
Missions in the fear of God¹

*Dr. P.J. (Flip) Buys
Associate Professor Missiology
Ecclesiastical School
Research Unit of the Faculty of Theology of North-West
University
Potchefstroom Campus*

buys.flip@gmail.com

Abstract

The study of Missions and Missiology has expressed new interest in Missional Spirituality since David Bosch published his Spirituality of the Road in 1979.

It can indeed be argued from many angles that the spirituality of missionaries, the staff of mission organizations and churches that really want to be part of the Missio Dei, has a vital impact on their zeal, motivation, perseverance as well as their practical methods of doing missions.

This article considers the biblical concept of the fear of God as a vital yet often missing aspect of missional spirituality.

The fear of God as biblical concept is explained and then applied to attitudes, approaches and methods of mission there where the rubber hits the road in real hands on missionwork in practice.

1 Edited version of a presentation given at the International Missions Conference of The Gospel Coalition in Orlando in April 2013.

Opsomming

Sedert Dawid Bosch sy Spirituality of the Road in 1979 gepubliseer het verskyn verskeie missiologiese publikasies waarin opnuut intense aandag gegee word aan missionale spiritualiteit.

Inderdaad kan vanuit 'n verskeidenheid hoeke en oogpunte met oortuiging aangetoon word dat die spiritualiteit van sendelinge, personeel van sendingorganisasies en kerke wat werklik deel wil wees van die Missio Dei 'n kardinale invloed het op hulle motivering, volharding, hulle gesindheid, benadering en metodes in sending.

Hierdie artikel ondersoek die betekenis van die Bybelse begrip die vrees van die Here as kardinale dog dikwels ontbrekende perspektief in die besinning oor missionale spiritualiteit.

Die vrees van die Here as Bybelse begrip word verduidelik en die implikasies daarvan vir die praktyk van sendingwerk en die gesindheid van missionale kerke aangedui.

1. Introduction

Among missiologists there is a growing interest in the relationship between spirituality and missions at both the popular and academic levels (Karecki, 2010:1; Bosch, 2001:20; Fensham, 2011; Hjalmarson & Helland, 2011). In his book *A Spirituality of the Road*, (originally published in 1979 and republished in 2001) David Bosch had strong critique against the notion that spirituality is analogous to withdrawal. The idea that devotional practices are like fuel that burns up as we go about our work, and the common thinking that prayer fills you up and missions drains you out. He pleaded for a more cyclical understanding of spirituality where engagement in the world deepens our experience of God and our engagement with God deepens our experience of the world. Several authors writing on missional spirituality emphasize that spirituality is struggling to integrate the emotional and spiritual aspects of spirituality with real life, there where the rubber hits the road on the missionfield.

Barry Fischer (2010:1) agrees with Steve Bevans in a response to a paper he has read, that spirituality is like a reservoir from which a person or a community can draw to motivate action, to keep on track, to bolster commitment, to avoid discouragement when times get rough”, and then

adds: "To speak of spirituality is not to speak about a part of life but rather about the whole of one's life."

All mission flows from a transformed life. The realization of a growing irritation with shallow outward techniques, and a hunger for a deeper missional spirituality, has recently led Roger Helland and Len Hjalmarson (2011) to publish their guide to a spirituality that is deep and yet practical, mystical (in the best sense of the word) and yet missional. Their goal is to lead the reader into the depth of spiritual life that do not want to escape the world, but rather want to engage and subvert the world from a life rooted and grounded in the trinitarian life of God.

Effective evangelism, holistic missions and faithful perseverance in spite of intense opposition, suffering and even persecution go hand in hand with continued practice of true biblically based Christian godliness and spiritual growth.

In the Book of Acts, where the remarkable growth of the church under the guidance of and in the power of the Holy Spirit is described, it is clear that the early church's growth was not simply quantitative; it was also qualitative (Trites, 1988:162). There was not just an increase in numbers and in geographical outreach; there was also a radical transformation in the personal lives of the individuals in the developing Christian communities throughout the Mediterranean and the Roman Empire. Wherever the gospel was preached, there was an increase in godly living driven by heartfelt spirituality.

This article wants to consider the biblical concept of the *Fear of God* as a central aspect of genuine Christian spirituality providing the deepest inner motivation and drive for missions and its influence on methodology and approaches to missions.

