

ARTICLE

# The LIMM Model: Paradigm for Missiological Research

Pieter Hendrik Johannes Labuschagne

## Abstract

This article proposes a missiological research model, guided by three key missiological concepts: *missio Dei*, Christocentricity and contextuality (MDCC). The model is derived from a practical theology model that was developed by the Loyola Institute for Ministry (LIM). The new missiological model is called the LIMM model, where the added ‘M’ represents missional action.

Since the introduction of the term *missio Dei* during the last century, the focus has shifted from missions initiated and conducted by the church, to the one true mission: God’s mission. In the *missio Dei*, God sends his Son and the Spirit to the world, and through them sends people to the ends of the earth. This means that God is the sender and the content of *missio Dei*. The incarnation of God’s message in every culture is of great importance.

The LIMM model is characterized by the three key missiological terms mentioned above, and it directs the research, from defining the research topic all the way to the practical suggestions for improved ministry. If a research topic does not correlate with MDCC principles, it does not belong in the field of missiological research and another field of theology should be considered.

**Keywords:** Missiological research model, *Missio Dei*, Christocentricity, Contextuality.

## 1 Introduction

Ever since his earthly ministry, people have been spreading the gospel in obedience to Christ, yet no designated term existed to describe this mission. The Latin word *missio* was reserved for the Father sending the Son and the Spirit. This changed in the mid-sixteenth century when Ignatius of Loyola started to refer to the places and tasks to which Jesuits were assigned as “missions” (Kollman 2011: 425–26). Similarly, missiology as an independent theological discipline, was only established in the late

nineteenth century (Langmead 2014: 68). As it is a young field, some seminaries still do not recognize it as an autonomous discipline but relegate it to a sub-section of another field, like practical theology. When research methods from these fields are used, it strips missiology of its distinct character.

One such method is as an in-house research approach to practical theology that was developed by the Loyola Institute for Ministry (we will call it the LIM model). Even though it is a practical theology model, LIM is also suited for missiological research and some postgraduate students at the South African Theological Seminary (SATS) have used it for their research. This article proposes adaptations to the LIM model to repurpose it as a missiological research model. This will be accomplished in three stages:

- Describe the LIM model.
- Define the three key missiological terms to be incorporated into the model.
- Adapt the model for missiological use.

## 2 Methodology: integrative literature review

Integrative Literature Review was used as research model in this article. It is “a distinctive form of research that generates new knowledge about a topic by reviewing, critiquing, and synthesizing representative literature on a topic in an integrated way such that new frameworks and perspectives on the topic are generated” (Torraco, 2016: 62). The following principles were adhered to:

- Limited publications exist on the LIM model. To describe the LIM model and its historical development, the author used the following as anchor publications: the summary by Smith (2016) and publications by Professor Barbara Fleischer, of the Loyola Institute for Ministry.
- The author looked at three foundational aspects of missiology: *missio Dei*, Christocentricity and contextuality. We refer to the combination of these terms as MDCC. There is a close proximity between the concepts, and they are interconnected, defining the essence of missiology.
- The author holds that missiology is an independent field of theology, which directly fulfils the *missio Dei* and that missiological research models should be guided by missiological concepts.
- Through analysis and synthesis of the research findings, the LIM model was adapted for missiological purposes. This aligns with Torraco’s (2016: 66) suggestion that Integrative Literature Review, as research approach, must generate new knowledge and pose new questions and propositions for future research.

### 3 The LIM model

#### 3.1 Introduction to the LIM model

During the last few decades the Loyola Institute for Ministry (LIM) developed an in-house approach to practical theology (Lamont 2018: 2). The only external effort to describe the model is Smith's (2016: 151–60) summary of the model, which is based on a single course document, written by Michael Cowan (2000) of the Loyola Institute for Ministry. Woodbridge (2014: 89–121) briefly referred to the LIM model in an article but used Smith's article as only source of information. The current article delves deeper and provides a detailed description of the LIM model, based on additional publications by professors from the Loyola Institute for Ministry.

The development of the model started with Cowan's (2000: 3) introduction of a process of "pastoral praxis" where theological reflection is in constant dialogue with action. Lamont (2018: 3) described this dialogue as a horizontal relationship that requires mutual trust between the conversation partners, as it "creates a democratic, trusting space that welcomes, encourages, and listens to all voices" (Lamont 2018: 9). Dialogue is a slow, deep conversation that exposes hidden assumptions and leads to new insights, awareness and understanding.

