsen is therefore engaged in formulating how the more static ministry with the word in the church may equally be characterised and known as sharing in the missional identity. That an ecumenical understanding of the lay and ordained ministries of the church may also contribute to revealing the missional identity of these ministries, is a point I have also argued for myself.⁵³

Missiological Thinking in The Two Third’s World

A few years ago Berentsen launched a project which he called ”New Perspectives on the Christian World Mission: A Study of Theological Motives and Concerns in Missiological Writings from the Two Third’s World”, a project which, due to Berentsen’s heavy teaching and advisory obligations, has had

⁵¹ Jan-Martin Berentsen, ”Misjonærtjenestens misjonale identitet og karakter”, *Norsk Tidsskrift for Misjon* 57 (2003) 4, 221-234. The Norwegian manuscript was translated by the *SMT* editorial secretary and published as ”The Missional Character and Identity of the Missionary Vocation” (2003), *SMT* 91 (2003) 4, 519-532. The ecumenical character of the missionary vocation was outlined in the same issue by Thor Strandenæs, ”Toward an Ecumenical Understanding of the Ministry of the Missionary”, *SMT* 91 (2003) 4, 553-567.

⁵² Berentsen, *art. cit.* 2003, 228-230.

⁵³ Thor Strandenæs, ”Toward an Ecumenical Understanding of the Ministry of the Missionary”, *SMT* 91 (2003) 4, 553-567.

to rest for a while.⁵⁴ Now, as he is free from the daily duties of his professorate, he is engaged more fully in pursuing his intentions, namely of identifying and analysing contemporary missiologies in the South and the Far East. His particular focus is on missiological writings in Asia and Africa, and how they challenge or complement Western missiological thinking.

Missiology and Contextualization

The principles for and ways of contextualizing Christian faith and its expressions have always been part of missiological reflection at MHS, albeit different terms have been used to characterize the process or parts thereof. Formerly such concepts were used as indigenization, incarnation, inculturation, acculturation, adoption and adaptation. For identifying parts or aspects of the contextualization process some of these concepts are still relevant.

In my own studies I have earlier focused on bible translation as a contextualizing process,⁵⁵ and have shown how the perspective of the interpreter reveals his/her context, and often makes him/her fail to see a message or a perspective in the text which may be visible to a marginalized person,⁵⁶ or to a person from another culture.⁵⁷

In recent years the contextualization of Christian worship and liturgy has been another focus of mine, as well as the missional identity and function of Christian worship.⁵⁸ Using the insights from the Lutheran World

⁵⁴ An example and early fruit of his research is his article, "Missiological pleas for cultural diversity: Two voices from the non-Western World", *Norsk Tidsskrift for Misjon* 58 (2004) 1, 45-56.

⁵⁵ Thor Strandenæs, *Principles of Chinese Bible Translation as Expressed in Five Selected Versions of the New Testament and Exemplified by Mt 5:1-12 and Col 1*, (Coniectanea Biblica, New Testament Series 19), Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell International 1987.

⁵⁶ For reference, see note 43 above.

⁵⁷ Thor Strandenæs, "John 2:4 in a Chinese Cultural Context: Unnecessary Stumbling Block for Filial Piety?" in: Tord Fornberg & David Hellholm (Eds.), *Texts and Contexts. Biblical Texts in Their Textual and Situational Contexts. Essays in Honor of Lars Hartman*, Oslo/Copenhagen/Stockholm/Boston: Scandinavian University Press 1994, 959-978.

⁵⁸ Thor Strandenæs, "Gudstjenestens misjonerende funksjon: bidrag til en misjonsteologisk bevisstgjøring", *Misjon og Teologi* 3, 1996, 15-35; "Gudstjeneste som mission", *Ny Mission* 2, 2001, 6-31; "Gudstjeneste og misjon" in: Jan-Martin Berentsen, Tormod Engelsen, Knud Jørgensen (Eds.), *Missiologi i dag*, Oslo: Universitetsforlaget (2nd Ed.) 2004, 198-219.

