

Abstract (#2)

Introduction (#3)

Methodological
framework development
(#4)

Politics (#5)

Mission in *missio politica*
(#6)

Eschatology in *missio
politica* (#7)

Utopia in *missio politica*
(#8)


Speaking truth to power
(#9)

Conclusion (#10)

Acknowledgements
(#11)

References (#18)

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Original Research

***Missio politica in missio Dei:* Integrating politics into God's eternal mission**

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Abstract

The understanding of the *missio Dei* from the point of view of the International Missionary Conference in Willingen has rightly broadened the missiological horizon and promoted new approaches to God's mission in the world. This conference abandoned the ecclesiological approach to mission and focused attention on God as the foundation or source of mission. Inherently, this new perspective opened the door for other human institutions, such as politics, to be seen as critical participants together with the churches in the *missio Dei*. Apart from the writings of Saayman and Reimer, not much scholarly work is carried out to further develop the framework of the *missio politica* as an important tool to enable an analysis of politics in accordance with total salvation as the ultimate goal of the *missio Dei*. Relying upon literary analysis, this contribution orients itself on such exclusive important works as a basis on which *missio politica* is strengthened as a missiological framework that examines politics in relation to the ultimate goal of the *missio Dei*.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: This article presents research on the development of the *missio politica* framework in the field of missiology and highlights it as an important framework encompassing the scope of politics in relation to the eternal mandate of the *missio Dei*.

Keywords: *missio Dei*; mission; politics; *missio politica*; missiology; eschatology; utopia.

Introduction

Missio politica is a topic of pivotal importance because it constitutes a new missiological framework with largely unstudied potential. Once fully consolidated, this framework will result in a wealth of methods and techniques that will help theological scholarship, in particular missiologists to investigate the mandate of politics in relation to the economy of *missio Dei*. In the words of Thinane (2022 (#CIT0043_2582)), *missio politica* is 'an important missiological framework to analyse the instrumentally useful politics in line with efforts towards total salvation as the ultimate goal of *missio Dei*' (Thinane 2022 (#CIT0043_2582) :1). Originally this framework was framed as *missio politica oecumenica* and was developed amid ecumenical engagements by the International Missionary Council (IMC) and the Commission of the Churches on Internal Affairs (CCIA) through the IMC's merger with the World Council of Churches (WCCs) in 1961 and renamed as the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) (Reimer 2017 (#CIT0035_2582) :1.4; Thinane 2022 (#CIT0043_2582) :7). Subsequently, on this important basis, missiologists such as Professor Johannes Verkuyl (1908–2001) and Professor Willem Saayman (1942–2015) published important works that attempted to further examine the interrelationship between mission, politics and ecumenism (Garcia 2006 (#CIT0019_2582) :116–170; Saayman 1991 (#CIT0036_2582) ; Verkuyl 1976 (#CIT0047_2582)). The most recent work dealing with *missio politica*, but without adding the word *oecumenica*, is by the Russian-German professor of missiology Johannes Reimer, whose 2017 work entitled *Missio politica: The mission of church and politics* was instrumental in motivating the author of this article to reimagine the inclusive use of *missio politica* beyond Christian delineations (Reimer 2017 (#CIT0035_2582) ; Thinane 2022 (#CIT0043_2582) :1–13).

While the given scholars have examined the *missio politica* on the basis of Christian reflections or from the perspective of Christianity, the present work will draw on their esteemed, timeless efforts to rebuild the *missio politica* as an integrative and neutral methodological framework that can be used by other religions. In this way, this article will present *missio politica* from an inclusive perspective that accommodates a religiously pluralistic world. This happens in accordance with the far-reaching, comprehensive understanding of the *missio Dei* from the point of view of the IMC, which met in Willingen, Germany, in 1952. It was this conference that rightly expanded the concept of mission beyond the borders of the church and placed the Triune God at the centre as the only source of mission. In other words, this conference has shifted the understanding of mission from a church-centred mission to the Triune God-centred mission (Reimer 2017 (#CIT0035_2582) :2.1, 4.5).

The work of this article is roughly divided into four parts: firstly, a brief explanation of the understanding of the methodological framework development related to *missio politica* as the new framework within the field of theology. Secondly, the term politics is broadly defined, consistent with the broader scope of the *missio Dei*. Thirdly, the mission concept of *missio politica* is identified in accordance with the Willingen perspective of *missio Dei*. Fourthly, and lastly, some of the essential and identifiable elements of the *missio politica* are described, which include eschatology, utopia and speaking truth to the powerful.