Cowan (2000 :1) stated that practical theology is not only concerned with understanding the world as it is, but to "contribute to the world's becoming what God intends that it should be". He identifies four characteristics of practical theology, namely the *correlational*, *hermeneutical*, *critical* and *transformative*. The *correlational* character of practical theology refers to the fact that two things, the world as it is and the world as it should be, stand in a reciprocal relationship. The *hermeneutical* character highlights the importance of interpreting our world and our traditions. The *critical* requires that we evaluate our own understandings that influence our interpretations and actions. It is *transformational* because it brings "the real world into greater harmony with the Creator's intentions".

#### 3.2 Historical development of the LIM model

For Imbelli and Groome the major methodological shift in practical theology in the twentieth century was theological inquiry, grounded in the human experience of those doing theology (Fleischer 2000: 23). Since 1983 when the Loyola Institute for Ministry Extension Programme (LIMEX) began, the focus was on an experientially based method of theological reflection, founded on the work of David Tracey and Bernard Lonergan (Fleischer 2000: 24). Tracey's revisionist model was based on a critical correlation between Christian tradition and contemporary understanding of human existence. Lonergan identified four levels of critical consciousness which formed the basis for the LIMEX programme: (i) identify an experience to reflect on

(ii) express an initial understanding of this experience (iii) test this initial understanding, and (iv) arrive at a new decision about the initial understanding and future action plan.

The LIMEX programme was further influenced by the work of James and Evelyn Whitehead. Where Tracy's model focused on Christian tradition and contemporary understanding of human experience, the Whiteheads' model of theological reflection identified three sources of context: (i) Christian tradition, (ii) personal experience, and (iii) the resource of culture. The Whiteheads' contribution was employed in LIMEX for more than seventeen years (Fleischer 2000: 26). Charles Winters of Loyola University New Orleans added a fourth source to the Whiteheads' tri-polar model. "That fourth source, or 'context' as he called it, was the institutional context of ministry: the organizational dynamics and structures that largely shape how ministry is legitimized and who is authorized for what roles in any ministry site" (Fleischer 2000: 29).

Theology that is focused primarily on abstract, universal, or static truth, pays little attention to the dynamics of human conversion. That is why the contributions of Lonergan are important: he "proposes that as a human endeavor, theology proceed through the phases that all human learning follows; learning begins with experience and moves through initial understanding, judging (or critical reflection), and decision" (Fleischer 2000: 30). Lonergan, thus, shifted the focus of practical theology from starting with theological truth, to starting with experience. This approach turns from "deductivism to an empirical approach, from the static to the dynamic, from the abstract to the concrete, from the universal to the historical totality of particulars, from invariable rules to intelligent adjustment and adaptation" (Lonergan 1968: 11). Lonergan's four operations (experiencing, understanding, judging and deciding) became the basis for the LIMEX programme (Fleischer 2000: 35). It also forms the basis of the four phases of the LIM model:

### 3.3 The LIM model

#### 3.3.1 *Phase One: Identify a real-life problem (Experiencing)*

Researchers identify a ministry, life experience, or experience of a text that they want to reflect on (Cowan 2000: 2). This is something that exists in one's context that affects the life of believers or the church. Researchers must pay attention to (i) the details of their experience, (ii) significant aspects of the experience, and (iii) emotions stirred by the experience. This is an experiential phase: there is no scientific observation and reflection in this step; one simply states the problem and the reasons why you believe it exists (Fleischer, 2000: 35; Lamont 2018: 2).

This makes the first phase of the LIM model refreshingly unique because it invites researchers to express their own, unresearched experience and understanding of a situation. In fact, this phase cannot be undertaken without the researcher's involvement, expressing his or her own subjective understanding and experience of a situation, without having to justify it with research data. In this regard, Smith missed an important aspect of the LIM model that distinguishes it from other practical theology approaches. In his summary of the model (2016: 153) he mentions the initial, non-scientific opinion of the researcher, based on his or her understanding, but in his description of how a thesis would look when using LIM, Smith (2016: 154) omits this distinctive feature of the model.

### *3.3.2 Phase Two: Interpret the world as it is (Understanding)*

This phase seeks to understand the experience, evaluates the researcher's initial views, and lays bare meanings, interpretations and questions that arose in the first phase. A dialogue develops between the researcher's initial experience and the meaning that emerges through the research. A disciplined, practical investigation is conducted to determine the *what*, the *how* and the *why* of the problem (Cowan 2000: 2). It is important to determine what the real situation is because one might have been mistaken in your initial experience. This phase uses descriptive research based on literary and/or empirical methods. A historical survey of published works, archived records and interviews are useful to get a clear picture of the historical development of the situation.