2. Missions and evangelism the overflow of true spirituality

After many years of studying evangelism in the early church and comparing it with evangelism in later stages of church history around the world, Michael Green came to the conclusion that in a certain sense the essence of evangelism may be summarised with one word: **overflow** (Green, 1992:8): It gives the right nuance: of someone who is so full of joy, reverence, worship and admiration for Jesus Christ as a mighty Saviour and so concerned about the glory of a majestic God, that evangelism flows from his life as surely as

a bathtub that is filled to overflowing with water. Evangelism then becomes a natural thing.

The word *overflow* has the qualities that are lacking in so many evangelistic approaches: *spontaneity* as well as *reverence and awe*. Incidentally, *overflow* is a very passable translation for the Greek word πληροφορία, (translated with *deep conviction* [NIV] OR *assurance* [KJV]). This term is used a good deal in the New Testament to describe the liberated confidence of a Christian. Paul, for example, reminds the Thessalonians that “our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and in much *confident overflow*” (πληροφορία,) (1 Thess 1:5).

The same word on the other hand is used in Hebrews 10:22 to describe the attitude with which we should draw near to God, namely with a *sincere heart in full assurance* of faith.

Francis Schaeffer, however, warned against an irrational emotional Christian religion where evangelical Christians begin to slip into a dichotomy, to separate an encounter with Jesus from the content of the Scriptures (including the discussable and the verifiable portions of Scripture) (Schaeffer, 1982:260). Such an understanding produces a kind of spirituality where, “it is now Jesus-like to sleep with a girl or a man, if she or he needs you. As long as you are trying to be human, you are being Jesus-like to sleep with the other person—at the cost, be it noted, of breaking the specific morality which Jesus taught.” (Schaeffer, 1982:259).

The biblical concept of the fear of God provides one of the most important key nuances of true biblical Christian spirituality, having an impact on the whole life of an individual and determines the whole motivation as well as methodology in our approach to missions.

3. Genuine faith expressed in the fear of God

The real kind of *overflow* that is needed for missions is a ***mixture of love and reverence, of abundant joy and deep respect***. The Bible calls this kind of attitude the ***fear of God***. Genuine faith is expressed in, and animated by, a reverential awe, and this is the basic meaning of the biblical idea of the ***fear of God***.

We read of the churches in Acts 9:31 that they ***were multiplied while they were walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit***.

For many Christians, one of the most perplexing commands in the New Testament is found in Simon Peter's words: "Fear God!" (1 Peter 2:17). They feel uncomfortable with such an exhortation. Now that through Christ we call God "Father", is there any room left for fearing Him? Surely we are meant to love Him, not to fear Him. Doesn't perfect love drive out fear (1 John 4:18)?

In the Bible, however, the primary meaning of the fear of God is veneration and honor, reverence and awe.

John Murray wrote in *Principles of Conduct*, "The fear of God is the soul of godliness" (cf. Bridges, 1999:31). It is the attitude that elicits from our heart's adoration and love, reverence and honor. It focuses with awe not primarily upon the wrath of God but upon the majesty, holiness, amazing love, forgiveness and transcendent glory of God.

This concept of the *fear of God* is often given as a key aspect of a holistic godly life as it can be shown in the following passages.

Proverbs 9:10: *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, ...*

1 Peter 1:17: *Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear.*

Clearly, the fear of God is not optional:

- *Live in the fear of the Lord always (Prov 23:17);*
- *fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell (Matt 10:28);*
- *in all things obey ... fearing the Lord (Col 3:22).*

In fact, God's wish for his covenant people is that they should fear Him. He says to Moses according to Deuteronomy, 5:29:

Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear me and keep all my commands always, so that it might go well with them and their children forever!

The deepest wish of any true child of God is expressed as to obtain an existential knowledge of this fear of God. Therefore it is part of David's desire of experience of godliness in Psalm 86:11:

Teach me your way, O LORD, and I will walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name.

Jesus carried out his ministry in the fear of God (Is 11:2, 3; Heb 5:7).

4. Meaning of the fear of God

It is not always easy to describe the exact meaning of the Hebrew word *יִרָאָה* (*yirat'*) that has been translated with the word *fear*. It is sometimes translated with *reverence*, sometimes with *serve* sometimes with *terror* (Harris, 1980:399 ff; Paul, 1993:34, 35). In various genres of the Old Testament the expression has different nuances or shades of meaning (Schultz, 1996:192). In several contexts the verb not only describes an awed disposition toward God but also often serves as the Old Testament word for "faith" in God that is demonstrated through obedience (Block, 2005:15). Paul (1993:34) summarizes: "Tegenover God betekent het: Hem erkennen als Heer en Hem liefhebben en dienen."