Methodological framework development

Throughout the history of academia, scholars from various scientific disciplines have been able to develop a pool of methodological frameworks to support research efforts. However, McMeekin et al. (2020 (#CIT0030_2582)) observe that there is currently no formal definition of what really constitutes a methodological framework in the academic community. Instead, various scholars have largely come to the conclusion that a methodological framework must provide reasonably well-thought-out practical guidance as a procedure for conducting academic study or research (McMeekin et al. 2020 (#CIT0030_2582) :174). Research can be broadly defined as a systematic or logical search for new, useful and factual knowledge on a given subject with the intention of gaining understanding, exploring new interpretations and solving new or existing scientific and social problems (Goundar 2012 (#CIT0020_2582)). This is consistent with Breen and Lindsay (1999 (#CIT0009_2582)), who define an academician or researcher as someone who is curious as to why certain things are the way they are and accordingly searches objectively and systematically for answers based on the existing knowledge (Breen & Lindsay 1999 (#CIT0009_2582) :76).

Contrary to this, the field of theology is rich in a number of methodological frameworks that have been adopted throughout its history merely to outline basic foundations that researchers should follow in their scholarly discourse about God (Holmes & Lindsay 2018 (#CIT0023_2582) :1–9). Unlike a secular researcher who enters the inquiry out of sheer curiosity, a theological researcher's inquisitiveness is compelled by the substance of his or her faith to conduct an inquiry. Such a journey is often guided by a comprehensively coherent tradition from which no mere scholar may deviate. On the one hand, a theological researcher sets out to explore the epistemological and ideological understanding of God as presented through theological scholarship. On the other hand, a missiologist in the field of theology is someone who studies and researches mission or missiology, whether from a political, economic, cultural or even social perspective, so long as such investigation is inspired or prescribed by God's mission (*missio Dei*). It means that such a person draws equally on existing religious or theological modalities to examine the impact of social,

political, cultural and economic realities in relation to human salvation as the ultimate goal of the *missio Dei*. Thus, the *missio Dei* becomes the touchstone that inspires the missiologist to carry out his or her inquiry into God and the world. Given that missiology as an academic discipline is something of a latecomer to theology, there is a gap in the development of methodological frameworks to guide missiological research.

Corresponding to the given explanation, this article will rely upon literature analysis to continue the process of developing *missio politica* as a missiological methodological framework that will enable missiologist to examine politics in line with the aim of the *missio Dei*. In other words, *missio politica* as a framework encompasses the mission of God (*missio Dei*) through politics. This is in line with McMeekin et al.'s (2020 (#CIT0030_2582)) three phases of development characterising the methodological framework, namely identification of data to inform the methodological framework, development of the methodological framework and validation, testing and refinement of the methodological framework (McMeekin et al. 2020 (#CIT0030_2582) :173–181). After the initial introduction of the *missio politica* in 1961 through the initiated collaboration of the IMC, CCIA and WCC, scholars such as Garcia (2006 (#CIT0019_2582)), Saayman (1991 (#CIT0036_2582)), Verkuyl (1976 (#CIT0047_2582)) and perhaps especially Reimer (2017 (#CIT0035_2582)), as the most recent missiologist, have identified important data informing the *missio politica*; this article picks up where they left off in order to further develop and, if necessary, validate this methodological framework.

Politics

Politics is a highly complex topic, and it is just as complex to define it. The problem of defining politics is further complicated by the fact that, on the one hand, history is saturated with a range of political ideologies, and on the other hand, our perceptions of politics differ from person to person. Interestingly, Taft (2006 (#CIT0041_2582)) has attempted to describe the implication of politics from the perspective of those who expressly refuse to identify with politics but are aware and committed to combating social inequality and injustices within their localities. Similarly, Axford, Browning and Huggins (1997 (#CIT0004_2582)), in attempting to introduce the concept of politics, found that every living person is inherently linked to politics just by watching TV news, reading newspapers or even expressing opinions about what is right or wrong (Axford et al. 1997 (#CIT0004_2582) :1). The next basic definition will first show the etymology of the word politics and finally strive to appropriate or describe it as warranted by the *missio Dei*.