An important part of Phase Two is how the problem developed and why it is the way it is. One wants to determine which forces are at work and led to this problem. This sets the direction for the biblical and practical response in the next phase (Smith 2016: 155; Fleischer 2000: 35).

### *3.3.3 Phase Three: Interpret the world as it should be (Judging)*

The judging or testing phase is the heart of the reflective process that interprets the world as it should be. For evangelical theologians the Bible takes centre-stage in this phase, and other sources as seen as secondary. The focus is on one's ministerial praxis in light of the four contexts of ministry defined by the Whiteheads and Lonergan: (i) Christian tradition; (ii) personal experience; (iii) culture; and (iv) the institutional context of ministry. This phase is a hermeneutical task that offers a summary of insights gained and judges one's understanding of Christian tradition and human experience, and arrives at suggestions for responsible living (Fleischer 2000: 36).

This phase develops a theological model, based on biblical perspectives and the sources of context that were discussed earlier. Smith (2016: 155) suggests that the biblical aspect should take the form of a survey or overview analysis of Scriptural teachings related to the research problem. One must work through the Scriptures and explain how they address the topic. The works of authoritative biblical scholars must be consulted.

#### *3.3.4 Phase Four: Interpret your contemporary obligations (Deciding)*

The decision phase is a summary of the new insights that were gained in the previous phases. It leads to new action in the praxis cycle, which has the potential of bringing positive change to the situation (Fleischer 2000: 35). This action plan must reflect the theological findings of the previous step. Though implementation of the findings does not form part of the LIM model, one should offer concrete and detailed recommendations to remedy the problem that exists, with reference to (i) the historical and empirical analysis of the present situation, (ii) the synopsis of biblical and theological findings, and (iii) practical suggestions to correct the current problem (Smith 2016: 156).

This must be done with sensitivity toward the people involved, and the recommendations must be described in terms of the context of the contemporary church.

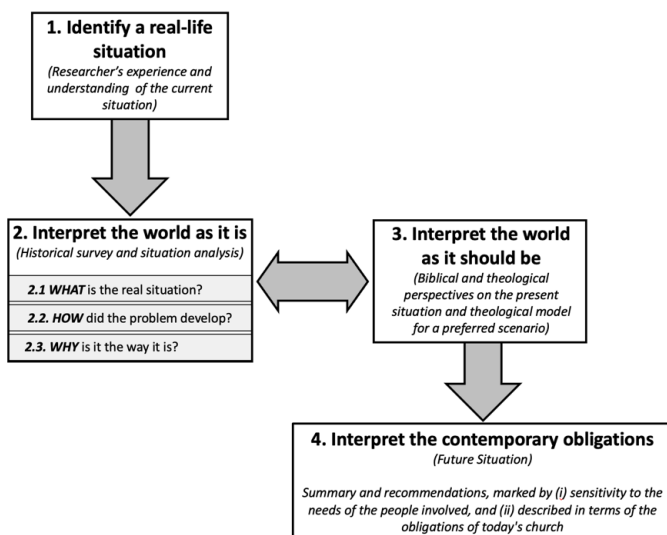


Figure 1 Schematic representation of the LIM model<sup>1</sup>

## 4 Key aspects of missiological research

In order to adapt the LIM model for missiological use, we briefly summarize three key concepts which are indispensable for missiology.

### 4.1 Missio Dei

For several centuries, the church saw itself as the ‘author’ or ‘authority’ on mission, travelling to foreign lands, taking the gospel from Western countries to the so-called uncivilized. This view has undergone major changes in the last century, and in modern missiology there is only one mission – the *missio Dei* (Whitworth 2019: ix, 5). The basic meaning of the Latin term *missio Dei* is ‘the sending of God’ (Whitworth 2019: 3). This connects well with the LIM model, which takes place “within the wider meta-context of all God’s Creation ...transcend the limits of human knowing ... to learn from Creation by listening to God’s voice in the diversity of the natural world” (Lamont 2018: 2).

The starting point of *missio Dei* is not the *ecclesia* or the *missio humanitatis*, but God himself (Rosin in Whitworth, 2019: 4). We are not sent by the church to make disciples that conform to our ways; we are sent by God, through the *missio Dei*, to draw people

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<sup>1</sup> This is the author’s own schematic representation of the LIM model.

to him (Niles 2002: 363). Through the *missio Dei*, we become part of God's family, witnessing to, and participating in God's work of saving and reconciling people to him (Johnson 2016: xvi). *Missio Dei* is God's mission, which becomes our mission. It propels the church from "worship and fellowship into the frontiers of God's reign" (Sunquist 2013: 16; Teer 2020: 535, 553; Whitworth 2019: 3). In *missio Dei* (i) God sends his Son and the Holy Spirit; but (ii) God is also the content of this sending (Heikkilä 2018: 79).