Federation's study program *Worship and Culture*, I have studied the various contextual aspects of worship – including the culture affirming, culture critical, transcultural and universal aspects.⁵⁹ Further, I have devoted myself to studies of aspects of children and worship, asking how dialogue with children may be used as a means for developing Christian worship as all-age-worship, presupposing both the ecumenical and missional nature and role of Christian worship.⁶⁰ Presently I am involved in a book-project on children and worship in congregations of the Church of Norway and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hong Kong, with a view to identifying to what extent children are regarded and treated as contributors or agents in liturgy, and to what extent they are only regarded and treated as recipients.⁶¹ Since "teaching them to keep all that I have commanded you" (Matt 28,20) is part of the Great Commission – which is regarded by the church as a commission for both mission, baptism and Christian teaching – the question of how children are received into the church as a missional and ecumenical community is of high missiological relevance. By focusing on church worship in two different contexts I also expect to be able to discern how local cultures influence church worship with regard to the way children are regarded and treated.

The study of the principles and practises of contextualization has also been the focus in three doctoral dissertations at MHS – those by Arne Redse, Gustav Steensland and Hans Austnaberg:

Arne Redse in his doctoral dissertation on contextualizing the Lutheran doctrine of justification to a Chinese Neo-Confucian context has developed a specific methodology.⁶² He shows awareness of both the culture affirmative, culture critical, transformational, and transcultural aspects of contextualization and develops his methodology in three steps, including

⁵⁹ See the three issues of *LWF Studies: Worship and Culture in Dialogue* (1/1994), *Christian Worship: Unity in Cultural Diversity* (1/1996), and *Baptism, Rites of Passage, and Culture* (1/1999).

⁶⁰ Thor Strandenæs, "Dialoguing with Children on Liturgy and Worship", *SMT* 92 (2004) 3, 489-515.

⁶¹ This is a project under the auspices of Stiftelsen Kirkeforskning (KIFO), Oslo.

⁶² Arne Redse, "By Grace Alone" in *Contexts of "Self-Cultivation": An Attempt at Contextualizing the Lutheran Doctrine of Justification to Chinese Contexts as Influenced by New Confucianism*, Stavanger: (School of Mission and Theology Dissertation Series, Vol. 1) 2006.

(1) a context sensitive presentation of the doctrine of justification; (2) a presentation of the Neo-Confucian context; (3) contextualizing the doctrine. When contextualizing, Redse uses four steps:⁶³ clarifying the availability and usability of local linguistic components; clarifying doctrinal contact points and bridges for the Christian message; identifying, confronting and challenging elements which are not possible to accept from a Christian point of view or function as barriers to conveying the Christian message; the possibility of transforming such elements for adaptation to Christianity is also discussed; and identifying contextual elements which may influence one's horizon of understanding – both with regard to further developing Chinese theology and to possibly enriching and deepening Lutheran theology of justification universally by elements which hitherto have been neglected or ignored.⁶⁴

A second dissertation – yet to be publicly defended – is the one prepared by Gustav Steensland.⁶⁵ He has studied the formation of Lutheran pastors in Taiwan, focusing on a possible Confucian influence in their education through text books and theological teachers. His focus has been on the Confucian concepts of leadership, learning and self-cultivation. Steensland's documentation shows that during the period he focused on (1948-1987) the Confucian influence on the cultivation of Christian leadership was rather weak, and mostly implicit. In fact, only three out of his ten informants regarded the role of Confucian concepts to have been explicit. Thus, at least with regard to Confucian influence, the Christian leadership training in the Lutheran church in Taiwan during the period was not really contextually oriented. Instead it reflected to a large extent the ideals and parameters conveyed by the western missionaries, which they had adopted in their own education. In this sense neither theology nor formation was truly contextualized into the Confucian influenced culture of Taiwan.

The third study of a contextualized theology in a Malagasy culture, is the dissertation of Hans Austnaberg on exorcism, as understood and practised by the so-called shepherds in the revival movement (*fifohazana*) mentioned

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

⁶⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 415.