True fear of God almost defies definition, because it is really a synonym for *the heartfelt worship of God for Who He is and what He has done*.

Thus the biblical conception of fear embraces a much wider dimension than our common English word, which simply denotes some sort of dread or terror. While this meaning forms an essential part of the scriptural picture, it is by no means the primary significance, especially when the fear of God – an awe-inspiring reverence – is referred to.

It is true that the Bible uses the expression "the fear of God" in different ways.

We are told, "It is a fearful (terrible) thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb 10:31). Jesus taught that we should fear him (God) who has power to punish sin and consign men to utter destruction (Lk 12:4, 5).

Sometimes it does mean "terror", even a "horror" of God. The first occurrence of such fear may be found in Genesis 3 where Adam and Eve recoiled from the presence of the Holy God whose commandment they had blatantly spurned. Their fear was entirely reasonable for they had been sternly warned that disobedience would incur a grave judgment. Fear in this sense is quite naturally the logical consequence of sin (Gn 3:10; 4:13, 14; Prov 28:1).

Anxious fear seizes the wicked (Job 15:24), surprises the hypocrite (Is 33:14), and consumes evildoers (Ps 73:19), whose faithless lives are characterized by fear (Rv 21:8).

Such fear is the kind of fear some people have for God, but at the same time, deep in their hearts, they also carry animosity for Him, just as a slave would towards a cruel master. He serves his master, but only out of fear of punishment.

The true fear of God is a child-like fear. In line with the Puritans à Brakel, (1993:430) speaks of a filial fear that children have for their parents: "... they cannot bear to hear someone speak a dishonoring word about their parents; it grieves them at their heart and they will defend them with all their might".

To fear God is a combination of holy respect and glowing love. It is at the same time (1) a consciousness of being in the presence of true Greatness and Majesty, (2) a thrilling sense of privilege, (3) an overflow of respect and admiration; and perhaps supremely, (4) a sense that God's opinion about my life is the only thing that really matters. To someone who fears God, His fatherly approval means everything, and the loss of it is the greatest of all grieves. To fear God is to have a heart that is sensitive to both His God-ness and His graciousness. It means to experience great awe and a deep joy simultaneously when you begin to understand who God really is and what He has done for us.

Love for God and fear of Him are, therefore, not at all incompatible. To think that they are is to fail to see the richness of the character of the God we have come to know. It is to ignore the way in which knowing Him in all of His attributes, and responding appropriately to Him, stretches our emotional capacities to their limit. Scripture portrays the fear of the Lord and the love of the Lord as companion emotions.

F. W. Faber (cf. Ferguson, 1985:20) saw this clearly when he wrote:

*They love Thee little, if at all,
Who do not fear Thee much:
If love is Thine attraction, Lord,
Fear is Thy very touch.*

We see this same combination of *fear* and *love* in many of the Afrikaans Psalms of Totius of the Reformed Churches in South Africa, for example Psalm 119: 44:

*As ek dink aan U gestrengheid, (When I think of your strictness)
Dan meng liefde en vrees deureen; (Then love and fear blend in me)*

also Psalm 119:60

*Tot U loop ek, op U hoop ek, (To you I walk, on you I hope)
op U wette gee ek ag; (To your laws I give attention)
en ek hou wat U getuig het (and I keep what you have testified)
vol van liefde en stil ontsag ... (full of love and silent awe)*

It is a feeling of deep awe and respect about the magnitude of God. It gives the child of God a deep inner peace and calm. It lets him cry out in amazement: "O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens" (Psalm 8:1).

Such awareness not only leads to true wisdom (Ps 111:1) but also provides direction for the child of God throughout his life. When God works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure (Phil 2:12) you work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

This kind of spiritual experience drives a person to kneel down before God in amazement and adoration and with deep gratitude for his indescribable mercy. It brings them to cry out in utter amazement: "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!" (1 John 3:1).

It is therefore appropriate that the new international statement of faith of World Reformed Fellowship also expresses true Christian spirituality in terms of the fear of God:

Christian spirituality is a life-long process of deep reverence and love for God, which translates into a right relationship with fellow human beings (World Reformed Fellowship, 2011:8).