Already in the early church, Irenaeus and Tertullian taught that the Son was sent from God. Athanasius and the Cappadocian fathers expanded this sending of the Son from the Father, by adding that the Holy Spirit was sent from the Father through the Son. Augustine referred to it as the "sentness" of Jesus by the Father (Ubeilvolc 2016: 7). An important turning point came in the last century with the formal introduction of the term *missio Dei*. It started with Karl Barth who gave a lecture in 1932 on the relationship between the Trinity and mission (Voss 2016: np; Langmead 2014: 69; Newbigin 1989: 119). He believed that theologians and the church have wrongly defined mission from an anthropocentric vantage point (Whitworth 2019: 4).

Barth's concept was further developed at the 1952 IMC gathering at Willingen, Germany; the focus shifted to the fact that the church's mission was grounded in the divine mission (Konz 2018: 336; Kollman 2011: 433). This was further developed in Georg Vicedom's book, which was published in 1958, entitled *Missio Dei* (Konz 2018: 336). The goal of God's mission is not the Church but his kingdom, and therefore God acts both in and apart from the Church (Moreau 2000: 637; Pocock, van Rheenen and McConnell 2005: 503; Mashau 2018: 132). God is missionary by nature, and he calls the Church to participate in this activity (Heikkilä 2018: 83; Voss 2016; Moltmann 1977: 64; Langmead 2014: 69). Three significant changes took place in the understanding of mission in the second half of the previous century: (i) *missio Dei* became the foundation of all mission; (ii) this led to a shift from missions to mission; and (iii) a missional ecclesiology emerged (Ott Straus & Tennent 2010: 376).

All fields of theology need to contemplate how the *missio Dei* affects their respective domains. If indeed God is a missionary God, all theology should centre around this. And if the focus of Christian faith is on God's Son who was sent to forgive and save, then all theology should seek to understand the *missio Dei* and promote it (Langmead 2013: 70). Bosch (2011: 494) states that the Church stops being the Church if it is not missionary. Similarly, theology that is not missiological is not theology. *Missio Dei* is the essence of mission and missiology (Bosch, 2011: 494–96; Langmead 2013: 67; Whitworth 2019: x, 14–15; Wright 2006: 20).



Whitworth (2019: 7–8) presents four views of *missio Dei*, defined by prominent missiologists over the last century. (i) David Bosch focused on God’s nature and activity as the centre of *missio Dei*. The church participates with God, who is involved in the world. (ii) Johannes Verkuyl emphasized God’s reign over creation and humanity, with the aim of establishing his kingdom. (iii) For Emilio Castro, the mission of God was focused on God and his activities, and Christians and the church were drawn into communion with him. (iv) Christopher Wright described *missio Dei* as our participation as God’s people, at God’s invitation and command, in God’s own mission within the history of God’s world for the redemption of God’s creation (Whitworth 2019 :8).

We can conclude this summary of *missio Dei* in Kritzinger’s (2011: 52) words, “It is about the Reign of God that has entered into this broken world as a transformative power in Jesus; that continues to be manifested transformatively in our midst by the work of the Holy Spirit ... so that we too may encounter other people, thus creating the church as the community of the kingdom, working for and waiting for the coming Reign of God.”

## 4.2 Christocentricity

It is impossible to conceive of mission without focusing on Christ, who is the centre of God’s mission. He is the Son of God who became flesh to take away the sin of humanity (Jn 1). Driven by the *missio Dei* and his sacrificial love, Jesus emptied himself to become one of us.<sup>2</sup> “To see the gospel, and our mission, as being not only about spiritual good news, and not even only about people, but about God’s good plans for the whole created order is a fundamental shift in mission thinking” (Ross & Smith, 2018).

### 4.2.1 Divinity of Jesus

Jesus shares the identity of *YHWH*, and performs actions that are uniquely and exclusively associated with *YHWH*: Jesus is Creator,<sup>3</sup> Ruler,<sup>4</sup> Judge<sup>5</sup> and Saviour,<sup>6</sup> The New Testament made no distinction between Jesus and the God of the Old Testament (Wright 2006: 121–22). If you have seen Jesus, you have seen the Father (Jn 14.9). The Father sent the Son and the Son obeyed God’s mission to Israel and beyond. “The God of Israel, whose declared mission was to make himself known to the nations

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2 Isa. 7.14; 8:8; Mt. 1.22-23; 28.20; Jn 1.14; 3.16; Phil. 1 & 2; Rev. 21.3.