⁶⁵ Gustav Steensland, *Cultivation of Christian leadership in a Confucian context: A study of the preparation of pastors for ministry in Taiwan Lutheran Church 1948-1987*. It will be defended publicly at MHS on March 3, 2007 and will appear as Vol. 4 in the School of Mission and Theology Dissertation Series (2007).

above.⁶⁶ The movement is both indigenous and influential and has developed as a predominant lay movement within the Lutheran church in Madagascar, but strongly supported by the church leadership and clergy. In his study Austnaberg finds that the word "possessed" in most cases is unsuitable to describe the people treated by exorcism by the shepherds, and that people in need of exorcism are identified by the shepherd on the basis of a multitude of manifestations, e.g., the gift of discerning spirits, or by exorcism itself. The material has resulted in three important findings. The shepherds oppose traditional religion vehemently and consider all spirits in traditional worship as demons; estimate that exorcism is appropriate for people with a wide variety of problems (and has therefore evolved into a comprehensive practice); and regard the purpose of exorcism and the main focus of healing as creating a living faith in Jesus.

Thus the three dissertations demonstrate the importance of missiological studies of contextualization for developing contextual theology (Redse), for identifying the extent to which theology and theological formation are contextualized into the local culture (Steenland), and for measuring the presuppositions and values of a specific contextual theology (Austnaberg).

Missiology and Biblical Studies

As reflected above and in the following, mission studies in the biblical fields comprise both the testaments, Old and New,⁶⁷ and is yet another illustration of the point made at the beginning of this article, namely that missiology is a focal point also in the other theological disciplines at the institution. A study of *The Mission of the Early Church to Jews and Gentiles* appeared in 2000 as a result of a symposium which took place at MHS.⁶⁸ Professor Jostein Ådna, one of the two editors, is equally the author of an essay on "James' Position at the Summit Meeting of the Apostles and the

⁶⁶ Hans Austnaberg, *Shepherds and Demons. A study of exorcism as practised and understood by shepherds in the Malagasy Lutheran Church*, Stavanger: (School of Mission and Theology Dissertation Series, Vol. 2) 2006. His dissertation will also be published in 2007 in the above mentioned series, *Bible and Theology in Africa*.

⁶⁷ Knut Holter, "Det gamle testamente og misjonen", in: Berentsen, Engelsviken, Jørgensen, *Op.cit.*, 23-36.

⁶⁸ Jostein Ådna & Hans Kvalbein (Eds.), *The Mission of the Early Church to Jews and Gentiles*, (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 127), Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2000.

Elders in Jerusalem (Acts 15)”.⁶⁹ He has also contributed in other ways to the understanding of the roots and development of Christian mission in the early church, as well as its interaction with Hellenistic culture.⁷⁰

Two of the doctoral projects at MHS deal with reading and understanding biblical texts in a non-western context:

Kari Storstein Haug’s research project (2003-2007), *”As you sow, you will reap.” Selected Old Testament Wisdom Texts interpreted in light of Thai Experience. Contribution to a Thai Hermeneutic*, is in the field of Theology of Mission. Haug has already published two articles, which deal with Thai Buddhist readings of the New Testament.⁷¹ Her present project is a research on inter-religious interpretation of Old Testament texts, using Thai Buddhists as her informants – including scholars, religious leaders and lay people. She concentrates on their reading of three wisdom texts, namely Proverbs 11,18-31, Psalm 73, and Ecclesiastes 9,1-12. By making use of information collected through qualitative interviews Haug wishes to detect whether, and to what extent, their Buddhist faith and Thai cultural background influence the informants’ reading of wisdom texts. Her empirical evidence so far identifies the law of Karma (Kamma) as especially influential in Thai Buddhist interpretation of the material. Also her interviewees tend to be very open-minded in their reading of biblical wisdom texts, often taking a from-within-perspective in their reading, thereby demonstrating how useful a reading of the religious texts of the Other may be in interreligious dialogue. Through her research Haug also has a wider aim, namely to contribute to a Thai hermeneutic.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 125-161.