In summary the fear of God is awe, admiration, wonder, and love, all experienced simultaneously in the presence of His glorious majesty. Unless there is personal awareness of the awesome and majestic sovereignty of God, it is impossible to have a meaningful faith existing in one's heart (Ps 5:7; 89:7).

An experience of this child-like fear of God has influence on every aspect of a person's life, including our approach to missions.

Let us now look at the impact this kind of spirituality has on our lives in general and then specifically on our zeal for and methods in missions.

5. The effects of the fear of God in the life of a Christian

The true fear of God is holistic having an influence on a person's whole life. The most obvious impact of the fear of the Lord is that it produces holiness in our lives. It provides the spirit in which we are to work out our salvation into the whole of our lives (Phl 2.12) and to purify ourselves as we grow in holiness (2 Cor 7:1).

Not only will a right concept of the fear of God cause us to worship God aright, it will also regulate our conduct. As John Murray says: "What or whom we worship determines our behavior." Albert N. Martin has said that the essential ingredients of the fear of God are (1) correct concepts of God's character, (2) a pervasive sense of God's presence, and (3) a constant awareness of our obligation to God (cf Bridges, 1999:33).

The Bible abounds in illustrations of the sanctified lifestyle that the fear of God produces:

5.1 Motivation for Christian morality

To truly revere the Lord entails avoiding sin as expressed in Exodus 20:20: *God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning.*

Therefore, the fear of God is a deep inner motivation for genuine Christian morality. If we have some comprehension of God's infinite holiness and his hatred of sin, coupled with this pervasive sense of God's presence in all of our actions and thoughts, then such a fear of God will influence and regulate all our conduct.

An example is seen in the history of Joseph when the wife of Potiphar tried to seduce him. She blatantly invited him to have sexual intercourse with her, but he resisted. What was the secret of his moral power? The answer shows clearly in his words: *How could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?* (Genesis 39:9). His fear of God kept him from sinning.

James T. Draper, Jr. (1998:53) pointed out that a calamity of educational systems that no longer include the fear of God is reflected in violent crimes, mounting divorce rates, teenage pregnancies, abortions, illegal drug use, the highest illiteracy rate of any industrial nation, and the AIDS epidemic. These plagues, rising since 1963, bear witness to the disaster that ensues when God and the fear of his Name is banned from the academy.

5.2 Child-like fear of God produces integrity

Nehemiah was a model of integrity. The governors of his time all reigned through bribery and corruption. In Nehemiah 5:15 he says that the earlier governors – those preceding him – placed a heavy burden on the people and took forty shekels of silver from them in addition to food and wine. Their assistants also lorded it over the people. *But out of the fear of God he did not act like that.*

If we shared this sense of awareness that we live “before the face of God” (as the biblical phrase puts it), a new honesty would mark our speech and make us stand out in the world.

5.3 Child-like fear of God promotes obedience to God’s commands in our lives

Godly fear is characterized by total allegiance to the one true God.

The fear of God should provide a primary motivation for, as well as result in, obedience to him. If we truly revere God we will obey him, since every act of disobedience is an affront to his dignity and majesty.

When Noah received the command to build an ark he was obedient. Despite of the scorn of the people of his time he built the ark on dry ground. In Hebrews 11:7 we read that Noah ***in holy fear*** built an ark to save his family.

5.4 An antidote for the fear of people

A holy fear is actually a source of joy (Ps 2:11) and a veritable fountain of life (Prov 14:27). Therefore it also produces boldness and bravery. In fearful times of persecution, the fear of God will dominate the fear of man. The fear of God causes God’s children to speak out, though the fear of man bade them to be silent (Acts 4:18-21).

Jesus said that we should not fear those that can only kill the body, but that we should fear Him who can destroy body and soul in hell (Matt 10:28).

Many Christians are afraid to show that they are followers of Christ. Here is the answer to our own lack of courage in witness! In the context of his exhortation in Matthew 10:28 he said; “But if anyone publicly denies me, I will openly deny him before my Father in heaven” (Matt 10:33).

The great reformers in history were all people who acted with undaunted bravery. For example, friend and foe said of John Knox that he feared no man because he feared God.