3 Jn 1.3, 10; 1 Cor. 8.6; Col. 1.16; Heb. 1.2.

4 Jn 18.36; Eph. 1.20-21; 1 Tim. 6.13-16; Heb. 1.3-4; Rev. 1.5-6; 10.13, 16; 17.14.

5 Mt. 19.28; Jn 5.22, 27; 9.39; Acts 10.42; 17.31; 2 Cor. 5.10; 2 Tim. 4.8; Rev. 19.11.

6 Mt. 1.21; Lk. 2.11; 19.10; Jn 4.42; Acts 4.12; 13.23; Eph. 5.23; Phil. 3.20; 1 Tim. 1.15; 2 Tim. 1.10; Tit. 2.13; 1 Jn 4.14.

through Israel, now wills to be known to the nations through the Messiah, the one who embodies Israel in his own person and fulfills the mission of Israel to the nations" (Wright 2006: 123).

The *missio Dei* expresses God's desire to make himself known. He did that throughout the Old Testament using various messengers, he did it in the New Testament through his Son, and he does it today through every obedient servant. Wright (2006: 129) points out that our involvement with God's mission is both humbling and reassuring. It is humbling because it reminds us that we are not the initiators of mission but only secondary messengers and participants. It is reassuring because it reminds us that we are part of the greatest mission of all, with Christ at its centre.

#### 4.2.2 The supremacy of Jesus

Christ is supreme over all, and he is exalted above horizontal comparisons with founders of other religions. The only comparison that is possible, is with God himself, and in that lies the truth of Jesus' divine identity. "Christocentric biblical monotheism is profoundly missionary ... YHWH is God in heaven above and the earth beneath, and there is no other, and that Jesus is Lord, and there is no other name under heaven given to humanity by which we must be saved" (Wright 2006: 131). Verster (2021: 122) rightly points out that "without the eternal existence, the cross, and the resurrection of Jesus, there is no mission. Without the deep Christological implications of the Divinity of the Man Jesus Christ, the clear understanding of mission is blurred. A *Theologia Crucis*, or theology of the cross, must always be the main element of mission and missiology."

Missiology is Christocentric, and cannot exist without focusing on the cross. "Without the cross, no hope and salvation is possible ... the cross is followed by the resurrection as proof of Jesus as Son of God ... at the cross, God is present in this tragic world. At the cross, one sees God's reply to the world. The glory of the resurrection fulfils what happened on the cross" (Verster 2021: 123). Mission gives hope to a lost world (Verster 2021: 125). "When human beings in this world have nowhere to turn to, the church through the *missio Dei* in mission reaches out to them. This is the hope of the cross. Only then will mission and missiology have a future" (Verster 2021: 130).

### 4.3 Contextuality

In our discussion of contextuality, we focus on the integration between the contexts of the researcher and the research topic.

### 4.3.1 All theology is contextual theology

Bevans (2018) is famous for stating that universal theology, with universal application, does not exist – the only theology that exists is contextual theology. A particular place, time and culture form the basis of theology. Contextual theology comprises two elements: (i) the experience of the past, represented by Scripture and tradition, and (ii) the experience of the present, represented by the real-life situation of Christians in a particular time and place (Bevans 2018: 2; Ngubane 2013: 93).

Contextual theology requires critical dialogue between past and present experiences. The Scriptures and tradition aid us in measuring, judging, interpreting, and criticizing our present experiences (Bevans 2018: 2). Likewise, our experiences measure, judge, interpret and critique the classical sources. According to Bevans, contextual theology consists of four elements: (i) the spirit and message of the gospel; (ii) the traditions of Christian communities; (iii) the culture of a particular group or region; and (iv) the social changes that occur within each of these communities.

Pocock, van Rheenen and McConnell (2005: 502) state that the term contextualization was introduced in 1972 in order to encourage mutual understanding between the researcher and the research context. Our participation in the *missio Dei* requires sensitivity to our context and the research context. Jesus's incarnation was an example of contextual sensitivity because he emptied himself and took on human form (Phil. 2.1-11). Contextual research can only succeed if we approach it with an open mind, inviting critical dialogue between the conversation partners (Ngubane 2013: 144). Some skills to help with this include "'I' statements, concreteness, appropriate self-disclosure, gatekeeping, and inviting more information" (Fleischer 2016: 80, in Lamont 2018: 4).