⁷⁰ E.g., Jostein Ådna, ”Den kristne misjons begynnelse”, *Norsk Tidsskrift for Misjon* 54 (2000) 1, 3-28; ”Møtet mellom misjon og kultur i Det nye testamente. Den hellenistiske ”globaliseringen” som utfordring og mulighet i formidlingen av det kristne budskap” in: Strandenæs, *Op. cit.* 2006, 27-51.

⁷¹ Kari Storstein Haug & Knut Holter, ”No Graven Image? Reading the Second Commandment in a Thai Context”, *Asia Journal of Theology* 14(2000)1, pp. 20-36. Kari Storstein Haug, ”Christianity as a Religion of Wisdom and Kamma: A Thai Buddhist Interpretation of Selected Passages from the Gospels”, *The Council of Societies for the Study of Religion Bulletin* 25(2006)2, pp. 42-46; ”Did Jesus Teach about Wisdom and Kamma? : A Critical Analysis of a Buddhist Bible Interpretation”, *Swedish Missiological Themes / Svensk MissionsTidsskrift* 94(2006)1, pp. 55-79.

Ingeborg Kvammen has a research project (2003-2007) in the field of New Testament, with the title, *Poverty and Wealth in the Epistle of James: an Interpretation of Jas. 2:1-13 in a Scholarly Dialogue between Postcolonial African and Western Tradition of Interpretation*. Kvammen's project reflects postcolonial theory and shows recognition for how the colonial parameters have influenced much of past, and sometimes present, Western biblical scholarship.⁷² Her aim is both to demonstrate how a post-colonial approach may help to overcome some of the exegetical shortcomings in the past, and how such an approach may throw fresh light on the interpretation of James 2,1-13, assuming that the letter addressed colonised people and reflects perspectives of both the colonists and the colonised. Kvammen makes use of voices from the South in her exegetical as well as her post-colonial studies of James 2,1-12.⁷³

As can be seen, both these projects make use of perspectives or theories originating in either the East or the South to interpret and study the interpretation of biblical texts. They do not only show how important scholarly cooperation is between partners residing on different continents, and not only between partners in Europe or North America. They also demonstrate how voices in the Far East and South may contribute with new perspectives to ongoing research and dialogue and provide new methods and insights to Western scholarship.

Missiology and Church Growth, Organisation and Leadership Structures

Two other doctoral projects, both in the field of Theology of Mission, and related to African and Latin American churches, were started in 2005.

Frank-Ole Thoresen's project, *Characteristics of an Indigenous Protestant Somali Church: The Development of Leadership and Organizational Structures in an Indigenous Somali Church, Based on a Study of Authority and Leadership Structures in Somali Culture and Society* makes use of both historical documents and qualitative interviews with Somali informants

⁷² Cf. Fernando F. Segovia, *Decolonizing Biblical Studies. A View from the Margins*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books 2000.

⁷³ These include e.g., Elsa Tamez, *The Scandalous Message of James: Faith Without Works Is Dead*, (trans. John Eagleson), Rev. Ed., New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company 2002 – who has dealt with the book of James from a Latin-American Perspective.

who have been or are presently part of a Christian church. The aim is to study how different church and leadership models have functioned in Christianization processes among the Somali people. The aim is to develop a Somali church model which may function well contextually in a Somali culture by using insights from contextual church models, such as the church as clan, the house church, Christ as proto-ancestor of the church etc.

Amador Israel Caviedes Mandujano's project is called *Contemporary Paradigms on Church Mission: Identification and Analysis of Main Conditioning Factors in the Growth of the Christian and Missionary Alliance in Lima, Perú*. The project comprises both mission history and theology of mission and aims at identifying the conditioning and determining factors of the substantial church growth within the Christian and Missionary Alliance in Lima, Perú. As this is a topic which has hitherto had little or no research focus, Mandujano, like Thoresen, makes use of both historical documents and qualitative interviews with leaders within the church movement *Lima al Encuentro con Dios* (LED) and in the national church of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, as well as with individual Christians. By using this documentation Mandujano expects to detect and identify the main reasons for the substantial church growth in Lima and its underlying missiological presuppositions.