6. The impact of a child-like fear of God in missions

Those who fear the Lord, who have been gripped, awed and stunned by the knowledge of his majestic transforming grace will – of course – want to employ all their energies and gifts to bring others to trust such a gracious Saviour. This is what happened in the early church: ***it was strengthened and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the***

Lord (Acts 9:31), (emphasis added). The early Christian fellowship, marked by the fear of the Lord, did not diminish in size – it was joined by others! The fear of God makes you part of the *Missio Dei*, then you are empowered by the Holy Spirit.

7. The missional impact of corporate worship in the fear of God

The quest for transcendence is a challenge to the quality of the church's public worship. John Stott asks: "Does worship offer what people are craving for – the element of mystery, the 'sense of the numinous', in biblical language 'the fear of God', in modern language 'transcendence'? My answer to my own question is 'Not often'. The church is not always conspicuous for the profound reality of its worship. We seem to have little awareness of the greatness and the glory of the almighty God in our gatherings for worship. We do not bow down before him in awe and wonder. Our tendency in worship services is sometimes to be cocky, flippant and proud and focuses on entertainment. We radiate little of an awareness of the majesty of the God we are meeting" (Stott, 1992:227).

Sometimes worship services are slovenly, mechanical, perfunctory and dull. At other times they are frivolous to the point of irreverence. No wonder those seeking the reality of God's presence often pass us by!

The New Testament makes it clear that the true fear of God amongst the worshipping people of God, also has an impact on unbelievers.

In 1 Corinthians 14:24-25 Paul says that there should be such a consciousness of God's presence when Christians are worshipping, that an unbeliever who might be there, will be touched to such an extent that he will fall down on his knees and worship God, declaring that God is really there among them.

If we want to be missional churches we need to listen carefully to the biblical criticism of religion. No book, not even by Marx and his followers, is more scathing of empty religion than the Bible. The prophets of the Old Testament were outspoken in the denunciation of the formalism and hypocrisy of Israelite worship. Jesus then applied their critique to the Pharisees of his day: "These people ... honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me" (Matt 15:8). And this indictment of religion by the Old Testament prophets and by Jesus is uncomfortably applicable to us and many of our churches today. Too much of our worship is ritual without reality, form without power, fun without the fear of God, ultimately religion without God.

For a church to be an instrument in the *Missio Dei* (the Mission of God to the world) intense, earnest, authentic, God-centered, hope-giving, life-changing worship is essential. We need to see worship as the fuel and the goal of world missions. The goal of world missions is the gladness of the peoples in the glory of God. The fuel of that goal is our own gladness in God. If we are not real and deep and fervent with reverence and awe in our worship of God, we will not commend him among the peoples with genuineness. How can you say to the nations, "Be glad in God!", if you are not glad in God? (Piper, 1993:20).

That is why we also read in Acts 19:17 that the name of the Lord was greatly honoured after a solemn fear had descended on the city.

8. The fear of God provides a vision and a zeal for missions

When Paul is explaining in 2 Corinthians 5:11, what it was that made him such a zealous missionary, he says: *Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men.*

For Paul involvement in missions was not a kind of a special hobby as some Christians and churches view it today. It was part and parcel of his life as natural as breathing and an outflow of his fear of God.

This connection between the fear of God and a zeal for missions is also well formulated in the Totius version of Psalm 22:8 of the Reformed Churches in South Africa.

laat wie God vrees, uit altyd wyer kringe sy lof vertel. (Let those who fear God proclaim his glory in always wider circles).

9. The fear of God producing boldness as well as gentleness in witnessing

It is amazing that the Bible combines our Apologetic task to witness with this fear of God. This filial fear is an absolute precondition in our spiritual lives in order to have boldness on the one hand and gentleness in the same time.

Look at 1 Peter 3:15

... But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect ... (NIV)²

In witnessing you usually find one of these problems: People are too timid to really speak boldly about the hope of salvation in Jesus Christ in their own hearts. On the other hand you sometimes find witnesses who are so full of pride and a lack of the fear of God that they are rude and are actually witnessing more about themselves than about Jesus Christ.

10. Proclamation of God's eminent judgment

Missionaries working in the fear of God are not afraid to preach the clear and sure coming judgement of God. When Jesus sent out the 70 on the first missions assignment he said to them:

When you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town that sticks to our feet we wipe off against you. Yet be sure of this: The kingdom of God is near.' I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town (NIV Lk 10:11).

When Paul preached the Gospel in addressing the Areopagus he concluded his message with the words:

In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead. (NIV Acts 17:30-31).