### 4.3.2 The dangers of universal theology

Niles (2002: 363) states that "the *Word* in isolation in and of itself is not good news, but the proclamation and action that shows how the *Word* has become flesh in specific situations, is good news". Historically, missionaries colonized those who were perceived as inferior, by conveying a message that was isolated in and of itself. It is not good news for the oppressed to hear that their ways are evil, and that the only remedy is to conform to the ways of their oppressors. In fact, that is rather grim news (Kraft 2011: 6–10).

Duraisingh (in Barnes-Davies, 2002: 592) blames two social forces for this, (i) you either stand opposed to the "other", or (ii) you assimilate life elements and call it "your own". We must not succumb to forces that silence the "other" but must rather value the "other" as "other". This shifts missiology from a quest for power and

control to a place of service. Instead of only focusing on our own story, which rejects and excludes the “other”, we must allow multi-voiced inter-contextual communion, listening to the different narratives of the “other” and maintaining a creative tension between us and them (Duraisingh in Barnes-Davies 2002: 601).

### 4.3.3 Questioning as key to contextuality

Questioning formed part of the Jewish-Christian tradition, and is still an effective way of contextualization and mutual transformation (Kritzinger 2002: 144–45). Questioning establishes a special connection between God and humanity. God connects to us through questions and our responses to his questions lead to accountability. Humans can also ask God questions and in the process gain understanding.

In Mark 8.29 Jesus asked his disciples who they thought he was.<sup>7</sup> When we read the passage today, the same question confronts us. There is no final answer to Jesus’ question and traditional orthodoxy and colonial missions were wrong to presume that they had *the answer* to this question and simply had to export this answer to the rest of the world (Kritzinger 2002: 145). “What the church of Christ ... should seek is not the definitive answer to this question but tentative and provisional answers in concrete contexts ... to discover who Jesus is for us today and therefore what our missions in his name could look like in our respective contexts” (Kritzinger 2002:145).

Inasmuch as the researcher questions the context, the context questions the researcher. Like the examples from Scripture, the goal of this questioning is not to find definitive answers but to ask probing questions. In the process we learn about the research context and our own context. “When LIM students explore their concerns within their personal ministry context; for example, they often analyze their personality type and explore the strengths and weakness in their communication skills” (Lamont 2018 :4). Our horizon (Thiselton 1992: 44–46), our context, or our cultural environment (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010) influences our epistemology and determines how we interpret the world. “When we do not understand, for example, how much our culture influences our theology, we are easily seduced into believing that we are communicating a gospel free of cultural bias, when, in fact, we may be blind to our own cultural and denominational ethnocentrism. We will confuse what is cultural with what we *think* is biblical” (Whiteman 1997: 137; also see Kraft 2011: 30).

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7 Other examples of questions asked by Jesus include Mk 8.27, 29; 15.34; Lk. 18.41; Jn 5.6; 6.67; 8.10; 21.15; Acts 9.4.

Western logic seeks truth that is applied universally. “This happens when a religion, a nation or a culture is made into a centre, and is the same logic which operated in the colonial conquests, and today continues in the neo-colonial dynamics of globalization” (Duraisingh 2002: 363; Kraft 2011: 7, 30). Missiology departing from this premise promotes an “us” and “them” mentality where the “other” from another context is seen as inferior, and in need of redemption from their ways. Missional contextuality is needed where the researcher and the “researched” as partners, or co-workers, learn from one another. “Mission as praxis is about concrete transformation...among people, and between the living God and people, leading to people being called, sent, healed, and empowered” (Kritzinger 2011: 52).

## 5 The LIMM model of missiological research

For the LIMM model of missiological research, we kept “LIM” in recognition of the work done by the Loyola Institute for Ministry but added an additional “M” to represent missional action. We renamed each step of the model to correspond to the acronym LIMM:

- L = Life-situation
- I = Interpret the life-situation
- M = Model preferred scenario
- M = Missional action

*Missio Dei*, Christocentricity and contextuality (MDCC) are three distinct terms that are interrelated and impossible to separate because (i) the Father sends the Son, (ii) the Son comes to live in our context, and (iii) he sends us out to make him known in all contexts (to the ends of the earth, Mt. 28.19). MDCC has a key function in the formulation, examination and explanation of every phase of the LIMM model. It is not necessary to describe every phase of the research in terms of all three concepts because in certain cases one aspect might be more applicable than another.