It is important to derive the correct use of the word 'politics' from its original usage by first understanding its grammatical construction, etymology and early implications. The word politics

is derived from the Greek term πολιτικά, *politiká*, which means the affairs of the cities and in a broader sense describes a kind of relationship to a sociocultural space. It includes social responsibilities in relation to group policymaking and resource allocation. According to Cole (2021 (#CIT0014_2582)), in its original sense, the Greek word τὰ πολιτικά – *tá politiká* (meaning ‘affairs of the city’) indicates a community that strives to live a life in truth, a truth that is in line with the Greek etymological sense of unhidden. He further emphasises that when such revealing truth is correctly applied to politics, politics can be understood as a collective human struggle to reveal the truth in relation to their real existence. Citing the work of the Greek philosopher Professor Christos Yannaras, Cole then seeks to reconnect the word politics back to πολιτεία – *politeía*, wherein the Greek root πόλις – *pólis* (meaning ‘city’) referred to ‘the permanent, unchanging, harmonious and, above all, impersonal relational order’ that the Greeks sought to demonstrate in their collective political life (Cole 2021 (#CIT0014_2582) :3). Thus, Tutu (2017 (#CIT0045_2582)) is right when proposing that the word politics is about the collective enforcement of the social order that has to be consistently implemented by citizens within a certain territory for their own betterment. In other words, the definition of politics boils down to a society’s fundamental alignment towards a unified goal (Tutu 2017 (#CIT0045_2582) :165–166).

If anything can be gleaned from the given analysis, it is clear that every living human being has some connection or is inherently linked to politics, regardless of whether or not they associate themselves with politics (Reimer 2017 (#CIT0035_2582) :2.3). More importantly, however, politics is about discourses concerning the inherent mandate to order societies towards a conceivable unified goal. In other words, politics aims to oblige the members of a society to collectively achieve an important human goal that cannot otherwise be achieved individually.

Mission in *missio politica*

The definition of mission was the subject of sustained research activity in the field of missiology for many years prior to the 1952 International Missionary Conference in Willingen. However, after Willingen, any discussion of the meaning of mission rightly centred on the concept of *missio Dei* (Bosch 2011 (#CIT0008_2582) :398–402; Engelsviken 2003 (#CIT0017_2582) :481–497; Laing 2009 (#CIT0027_2582) :89–99). In other words, from the Willingen Conference to the present day, missiology continues to centre all theology of mission on the Triune God as the source of mission (Reimer 2017 (#CIT0035_2582) :2.1). Accordingly, *missio Dei* becomes the heart of any dialogue in mission (Kritzing 2013 (#CIT0026_2582) :36). From Willingen, where the Triune God rightly dethroned the church from the assumption that it was at the centre of mission, it was emphasised that God in his own mission is not active only in the church but

far beyond the ecclesiastical parameters. In essence, this emphasis contradicted the traditional understanding, which suggested that *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (beyond the church there is no salvation) (Von Rohr **1967 (#CIT0048_2582)** :107–121). Thus, by placing the Triune God at the centre of mission, the Willingen Conference understood that the Triune God is equally active in the church and through other institutions (Saayman **1991 (#CIT0036_2582)** :5–8). Consequently, the church had to accept that there are legitimate human social structures beyond itself that are part of God's plan in his own mission (Reimer **2017 (#CIT0035_2582)** :2.3).

Incidentally, the institution of politics rightly belongs to the above-mentioned institutions because the Willingen Conference took place in the context of political fears triggered not only by the aftermath of the Second World War (Barton **1919 (#CIT0005_2582)** :1–35; Taylor **1964 (#CIT0042_2582)**) but in particular by the grim political context in China, which threatened mission prospects. Prior to this war, the scope of mission was more inward than outward. In other words, prior to the volatile political context in China, mission was about the church and for the church. According to Sugeno (**1992 (#CIT0040_2582)**), the sense of mission during this period was limited as it reflected the culture of their national origins. After World War II, however, the mission began to take on the global character that reflected the culture of the context in which the mission was conducted (Sugeno **1992 (#CIT0040_2582)** :12). According to Barton (**1919 (#CIT0005_2582)**), a number of foreign missionaries were trapped in the war zone and eventually subjected to the laws of war, resulting in missionary compromises that would shape the direction of the mission beyond the wartime (Barton **1919 (#CIT0005_2582)** :1–2). In fact, Bosch (**2011 (#CIT0008_2582)**) identifies four trade-offs that Christian missions had to face after World War II, namely trade-offs with the state, culture, money and disunity (Bosch **2011 (#CIT0008_2582)** :297). This shift in missionary perspective is perhaps further substantiated by Winter (**1974 (#CIT0052_2582)**), who observes that while mission was church-centred before World War II, more independent mission agencies emerged shortly thereafter (Winter **1974 (#CIT0052_2582)** :13–14). A few years after the end of the war (01 September 1939 – 02 September 1945), the communist revolution in China, which culminated in communist victory in 1949, threatened the establishment of the mission in China and sent dire signals for missionary activities elsewhere in the world. Although by this time most missionaries had either fled to neighbouring countries or returned to their birthplaces, those who remained could either jeopardise the character of the mission by submitting to communist ideologies or suffer discriminative restrictions that could lead to persecution (Tucker **1976 (#CIT0044_2582)** :97–100). Taken together, the political fears emanating from China, as well as the aftermath of World War II, led to what Bosch (**2011 (#CIT0008_2582)**)

calls 'shifts in missionary thinking' (Bosch **2011 (#CIT0008_2582)** :378–381).