11. God centeredness in the work

When churches and even missionaries are involved in missions without doing it in the true fear of God, their whole approach becomes man centered and not God centered. They want to gather numbers as fast as possible to flatter their own ego or even to impress their mission board. They want to plant as many churches as possible as fast as possible, without really making sure that those who profess to have become genuine followers of Christ, have

² It is noteworthy to see that the original Greek has ἀλλὰ μετὰ πραΰτητος καὶ φόβου, where the ESV and NIV translates with *gentleness and respect* and the OAV 1953 with *met sagmoedigheit en vrees*.

truly committed themselves to Christ as their only hope in life and death and their one and only Saviour and Lord.

Zodhiates (2000) describes the Greek term θεοσέβεια *theosébeia*; *gen. theosebeías*, as *God-fearing*, reverence toward God, godliness. Godliness is always devotion in action. It is not just a warm, emotional feeling about God, the kind of feeling we may get while singing some grand old hymn or dancing with a praise band or some modern-day chorus of worship. Neither is devotion to God merely a time of private Bible reading and prayer, a practice we sometimes call “devotions”.

Godliness is an attitude toward God. This attitude is composed of three essential elements:

- the fear of God
- the love of God
- the desire for God

From this Godward attitude arises the character and conduct as fruit of godliness.

Sometimes missionaries may fear their sending organisation or the loss of their image as successful missionaries in the eyes of their senders, more than they fear God. In order to prove to their sending organisation and supporters that their work is worthwhile, they are quick to accept people as full members of a church without having seen clear evidences of true repentance and faith and new Christians radiating fruit of godliness in their lives. Without realising it missionaries and mission organisations sometimes want to exhibit their converts as trophies to their supporters. They may publish all kinds of sentimental articles in mission magazines with the photos of their successes. When local people then read such mission reports they may burst out laughing or even be disgusted with the false pictures portrayed.

12. Missions without the fear of God produces syncretism

When mission work is not done in the fear of God and new converts do not learn to live in reverence and awe it often happens that new Christians want to accept new teachings but also retain many old pagan legacies, resulting in syncretism (Hesselgrave, 1980:246-247).

This kind of approach has led to a vast problem in Africa. There are large congregations full of baptised pagans. Many churches are extremely weak because they are packed with unfaithful Christians who still walk with one leg in paganism and cling to pagan beliefs like the veneration of ancestral spirits and consultation of traditional healers (isangomas and inyangas) that rely on witchcraft practices, when they come into crisis situations.

It is also becoming clear that the most important problem in an effective intervention in the HIV AIDS pandemic, namely **stigmatization**, is to a large extent caused by witchcraft legacies of traditional African religion (Buys, 2008:35).

In this regard some missionaries have a greater fear of losing numbers than they have a genuine fear of God. Therefore they even concoct a kind of "Contextualised Theology of Missions" that allows for the accommodation of raw paganism within the Christian Church (Kgatla, 1997:634-646; For a good summary of Reformed views on Contextualization, see Conn, 1990:52-66).

13. No self-supporting churches without the fear of God

There are many churches in Africa that have been established more than 50 years ago, with fairly large congregations, but they are still unable to support their own pastors. There are even churches which after several decades of existence, are in such a deep bondage of a culture of dependency, that they still appeal to mission boards overseas for new missionary pastors when a serving missionary retires from the work. The painful thing is that they often do not really want the missionary, but they want the money that usually flows into an area as a by-product of a missionary being sent to that area.

In some places the sponsoring mission organisation passed through a financial crisis and was forced to radically cut funds going to the support of pastors. As a result, pastors failed to find other means of support from their churches and took secular employment. Abandoned chapels and scattered congregations were the result.

It is difficult to escape the conclusion that there was something fundamentally wrong in the life of those churches right from the start. Surely God does not intend for the church in any country to continue to be so dependent upon a sponsoring foreign mission, that when its help is removed the young

church becomes sick and dies (Roland Allen, 1956:5-30 gives many biblical arguments to prove this point).

In the New Testament we see a completely reversed pattern. There we read of young churches that supported older churches financially. Paul says that he was almost feeling embarrassed by the willingness of the church in Macedonia to bring financial sacrifices to help the poor in the mother church in Jerusalem.