### 5.1 The LIMM model

At the time of writing, the LIMM proposal is nothing more than an experimental model. However, the author intends to test the model in the near future, by researching the challenges faced within the context of his own church, as the church is transitioning from a traditional church model to a cell-church that meets in the homes of believers.

### 5.1.1 LIMM Phase One: Life-situation

Guided by MDCC, the researcher shares his or her own experience and understanding of the topic under investigation, expounding (i) the details of the experience, (ii) important aspects of the experience, and (iii) emotions aroused by the experience. This is not based on scientific observations and reflections but the researcher simply states his or her understanding of the problem and the reasons it exists (Fleischer 2000: 35; Smith 2016: 153).

In this phase, MDCC principles are used to examine, evaluate and formulate the research in missiological terms. The researcher uses his or her understanding of MDCC to evaluate the research topic. Here are some examples of questions that could be asked:

- To what extent is the *missio Dei* promoted or neglected in the current situation?
- Does the situation sufficiently focus on the proclamation of Christ, and how will the research advance the proclamation of Christ?
- What are the differences between the researcher's context and the research context? How does the researcher's context affect his or her view of the topic? What questions are being asked *by* the researcher and *to* the researcher?

This phase ends with a clear formulation of the research in MDCC terms.

### 5.1.2 LIMM Phase Two: Interpret the life-situation

The researcher gathers data to interpret the life-situation, by breaking it down into three categories: (i) what is the real situation; (ii) how did it develop; (iii) why is it the way it is? The personal experience described by the researcher in Phase One is now scrutinized through research based on MDCC principles. The researcher wants to understand what missiological deficiencies led to the situation. Suitable methodologies to trace the historical development of the situation include descriptive research, based on literary and/or empirical methods, and a historical survey of published works, archived records and interviews.

Note that there is a twofold focus when interpreting the life-situation: (i) the researcher examines the elements of the research problem that was formulated in phase one; (ii) this is not done in a vacuum but against the backdrop of MDCC. For example, when the researcher asks "what is the real situation?" he or she wants to know what the real situation is in light of MDCC.

MDCC is the plumline of the LImm model. It is both a tool to determine what is going on, and it facilitates the discovery of possible solutions. Helpful questions that could be asked in Phase Two include:

- How can the present situation be described in terms of MDCC?
- What role did the presence or absence of MDCC play in the development of the current state of affairs?
- Why is the situation the way it is, in terms of MDCC?

### 5.1.3 LImm Phase Three: Model the preferred scenario

This phase envisages the situation as it should be, from a biblical and theological perspective. In Phases One and Two we introduced the research topic and defined it through research, in light of MDCC. Phase Three follows the same logic: (i) the researcher searches for biblical and theological guidance related to the life situation under investigation; and (ii) the researcher seeks for biblical and theological support that will promote MDCC principles.

- What can we learn from the Bible and theology about the research topic?
- What would an applicable contextual theology be for this research topic?
- How should MDCC best be applied to bring the research topic in line with God's mission in God's way?

### 5.1.4 LImm Phase Four: Missional action

Missiological research must never be simply academic but it should lead to participation in sharing the good news across borders to all of humanity. If the outcome of missiological research does not promote MDCC, we have missed the mark. A way forward should be proposed that honours MDCC principles, for example:

- To fulfil the *missio Dei* in this situation, one must ...
- To ensure that Christ is proclaimed as good news in this context, one should ...
- A new contextual theology that directs the praxis in this situation, focusses on ...

In the schematic representation of the adapted LIMM model below, MDCC stands central, and every phase of the model flows from it and through it:

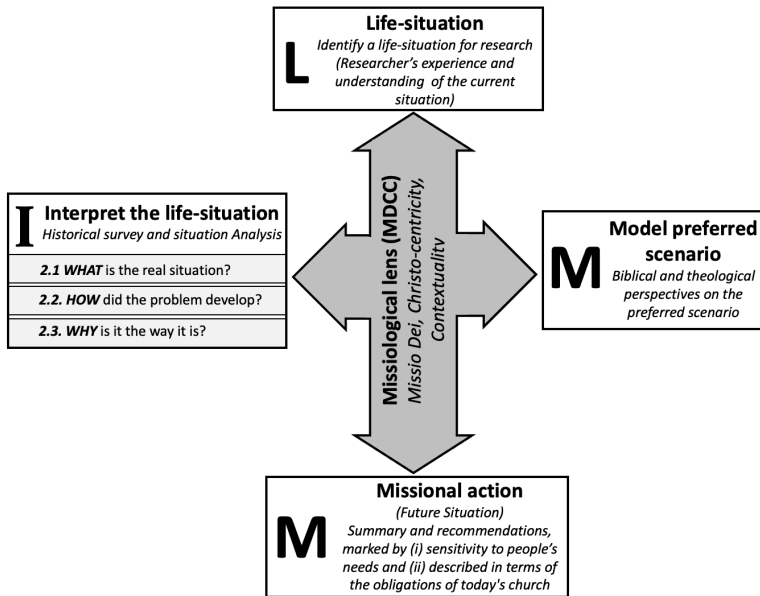


Figure 2 Schematic representation of the LIMM model<sup>8</sup>

## 5.2 Potential application of the LIMM model

This paper introduced a new missiological research model, which is being developed. In order to stimulate reflection, a few examples are offered that illustrate how this model may be used, either as a diagnostic tool or as a development tool.

### 5.2.1 As a diagnostic tool

As a diagnostic tool, it examines an existing life-situation or ministry, by reflecting on the researcher's understanding of MDCC and his or her own experience of the situation, as well as the details and important aspects of the experience, and the emotions elicited by the experience (Fleischer 2000: 35; Smith 2016: 153). The research is developed with a missiological focus; questions such as the following are raised:

- How does *missio Dei* inform the current ministry?

<sup>8</sup> This is the author's own schematic representation of the LIMM model.



- Is there sufficient focus on the proclamation of Christ, and how can the proclamation of Christ be advanced?
- What is the influence of the researcher's context on the ministry context, and vice versa?

These findings are compared to the preferred scenario, and missional action is proposed to improve the life-situation or ministry.

### **5.2.1.1 Academic research**

Academic research is one example of how L IMM can be used as a diagnostic tool, where the researcher identifies a life-situation or ministry that he or she wants to examine. L IMM serves as the academic research model and the elements of the L IMM model direct the researcher's analysis and evaluation of the situation. This is measured against MDCC principles as well as biblical and theological contributions. Based on this research, a more effective approach can be envisioned.

### **5.2.1.2 Ministry**

Another example is when a ministry uses L IMM to evaluate how well they incorporate MDCC principles. For instance, mission organizations could use the model to evaluate their ministry projects in light of biblical, theological and MDCC principles, to determine if their ministries are still fulfilling the organization's mandate.

## **5.2.2 Development**

As a development tool, the L IMM model is used to plan a new ministry, and to determine what is needed to succeed. The researcher explains his or her expectations of the future ministry, including the details and important aspects of the expectations, and emotions aroused by the expectations. The context is surveyed by engaging with, and observing key people and ministries. MDCC principles form the backbone of planning the new ministry and is guided by questions such as:

- How will the new ministry proclaim Christ?
- Are there elements of the researcher's context that could clash with the ministry context, and how can this be addressed?

Based on these findings, the new ministry is launched.

### **5.2.2.1 Evangelism**

A church engaged in evangelism and church planting can serve as an example. As they prepare to launch a new ministry, they could use L IMM as planning tool, to see if their regular approach will work in the new setting. The model brings the church's

ministry-understanding and prejudice into dialogue with the new context. This enables them to adapt their ministry model to be most effective in the new setting.

### 5.2.2.2 Overseas mission

Another example is when a person senses a call to serve as a missionary abroad. By using L IMM as planning tool, the person can learn about the cultural, economic, religious and social aspects of the people he or she is called to minister to. L IMM will also challenge the person to become aware of, and evaluate, his or her own understanding of MDCC principles, and how missionary work should be conducted.

## 6 Conclusion

The LIM model, developed by the Loyola Institute for Ministry, is based on pastoral praxis, where theological reflection is in constant dialogue with action. Based on mutual trust between the conversation partners, hidden assumptions are exposed that lead to new insights, awareness and understanding. Practical theology is not only concerned with understanding the world as it is, but contributes to the world becoming what God intended it to be. It is correlational, hermeneutical, critical and transformative.

The focus on pastoral praxis, contextual engagement and contributing to the world becoming what God wants it to be, means that the LIM model is an ideal basis for missiology to build on. The aspects of the *missio Dei*, Christocentricity and contextuality resonate with the essence of the LIM model, and contribute to the development of a new approach to missiological research – the L IMM model, as proposed in this paper.

### About the author

Dr Pieter Labuschagne is the Curriculum Coordinator at the South African Theological Seminary and leads the Course Development Team. He earned a PhD from the University of Pretoria, and served as a missionary for twenty years with Serving in Mission. His research interests include postcolonialism, Africanization, cross-cultural studies and missiological research methods. Contact: Pieter@sats.ac.za

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