Accordingly, the politically influenced circumstances mentioned here led to a somewhat open relationship between political ideology and missionary theology. It was such historical-political events that effectively forced mission into a coexistence with politics, with missionaries having to consider the direction of politics in both their discourse and projections. Immediately, it became clear that missionaries had to understand the political agenda if they were to pursue and fulfil God's primary mission in the world. Although not comprehensive, it is such political developments that have marked the need for Christian missionary responsibility in politics or that formed the interface between mission and politics, referred to in this article as *missio politica* (Saayman **1991 (#CIT0036_2582)** :1–21). Mission here certainly does not mean ecclesiastical mission but a broader mission ordered within the framework of *missio Dei*. In other words, *missio politica* generally refers to a missiological framework that integrates the mandate or scope of politics into the economy of the *missio Dei*. Although not exhaustive, the next sections will make a limited attempt to describe some of the essential features of the *missio politica* as a framework.

Eschatology in *missio politica*

The term 'eschatology' comes from the combination of two Greek terms (ἔσχατος and λόγος), which roughly means ἔσχατος – 'last, end or final' and λόγος – 'study of, or logic of or reason of' separately. Generally speaking, then, the term eschatology refers to 'the study of final things' in the Bible. Christian eschatology, as the doctrine of the last things, is among the major branches of Christian theology. According to Wilkinson (**2010 (#CIT0051_2582)**), forms of eschatology within Christian theology include but are not limited to Christological eschatology, redemptive eschatology, theocentric eschatology, contextual eschatology, integrative eschatology and political and pastorally responsible eschatology (Wilkinson **2010 (#CIT0051_2582)** :33–40). Accordingly, the substance or content of the *missio politica* inherently presupposes a somewhat distant but slowly approaching eschatological horizon. As the reach of missiology is nothing other than understanding of contemporary human imperatives as consumed by efforts in securing total salvation as the ultimate goal of the *missio Dei* (Sarisky **2013 (#CIT0037_2582)** :257–270), what is at the heart of such imperatives is a view informed by eschatological considerations (Ma **2009 (#CIT0028_2582)** :186–198; Saayman **1991 (#CIT0036_2582)** :15).

In the world of politics, where the notion of God is trumped by materialistic and secular ideologies (Blanton **2014 (#CIT0006_2582)** ; Casanova **2014 (#CIT0012_2582)** :1049–1066), where human beings continue to live as though autonomous and independent from the transcendental God or as Hugo Grotius (1583–

1645) would put it: '*Etsi Deus non daretur* (as if God does not exist)' (Appolonov **2018 (#CIT0002_2582)** :63–71), even though the ultimate realisation of the goal of the *missio Dei* remains at the heart of mission, the missiological analysis of human or political participation in the work of the *missio Dei* can neither be separate nor without eschatological perceptions. In such circumstances, the subject of eschatology is not an end but becomes the means by which the final goal of the *missio Dei* – total salvation – is reached. In this way, eschatology becomes the central hope that directs missionary action towards the eternal destiny embodied by the objective of the *missio Dei*. Perhaps this is why Bosch (**2011 (#CIT0008_2582)**) believes that eschatology signifies the hope element in religion, particularly within Christian religion, and even goes further to support it with the words of Ernest Bloch: 'Where there is hope, there is religion' (Bosch **2011 (#CIT0008_2582)** :511). Perhaps it is this same hope as derived from the idea of eschatology that inspired the German professor emeritus of systematic theology at the University of Tübingen, Jürgen Moltmann (**1967 (#CIT0031_2582)**), to write his excellent book entitled *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*. This very hope has always been instrumental in sustaining the church throughout its complex history; hence, the 1938 IMC Madras conference could pleasantly state: 'We are convinced that only this eschatological attitude can prevent the Church from becoming secularised'. But eschatology emerged more clearly at the 1952 Willingen Conference, gripped by the political anxieties after World War II, and there it re-established itself as the basis of mission, particularly in relation to ecumenical discussion (Bosch **2011 (#CIT0008_2582)** :514).

Missio Dei inherently involves God's special intervention aimed at restoring or saving his own creation from decay (Reimer **2017 (#CIT0035_2582)** :3.3). God's interventional act translates into a mission that began at a specific point in history and will end at a specific point in the future. This mission continues in accordance with God's will and ends accordingly at the time of his choice. That is to say, the *missio Dei*, by its nature, presupposes a time limit (the end) for the completion of the mission. Similarly, a *missio politica* analysis must at all times be characterised by an element of eschatology. As if receptive to this understanding, when Saayman (**1991 (#CIT0036_2582)**) states that 'the political dimension of Christian mission should always be understood in the light of eschatology', he also vividly underscores that the eschatological element in policy analysis aims to protect Christian sociopolitical engagement from being viewed as mere romantic idealism without hope or concrete anticipation (Saayman **1991 (#CIT0036_2582)** :15–16). In other words, *missio politica* analysis not only must go beyond the present secular limitations, but also impose an eschatological outlook as a way of keeping the society's eyes on the far yet approaching horizon. Klaasen and Solomons (**2019 (#CIT0025_2582)**) use similar

language to describe Professor Nico Botha's theological scholarly journey. They argue that Nico Botha pushed the boundaries, challenged boundaries, developed potentials aimed at pushing boundaries and sought a form of theology that got missiologists rolling their eyes to a distant eschatological horizon (Klaasen & Solomons **2019 (#CIT0025_2582)** :18). Although eschatology can be described in terms of a range of choices between alternatives, the next section focuses on utopia as a form of eschatology to which *missio politica* is directed.

Consequently, a missiologist who addresses the question of politics related to the aim of the *missio Dei* cannot do so without essentially expressing or being aware of the eschatological perceptions inherent in the *missio Dei*'s plan itself. Saayman (**1991 (#CIT0036_2582)**) states it more clearly: 'For eschatology creates room for the unexpected, even revolutionary, breaking in of the kingdom of Christ' (Saayman **1991 (#CIT0036_2582)** :16). Bosch (**2011 (#CIT0008_2582)**) addresses the question of mission as action that is encompassed by hope; he explains eschatology more clearly:

[T]his eschatology had no ethic for public life and left the church helpless in the face of the demons of power-politics, particularly the challenge presented by National Socialism. Neither was there room for any expectation of a different future. (p. 514)

Thus, as Saayman (**1991 (#CIT0036_2582)**) correctly observes, the eschatological dimension is integrated into the mission to prevent Christian sociopolitical participation from being understood as mere romantic idealism but rather being associated with a special hope for what is expected in the future (Saayman **1991 (#CIT0036_2582)** :16).

Utopia in *missio politica*

In this article, the idea of utopia does not necessarily refer to political utopia per se but is only used generally as the ultimate ideal representing or analogous to the ultimate goal of the *missio Dei*. Although the idea of the perfect or better state of life has always existed even before Plato (Aslan **2020 (#CIT0003_2582)** :145), a widely read dialogue from his 375 BC book entitled *The Republic*, dealing predominantly with the questions of justice and order incorporating the just city-state, just life and the just man, is perhaps among the early literary works to introduce a dream of a better life as an inherent part of humanity, in which Socrates as the main character seem to envisage the shift from egocentric politics to a virtuous community or the ideal just city (*polis*) consisting of virtuous men and women (Bobonich & Meadows **2018 (#CIT0007_2582)**).

Largely, the topic of utopia rose to prominence after Thomas More (1477–1535) coined it from

Ancient Greek οὐ (*ou*, not, no) and τόπος (*tópos*, place, region) (Aslan **2020 (#CIT0003_2582)** :145). In this novel, Thomas More envisions a complex interconnected community on a fictional island, united by a shared culture and way of life. Most scholars share the view that Thomas More encountered the notion of utopian society when attempting to describe the chaos of world politics, particularly European politics as per his focus (Aslan **2020 (#CIT0003_2582)** :144–153). Subsequently, Thomas More expresses the wish that England should, to some extent, achieve a utopian society, although he never believed that such a dream could be realised within a conceivable generation. Thomas More's utopia becomes clearer when analysed by the American historian Jack H. Hexter (1910–1996), who uses the fictitious figure Raphael Hythloday to describe how he discovered the island of Utopia and its inhabitants during his travels (Brandshaw 1981:2; Steintrager **1969 (#CIT0039_2582)** :357–372). In short, the idea of utopia as presented by Plato and Thomas More is about a perfect and just society in which everything is done equally for the good of each member of the society. What is further underscored in this idea is that every community, be it religious or secular, has some alternative model of salvation informed by utopian desires. Seligman (**1988 (#CIT0038_2582)**) puts it in simple terms: 'all societies contain some image or vision of their own perfection – of life, both individual and collective, free of the burdens of history and death' (Seligman **1988 (#CIT0038_2582)** :13). Similarly, Christian soteriological teachings, activities and mission are accompanied and shaped by utopian community longings. At the centre of this longing is nothing other than the theme of the kingdom of God. In other words, in search of the *missio Dei's* ultimate goal, the journey itself is steeped in utopian aspirations.