*For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even **beyond their ability**. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. And they did not do as we expected, but they **gave themselves first to the Lord** and then to us in keeping with God's will. (2 Corinthians 8:5)*

They **first gave themselves to the Lord!** That is precisely the first place where many missionaries and evangelists and church workers go wrong. Because they do not walk in the fear of the Lord, they do not really lead people to **first give themselves to the Lord**. They allow new people as members of the church without real evidence of having started to walk in the true fear of God! People who have not been lead to a filial fear of God will not be willing to sacrifice themselves in order to seek first the kingdom of God. Hesselgrave, (1980:56) therefore, stresses the need for genuine conversion in church planting very strongly.

14. Missionaries not Christ centered enough

When a missionary does not really do his work in the fear of God, he often trains the converts to depend on himself and not to become themselves responsible to Christ. It may sometimes be because missionaries have an overprotectiveness for the new converts; other times it may be that missionaries unconsciously desire to build their own kingdoms and have people look to them as the indispensable man; it may even stem from a lack of faith in the Holy Spirit to do His work in maturing new converts.

There is one "pearl of great price" in building the church on the mission field, and that is a sense of responsibility on the part of the new converts (Hodges, 1976:17). With such a sense of responsibility the church will prosper. Without it – although we try to strengthen the church with a thousand other reinforcements, in the end it will surrender to the spirit of the world around. Only God can produce this sense of responsibility in the hearts and minds of the members of the young church. But the way in which a missionary

approaches his work will open or close doors for the indigenous people to become responsible or hinder them in their growth in becoming really responsible children of God, who are walking in the fear of God and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:31).

15. The origin of man centered theology and missions

Why is it that the fear of God is not at the heart of true Christian living even in the hearts of missionaries? It really lies in people's ideas about God; their concepts of God. We have made God small and man great also in missions. Throughout the last two centuries our Western world has been intoxicated more and more with the notion that "man is the measure of all things". Thus any god still believed in, has been a pagan god, made by man in his own image, to suit his own taste. No wonder the sense of awe has gone from our spirits.

Martin Luther once put his finger on the issue when he told the great humanist scholar Erasmus, "Your God is too man-like". Only when we share Luther's other great cry, "Let God be God", is God feared, because only when He is seen as the Glorious One are our hearts hushed in reverence before Him. If we do not fear God today it is not because (as we sometimes mistakenly assume) we have been set free from "Old Testament religion", but because we do not really know Him as God. For to know Him as God is to fear him, to be "stunned", as A.W. Tozer puts it, by the *splendour of His presence* (as quoted by Ferguson, 1985:10).

16. How does one achieve a filial fear of God?

There is an infinite gap in worth and dignity between God the Creator and man the creature, even though man has been created in the image of God. The fear of God is a heartfelt recognition of this gap.

After God had revealed something of his predominant majesty to Job, and had asked:

Do you have an arm like God's, and can your voice thunder like his? (Job 40:9)

Job replied;

... I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted ...

... My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you.

Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes ... (Job 42:2, 5, 6)

A realisation of our insignificance before God Almighty brings us to the point to come on our knees before God with awe and true fear. Thereafter Job could pray for his friends.

But this realisation alone is not enough to let true fear of God emerge in our lives. The main thing needed for growth in a filial fear of God, is the realisation of God's amazing and astonishing mercy for a lost sinner.

In Psalm 130:4 it is put like this:

But there is forgiveness with you, that you may be feared.

In the Totius version of Psalm 130:2 het puts it like this:

<i>Maar nee, daar is vergewing</i>	<i>(There is forgiveness with you)</i>
<i>altd by U gewees;</i>	<i>(always)</i>
<i>daarom word U met bewing</i>	<i>(so that with trembling)</i>
<i>reg kinderlik gevrees.</i>	<i>(we have a childlike fear of you)</i>

An understanding of God's mercy and loving kindness evokes the true fear of God in our hearts. The realisation that the great and Almighty God, who should condemn me because of all my sins, has forgiven me, has sent his Son to save me, has adopted me and made me his heir. This realisation brings us to a true filial fear of God. As John Newton says in his song "Amazing Grace":

T'was grace that taught my heart to fear ...

We mistake Newton's meaning if we understand him to say that grace removes the fear of the Lord. No, it is fears that grace removes by teaching us the fear of the Lord!

It is brought about by a realisation of God's love.