Neither the understanding of church growth nor the choice of suitable church and leadership structures are without missiological presuppositions or implications, and these studies will eventually also bring documentation of what kind of missiological thinking has determined church growth in Somali and Peruvian churches.

Missiology as Mission History

Lastly I wish to draw the attention to two studies in Church and Mission History. The first one reveals the negative political influence of missionaries in Madagascar in the early 19th Century. The latter identifies the positive influence which Norwegian missionaries in Cameroon had for the emancipation of the Dii people in the 20th Century.

In his dissertation related to Madagascar in the period 1820-1840 Sigmund Edland has documented and analysed the role of the British missionaries in

the political history and development there.⁷⁴ In spite of their small numbers (there were never more than 4 pastors, 6 artisans and seven spouses at one time in the field) they had a great impact on the political events. Until mid 1831 nearly every party regarded the role of the missionaries as a whole as positive. But Edland shows that thereafter their politicizing activities not only led to the persecution of Christians and the deaths of many of them, but also to consolidation of traditional religion, increased use of unlimited feudal servitude to the government, and expulsion of the missionaries themselves. It was only in 1861 that amnesty was given to persecuted Christians and religious freedom for all people in the country was proclaimed. The evangelistic work of the missionaries in time bore fruit, however, and Rainilaiarivony, who married the new queen who was installed in 1868 and he was baptized the same year, both he and his two sons. Politically the last period (1831-1840) was a failure for the missionaries, but their evangelistic work had long term consequences.

The missionaries in Cameroon (1934-1994) also engaged themselves in political activities, for example in the slave issue, which resulted in serious conflicts with the colonial administration, due to their active work to free slaves and achieve abolition of slavery in the country. Most often, however, their political engagement was subtle and indirectly, but with a positive and liberating effect for the Dii people, as Thomas Drønen has set out to show in this doctoral project (2004-2007), also in the field of Church and Mission History.⁷⁵ The research results in this project will be published through individual articles, some of which have already appeared.⁷⁶ Drønen's purpose is to investigate whether the missionaries were important agents

⁷⁴ Sigmund Edland, *Evangelists or Envoys? The Role of British Missionaries at Turning Points in Malagasy Political History, 1820-1840. Documentary and Analysis*. The dissertation will be publicly defended at MHS on December 16, 2006 and will soon appear as Vol. 3 in the School of Mission and Theology Dissertation Series.

⁷⁵ Project title: *Ethnicity and Christian-Muslim Relations – a Central African Perspective: the Case of the Dii People in Adamawa, Cameroon 1934-1994*.

⁷⁶ Tomas Sundnes Drønen "The Role of Religion in social Change. The Arrival of Christianity among the Dii People in Adamawa, Northern Cameroon (1934-1960)." *Swedish Missiological Themes* 93 (2005) 4, 479-503; "Anthropological Historical Research in Africa – How Do We Ask?" *History in Africa* 33 (2006), 137-153; "Scientific Revolution and Religious Conversion - a Closer Look at Thomas Kuhn's Theory of Paradigm-Shift." *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 18 (2006) 3, 232-253; "'And it is really thanks to you that we are saved...' An African Discourse on Conversion and the Creation of a Modern Myth. To be published in *Exchange* (2007).

of colonisation, especially of a colonisation of the Dii mind, or whether conversion to Christianity was part of a spiritual and political Dii project that promoted social liberation. Besides using historical documents for his research Drønen has engaged Dii informants who have been part of the liberating process of the Dii people, and who have responded in qualitative interviews. As such his study is a project which takes the perspectives of post-colonial theory seriously, and where the national Dii, both Christians and non-Christians, are the primary sources, and not the missionaries.⁷⁷ Hence, one of the methods Drønen makes use of is discourse analysis. One of the findings which the interviews interestingly reveal is that the Dii informants consider the Norwegian Missionary Society and its missionaries as enablers and compatriots in their process of political and ethnic liberation, not as colonisers.

It is not surprising to find that Western missionaries in the last centuries were engaged directly or indirectly in political activity, but these two studies reveal that the outcome could go in two directions, rewarding or damaging for both the mission and the society. This double role which Western mission has played as an agent for positive and liberating development, or as a colonizing agent, has also been documented elsewhere by various MHS faculty in their research and will not be commented upon in more detail here. I will only mention here the essays on the *historical, political and cultural dimensions of mission* written by MHS colleagues in honour of Professor Berentsen, published earlier this year,⁷⁸ as well as the studies by Torstein Jørgensen⁷⁹ and Øyvind Eide,⁸⁰ both relating to history of missions in Africa.

⁷⁷ Another example of identifying natives as primary sources can be found in my essay, Thor Strandenæs, "Anonymous Bible Translators: Native Literati and the Translation of the Bible into Chinese, 1807-1907" in: Stephen Batalden, Kathleen Cann and John Dean (Eds.), *Sowing the Word. The Cultural Impact of the British and Foreign Bible Society 1804-2004*, (Bible in the Modern World, 3), Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press 2004, 121-148.

⁷⁸ See Strandenæs, *Op. cit.* 2006, pp 117-258.

⁷⁹ Torstein Jørgensen, *Contact and Conflict: Norwegian Missionaries, the Zulu Kingdom, and the Gospel 1850-1873*, Oslo: Solum forlag 1990.

⁸⁰ Øyvind M. Eide, *Revolution and Religion in Ethiopia: the Growth and Persecution of the Mekane Yesus Church 1974-1985*, Eastern African Studies, Oxford: James Currey, Addis Ababa University Press, Ohio University Press 2000.

Concluding Remarks

Instead of making a detailed summary I shall attempt to make a few concluding remarks about missiology at the School of Mission and Theology, Stavanger.

Firstly, the presentation above is ample documentation for the fact that missiology and mission studies function as a uniting, focal point for teaching, networking and research work at MHS.

Secondly, missiology is both one of the academic disciplines, Theology of Mission, and a perspective, the missiological, which is inherent in teaching and research also in the other theological fields, without violating the individual traditions and self understanding of the academic disciplines.

Thirdly, the missiological identity of MHS has become a bridge which enables South to North, North to South, East to North, and North to East student and faculty exchange, and research cooperation. *Fourthly*, as the centre of gravity in Christendom has moved from the West to the South and the East, the missiologically relevant research contributions from the South and the East become increasingly relevant not only for the churches and theologians there, but also for the self understanding of church and missiology in the North as part of a universal Christian community. This partnership in mission is particularly relevant for the church when it needs to identify its role and mission in a society where it co-exists with non-Christian religions, and for defining the missiological challenges it faces in a new millennium.

Fifthly, through networking the research at MHS, there has been a shift from a predominant focus on Nordic or Western interpretation and understanding of biblical studies, church and mission history, systematic and practical theology, to a focus which includes both the North, the East and the South. And, whereas churches and people outside of Norway have most often been studied as *objects* before, they have increasingly become *subjects*, both as researchers and as informants, informing and reflecting on their own lives, faiths, Christian experience and theology. Thereby the bridge offers a two-way communication and theological research cooperation where both sides benefit.

Sixthly, whereas the MHS is still a research and educational centre for personnel entering the missional vocation in Africa, Latin-America and the Far East, the institution, because of its missional focus, has developed into a relevant centre for equipping also church leaders in the South and East, and for training theological educators through the master and doctoral programs. Thus, by receiving hard working representatives from the Two Third's World into the degree programs, classrooms and research seminars, the MHS is increasingly becoming a multinational melting pot, where learning, teaching and doing theology is a joint, cross-cultural venture.

As already stated, an important reason for this development is the MHS focus on missiology, and its related topics and concerns, a focus which unites students, faculty and other staff and creates an international, ecumenical centre for research and studies, teaching and training.