During the study of the *missio politica*, the missiologist does not take the idea of utopia at face value but does whatever is necessary to introduce the idea of how to create a just society consistent with the ultimate goal of the *missio Dei*. In the same vein, Saayman (**1991 (#CIT0036_2582)**) states:

[T]he mission politica has everything to do with that eternal reality which Christians call salvation. Furthermore, this choice for the other, this striving for justice, is related especially to the humanising aim of mission, because it means striving to be a specific kind of person within a just and human society. (p. 13)

In other words, while secular politics seeks to abandon the ideal of utopia as encompassed by the Kingdom of God in favour of the material gains, *missio politica* seeks to systematically bring back into contemporary reality the ideal inspired by the *missio Dei*. In such a respect, utopia can be equated to what Bosch (**2011 (#CIT0008_2582)**) calls 'a tension free state of bliss', wherein such a

state refers back to the lost paradise for which salvation is needed (Bosch **2011 (#CIT0008_2582)** :511). *Missio politica* engages the political concepts strategically in the mission to point or carry society beyond the current political despair and futility by constantly reminding it of the ideal world as intended by *missio Dei*.

As with Plato, who argues that the virtuous philosophers should rule the city or at least that the city's rulers should become virtuous in order to establish a virtuous community (Brickhouse **1981 (#CIT0010_2582)** :1–9), the *missio politica* scholar is more inclined towards advocating for virtuous men and women who can lead society to an active participation in reaching the ultimate goal of the *missio Dei*. However, it is more important to emphasise here that such a goal must be achieved through the collective as a whole, with each person actively participating in *missio Dei*, as opposed to an individual, specific community or institution. Firstly, the idea of equal humanity is analogous to what the Apostle Paul says in Galatians 3:28 when he argues that in Christ all human beings are equal (Davis **1976 (#CIT0015_2582)** :201–208; Vorster **2019 (#CIT0049_2582)** :1–8) and in agreement with what Thomas More says:

In Utopia, where every man has a right to everything, they all know that if care is taken to keep the public stores full no private man can want anything; for among them there is no unequal distribution, so that no man is poor, none in necessity, and though no man has anything, yet they are all rich; for what can make a man so rich as to lead serene and cheerful life, free from anxieties; neither apprehending want himself, nor vexed with the endless complaints of his wife? (Aslan **2020 (#CIT0003_2582)** :146)

Also, as is the case in Thomas More's (**2001 (#CIT0032_2582)**) analysis, in which the fictional character Raphael is presented as a critic of the distortions and inadequacies of rulers who seem to prevent society from achieving the desired utopia (Aslan **2020 (#CIT0003_2582)** :146), *missio politica* scholars embody Raphael's voyages of discovery as theologians pursuing a positive, constructive critique of perversions and inadequacies in politics, consciously aiming to align society more closely with the ultimate goal of *missio Dei*. This criticism is fully aware that political imperfections and perversions will lead to chaos and endless quarrels which, if not condemned by constructive criticism, will surely deter societies from achieving total salvation as the ultimate goal of the *missio Dei*. In other words, a critique of such perversions and shortcomings is inspired by the knowledge of salvation, or its possibility, as the intended goal of the *missio Dei*, which the *missio politica* scholar discovers during the in-depth study of God and his mission in the world. The direction of human action remains

important in this context; be it religious or political, this action should aim to achieve the ideal goal of the *missio Dei*. In this way, the political community is strapped into religious ideology to promote a kind of utopia prescribed by the *missio Dei*, or better still, the political orders are used as mere instruments to realise the ideal world animated by the aspirations to reach the goal of the *missio Dei*.

Speaking truth to power

Although the phrase 'speak truth to power' has a plethora of meanings, it is correctly associated with Kerry Kennedy's call asking courageous men and women to advocate for human rights across the globe (Speak truth to power 2007). Literature is replete with sources that seek to explore the meaning of this phenomenon in different situations (Marable **2019 (#CIT0029_2582)** ; Mullan & Whyte **2006 (#CIT0033_2582)** ; Wildavsky **2007 (#CIT0050_2582)**). This nonviolent tactic has been used by protesters against the propaganda of repressive regimes and authoritarian systems of government for many years. Such a protester firmly believes in what they say and fights wholeheartedly every day to be heard. Among such people in South Africa, Archbishop Desmond Mpilo Tutu (1931–2022) has been praised for exemplifying the vocation of speaking truth to power by most authors. Even during the apartheid regime, Desmond Tutu used his ecclesiastical position to tell the truth to those in power, so much so that he ended up being associated with political leaders such as Nelson Mandela as icons of reconciliation (De Klerk **2003 (#CIT0016_2582)** :322–334). His vocation to speak truth to power did not only end with the demise of apartheid, but even under the democratic dispensation his voice of truth to power remained constant. Cilliers (**2015 (#CIT0013_2582)**) cites the letter that Desmond Tutu addressed to Pieter Willem Botha, who was then the prime minister (1978–1984), in July 1979, during which South Africa was experiencing sociopolitical turmoil. With this letter, Desmond Tutu sought to confront the apartheid system of the 1960s and 1970s, when some three million black people were forced to leave their family lands and white cities to settle in desolate and overcrowded homes (Hallett **1984 (#CIT0022_2582)** :301–320; Kgatla **2013 (#CIT0024_2582)** :120–132). Without mincing words, Desmond Tutu fearlessly declares:

I write to you to say that the policy of population removal and resettlement is quite indefensible on moral and pragmatic grounds ... I cannot avoid speaking about dumping people as if they were things, with little prior consultation about how they felt about things and almost certainly scant attention being paid to how they feel ... We want justice, peace, and reconciliation in our land, and these will come as we strive to remove all which makes people less than what God intends them to be.

Similarly, in his 2006 speech entitled 'What happened to you, South Africa', with the same energy alluded to here, he expressed his disappointment that Jacob Zuma, who was then Deputy President (1997–2005) to President Thabo Mbeki (1999–2008), despite all the controversy around him (Gumede **2008 (#CIT0021_2582)** :261–271), stood a good chance of becoming the fourth president of the democratic South Africa. Even after Jacob Zuma became the president of South Africa (2009–2018), Desmond Tutu continued to speak the truth against incidents such as Marikana, Nkandla and many other incidents that exposed poor South Africans to forms of injustices (Cilliers **2015 (#CIT0013_2582)** :51).

At the core of this phenomenon is on the one hand to speak and on the other is truth. These two words (speak and truth) are the operative words characterising the tactic of speaking truth to power. Perhaps this correlates with the observation by scholars such as Fried (**1978 (#CIT0018_2582)**) that silence can be complicit with lying when those who know the truth choose to remain silent (Fried **1978 (#CIT0018_2582)** :57). In other words, the one who chooses not to tell the truth in the face of lies is as good as condoning lies. Cilliers (**2015 (#CIT0013_2582)**) takes it even further by stating that 'silence is a distinct form of unethical preaching. It either expresses fear for the status quo or acceptance thereof' (Cilliers **2015 (#CIT0013_2582)** :43). Accordingly, *missio politica* should always reject the syndrome of silence but opt to speak up against all forms of injustices. However, the voice of *missio politica* is guided by nothing other than the truth as the core foundation upon which Christianity is found (Pearcey **2008 (#CIT0034_2582)**; Vattimo & Girard **2010 (#CIT0046_2582)**).

Accordingly, no matter how difficult or dangerous the situation, *missio politica* must always adopt the principle of telling the truth to those in power. In this regard, the confrontational moral tale involving the prophet Nathan and King David in 2 Samuel 11–12 comes to mind. On the face of this tale, what is observed is the courage by Nathan who stood up to King David's abuse of power, as recorded in 2 Samuel 11:1–26. Certainly, it could have been very awkward for a prophet like Nathan, who happened to be part of the royal household as one of the king's advisors, to have come into conflict with the will of the king more than once. Firstly, despite the fact that Nathan encouraged King David to build a temple for God as he had planned (2 Sm 7:3), he was brave enough when he received a contrary prophecy (2 Sm 7: 4–15) to tell the king to his face that Yahweh does not want him to build a temple (2 Sm 7:17). Secondly, another confrontation occurred after King David had impregnated Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, and even had him killed in a battle to conceal his scandalous act from criticism. Upon being sent to confront him yet once again, Nathan had to devise a relevant scenario, saying to King

David:

There were two men in a city. One was rich, but the other was poor. The rich man had many sheep and cattle. But the poor man had nothing except one little female lamb he had bought. The poor man fed the lamb, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food and drank from his cup and slept in his arms. The lamb was like a daughter to him. Then a traveller stopped to visit the rich man. The rich man wanted to feed the traveller, but he didn't want to take one of his own sheep or cattle. Instead, he took the lamb from the poor man and cooked it for his visitor. (2 Sm 12:1-4)

King David became angry at hearing such unacceptable conduct, saying to Nathan: 'As surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this should die! He must pay for the lamb four times for doing such a thing. He had no mercy' (2 Sm 12:5-6). Nathan then did not hesitate nor allow himself to suffer from silence syndrome, but he courageously declared, 'You are that man ... You killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword of the Ammonites and took his wife to be your wife' (2 Sm 12:7-9), to the extent that King David began the process of repentance when he ashamedly admitted his sin and said, 'I have sinned against the Lord' (2 Sm 12:13). Overall, the story of the confrontation between the prophet Nathan and King David underscores the importance of always telling the truth to those in power, even when such truth-telling may well expose its bearer to life-threatening circumstances. If anything, *missio politica* should show less of the 'silent syndrome' but more of the 'Nathan syndrome' (Brown **1984 (#CIT0011_2582)** :49-59).

More than ever before, more fear and hostility seem to emanate from the practice of politics around the world (Albertson & Gadarian **2015 (#CIT0001_2582)**). In such a climate of anxiety and disquiet, all stakeholders, missiologists included as a group of academics with the capacity to voice the goal of *missio Dei*, must always find ways to speak truth to power about what needs to be done, even if such a stand will stir up controversy and criticism from among politicians, media and secular cronies. Perhaps this is exactly what Bosch (**2011 (#CIT0008_2582)**) means when he says 'missiology acts as a gadfly in the house of theology, creating unrest and resisting complacency, opposing every ecclesiastical impulse to self-preservation' (Bosch **2011 (#CIT0008_2582)** :508). Better still, perhaps more inspiration can be derived from Moltmann (**1967 (#CIT0031_2582)**), who states: 'those who hope in Christ can no longer put up with the reality as it is, but begin to suffer under, to contradict it' (Moltmann **1967 (#CIT0031_2582)** :21). More and more missiologists must embody the spirit of the prophet Nathan and Bishop Desmond Tutu, always seeking new scientific ways

to speak truth to those in power. Perhaps this is exactly what Reimer (2017 (#CIT0035_2582)) means in his important discussion of prophetic testimony. In fact, regarding the church, he writes:

The church of Christ is called to be a communal priest in royal service proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom ... its voice is the voice of a prophet, and it is the prophet to whom God entrusts his revelation. (p. 6.4)

In this way, a missiological voice in politics will bring a change that might perhaps bring the much-needed promise of repairing the damage done by politicians and perhaps even improve the relationship between politics and the church for the betterment of the society in its entirety. Furthermore, maintaining this prophetic trait in missiology will surely make missiology credibly relevant and indispensable to any social institution, especially politics.

Conclusion

The work of this article is divided into four parts. Firstly, it provides a brief introduction and explanation of what is meant by the development of a methodological framework in relation to the development of *missio politica* as an important framework within the field of missiology. Secondly, the term politics has been defined or described in accordance with the broader scope of the *missio Dei*. Thirdly, the concept of mission in *missio politica* is rooted in Willingen's perspective of *missio Dei*. Fourthly and lastly, three essential elements of the *missio politica*, namely eschatology, utopia and truth to power, have been discussed as some of its core features that missiologists should consider while examining the role of politics in the broader context of the *missio Dei*.

Taken together, the content of this article underscored the importance of *missio politica* not only for missiologists but also for theologians and the general public at large. A better insight into the framework will certainly lead to a better understanding of the role of politics in achieving total salvation as the ultimate goal of *missio Dei*. Although this framework has emerged in recent decades in light of the *missio Dei* from the perspective of the Willingen Conference, it does not seem to have attracted the attention it deserves and as such remains a neglected aspect in the broader understanding of human participation the *missio Dei*. Therefore, the increased attention to this framework offers a research opportunity for more scholarly work, which will lead to a wealth of new methods and techniques that will help theological scholarship, especially missiologists, in the study and fulfilment of the *missio Dei's* mandate through politics.

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