The Holy Spirit produces the true fear of God in our hearts. He does it by having the Gospel proclaimed. Where Jesus Christ is preached faithfully, God allows people to look into his heart; a heart filled with so much love for a lost, condemned world, that He sent his only Son, whom He loved dearly, to rescue sinners to have fellowship with them and draw them to have fellowship with Him in true fear.

It is of utmost importance for missionaries and churches that want to be missional and part of God's mission, to learn to walk in the fear of God and the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

Bibliography

- À BRAKEL, W. 1999. *The Christian's Reasonable Service*. Escondido, CA: The Ephesians Four Group.
- ALLEN, R. 1956. *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* London : World Dominion Press.
- BLOCK, D.I. 2005. The Grace of Torah: The Mosaic Prescription for Life (Deut. 4:1-8; 6:20-25), *Bibliotheca Sacra* Volume 162:645.
- BOSCH, D. 2001. *A Spirituality of the Road*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers.
- BRIDGES, J. 1999. Something More Than Christian Character. *Discipleship Journal*, Issue 18. Colorado Springs: The Navigators/NavPress.
- BUYS, P.J. 2008. Shame, Guilt and HIV/AIDS in Rural Communities. *Praktiese Teologie in Suid-Afrika/ Practical Theology in South Africa*, Vol 23. (3) 2008.
- CONN, H.M. 1990. Contextual Theologies: The Problem of Agendas. *Westminster Theological Journal*, (Spring).
- DRAPER, J. T. JR. 1989. The Ground of All Truth: Deut. 6:4-9/ *Faith and Missions*, Volume 15:2:53.
- FENSHAM, C. 2011. A Missional Spirituality. Understanding God's call. <http://presbyterianrecord.ca/2011/12/01/a-missional-spirituality/>. Accessed on 13.10.2014
- FERGUSON, S. 1985. The Fear of the Lord: Seeing God as He is. *Discipleship Journal*, Issue 56 Feb.
- FISCHER B. 2010. Towards a Precious Blood Spirituality of Mission. http://www.mission-preciousblood.org/docs/index.php?option=com_docman&task=cat_view&gid=21&Itemid=5 (Accessed on 6 Feb 2014).
- GREEN, M. 1992. *Evangelism through the Local Church. A Comprehensive Guide to all Aspects of Evangelism*. Nashville: Nelson Publishers.
- HARRIS, R.L. (Ed.) 1980. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Vol 1. Chicago: Moody Press.
- HESELGRAVE, D.J.1980. *Planting Churches Crossculturally; A Guide for Home and Foreign Missions*. Grand Rapids : Baker Book House.
- HJALMARSON, L. & HELLAND, R. 2011. *Missional Spirituality. Embodying God's Love from the Inside Out*. IVP Books.

- HODGES, M.L. 1976. *The Indigenous Church. A Complete Handbook On How to Grow Young Churches*. Springfield: Gospel Publishing House.
- KARECKI, M. 2010. Contemplation and Mission: Exploring the Relationship. <http://67.59.160.66/Contemplation%20and%20Mission--National%20Meeting.pdf> Accessed on 13.10.2014.
- KGATLA, S.T. 1997. The perspectives of “undersiders” and “topsiders” on African Religions. *Missionalia*, Vol 25:no.4.
- PAUL, J, 1993. Vroomheid in het Oude Testament. In: Van't Spijker, W., Balke, W., Exalto, K., & Van Driel, L, *Spiritualiteit*. Kampen: De Groot Goudriaan.
- PIPER, J. 1993. *Let the Nations Be Glad!: The Supremacy of God in Missions*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Books.
- SCHAEFFER, F A. 1982. *The complete works of Francis A. Schaeffer: a Christian worldview* (Vol. 1). Westchester, IL: Crossway Books.
- SCHULTZ, R. 1996. Integrating Old Testament Theology And Exegesis: Literary, Thematic, And Canonical Issues. In: VanGemmeren W.A. (Ed.) *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*. Carlisle: Paternoster Press.
- STOTT, J. 1992. *The contemporary Christian*. Leicester: IVP.
- TRITES, A. A. 1988. Church Growth in the Book of Acts. *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Volume 145 (April 1988, 145:162-173).
- WORLD REFORMED FELLOWSHIP. 2011. The WRF Statement of Faith in English <http://wrfnet.org/about/statement-of-faith#.VDvX0PmSySo> Accessed on 13.10.2014
- ZODHIATES, S. 2000. *The complete word study dictionary: New Testament*. Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers.