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*A Trinitarian Missiology
for the Twenty-first Century*

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A Trinitarian Framework for Missions

THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY is the church's attempt to tell the truth about God and about ourselves. If God really is triune, this powerfully resolves many of the classic tensions in intellectual thought between unity and diversity, rationality and relationality, the material and the spiritual, autonomy and dependence, the one and the many, and so forth. God's self-disclosure also demands that the Trinity be at the center of all our theology, lest we slip into the monadic conception of God—the “man upstairs,” which resides in the popular imagination, or the impersonal “God of the Philosophers.”

In chapter 2, we demonstrated how the Trinity enlivens all theological discussions, demanding that they be seen from a missional perspective. The triune God is on a “mission.” The mission of the triune God, which we are summarizing with the shorthand phrase *missio dei*, must be understood as the generative center of our understanding of missions. The purpose of this chapter is to outline the specifics of how the missiology that this textbook proposes flows out of a Trinitarian framework.

The purpose here is not to provide a theological reflection on the Trinity in a broad way. There are many excellent works that already provide this.¹ This chapter seeks to examine the Trinity with a particular focus on the implications that it holds for the theory and practice of

1. For example, see David S. Cunningham, *These Three Are One: The Practice of Trinitarian Theology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998).

missions. It can be summarized as follows: The Father is the Sender, the “Lord of the harvest”; the incarnate Son is the model embodiment of mission in the world; and the Holy Spirit is the divine, empowering presence for all of mission. To demonstrate this, each person of the Trinity will be explored, along with four themes that are distinctive for that member of the Trinity.

GOD THE FATHER: THE SOURCE, INITIATOR, AND GOAL OF THE *MISSIO DEI*

Broadly speaking, there are four major themes in missions that can be identified as having their locus in God the Father.

God the Father as the Initiator of Missions

God the Father is the source and initiator of missions. This is a very liberating perspective, especially when seen through the eyes of those who have traditionally been the “object” of Western missionary activity. For those who have been the recipients of missionary activity, it is easy to fall into the trap of seeing only through the narrowest of historical lenses that the gospel came through the missionary agents. A statement such as “the missionaries brought the gospel to us in 1823” makes perfect sense historically but is far less coherent theologically. A theological perspective helps to liberate the gospel from the sometimes painful associations with the historical transmission process, which, like all human endeavors, is tainted with sin. Some of those who were the “objects” of the missionary impulse may associate the gospel with their culture being devalued or intertwined with colonialism, and so forth. This is why it is so comforting to hear the African theologian John Mbiti poignantly remind us all that the missionaries did not bring God to Africa, it was God who brought the missionaries to Africa! This is, of course, a vital distinction, since it unhinges the gospel from *mere* human agency, with its undue emphasis on human initiatives, and returns the focus to God's initiative. Indeed, as Kwame Bediako observes, only the *missio dei* can rescue Christianity from “the western possessiveness of it.”² Thus, rooting missions in God the Father as the source and originator of mission delivers all past, present,

2. Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995), 122.

and future agents of the gospel from a sense of triumphalism. Missions is ultimately the work of the triune God, initiated by God the Father for His eternal glory.

God the Father as the Sender of Missions

God the Father is the Sender and, therefore, the ultimate source of all missionary sending. The Father sent His word through the prophets. He sent miraculous signs and wonders to reveal His glory. Ultimately, He sent His Son into the world as the greatest revelation of Himself. It is quite common for the church, and even missions textbooks, to associate Jesus Christ with “sending” since He is the one who commissions and sends the church out in those dramatic, postresurrection appearances to His disciples. After all, it is Jesus who declared to His disciples those famous texts such as, “Go into all the world,” “preach the gospel to all creation,” and “send I you.” However, from the perspective of the triune God, Jesus is the one who Himself was sent into the world by the Father. It is only as a “sent one” that Jesus is granted the authority to send.³

Here we are reminded of the important distinction that is made in Trinitarian theology between the *economic* and the *immanent* Trinity. The *immanent* Trinity refers to the inner life of the Trinity within God’s own self—the ontology or aseity of God, apart from His actions in relation to human history. In contrast, the *economic* Trinity refers to the various ways the triune God acts in history and interacts with humanity. So, in human history it is Jesus who sends the church, but from the deeper perspective of the inner nature of the triune God, it is God the Father who is the source of all sending. It is sufficient to recall a few of the famous sending formulas of the New Testament.

For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by *sending his own Son* in the likeness of sinful humanity to be a sin offering. (Rom. 8:3 TNIV)

But when the set time had fully come, *God sent his Son*, born of a woman, born under the law. (Gal. 4:4 TNIV)

3. This point will be more fully developed and defended in chapter 5 when John 20:21–22 is examined within the larger setting of John’s Gospel.

This is how God showed his love among us: *He sent his one and only Son into the world* that we might live through him. (1 John 4:9)⁴

When the church sends out missionaries into the world, we are not only obeying the command of Jesus Christ but are also reflecting the glory of the Father, who is the ultimate source, initiator, and sender.

History as the Stage for God the Father’s Actions

Rooting missions in the *missio dei* and in God the Father as the source and initiator of mission enables us to see missions within the framework of the grand narrative of God’s work and not just from the perspective of the sent church. In other words, contrary to popular notions, missions does *not* begin after the Resurrection or with the witnessing church streaming out into the world in obedience to the Great Commission. Even the “Great Commission” texts must be seen within the larger context of the *missio dei* and as one part (albeit a very crucial part) of the unfolding drama of God’s redemptive plan, which started even before creation in the design of God and will not find its culmination until the eschaton and the consummation of the New Creation. From this larger perspective, the Father’s redemptive intentions for the world are made known to humanity in the covenant He made with Abraham, found in Genesis 12. The particulars of this covenant and its significance for missions will be explored later. It will be demonstrated that the entire missional impulse of the church is *already present* in the Abrahamic covenant in seed form. However, at this juncture it is important to keep the larger vista in view. It is theologically significant to note that God the Father took the initiative, not only to reveal His purposes to Abraham, but also to enter into a covenant that firmly links those purposes with the unfolding history of a specific and named nation, through whom all nations will be blessed.

This demonstrates that human history is the stage upon which the divine drama unfolds. Human history has a *telos*, a destination under the *missio dei*. Human history will culminate in the full realization of the New Creation. This not only validates the significance of human history in God’s plan, but it also provides the basis for a robust theology of human culture. The divine

4. This doctrine of the Father “sending” the Son is a central theme in John’s Gospel that will be explored in more detail in chapter 5.

affirmation of human history and culture is a necessary prelude, not only to such sublime realities as the divine inbreaking into human history that we call the Incarnation, but also to a whole host of daily activities that are crucial to the church's understanding of missions. Indeed, such familiar themes as church planting across cultural boundaries, Bible translation into new vernacular languages, and the formulation of contextual strategies could not be accredited without the high view of history and culture that is first revealed in God's creation and subsequent covenant with Abraham. To put it plainly, God's plan does not remain some ephemeral, hidden concept known only within the mysterious, inner counsel of the triune God. Rather, God's grand narrative intertwines with all the particularities of human narratives. It is made public and concrete on the plain of human history.

Missions as an Expression of God's Relational, Holy Love

The foundational assumption of this textbook is that a Trinitarian missiology is fundamental to a post-Christendom engagement with a relativistic, postmodern world. Increasingly, people are no longer willing to affirm a doctrinal or creedal statement, however orthodox, simply because the church declares it to be true. We live in a world that has a latent mistrust of authority skepticism toward all institutions. The notion of an overarching canopy of objective truth has collapsed, leaving only tiny islands of subjective experience. There is a growing dissatisfaction with the inability of postmodernity to make any moral discrimination. However, this generation also longs for authentic relationships. Therefore, there is a renewed longing for ethical and relational moorings.

This is precisely where Trinitarian theology is so abundantly rich and remains, in my view, the greatest hope for the twenty-first century. The Trinity is not merely some abstract concept. The Trinity is the seminal *relationship* that lies behind all human relationships. One of the greatest triumphs of the renewal of Trinitarian theology in recent years has been the emphasis on the *relational* aspect of the Trinity. God is not the solitary monad of popular imagination, or Aristotle's Unmoved Mover, or three individual "some-things." Rather, He is "a complex network of relations."⁵ As the Puritans said,

5. Cunningham, *These Three Are One*, 20. Cunningham comments that the historic affirmation that "God was a 'single divine substance' tended to evoke an image of an isolated, passionless monad—thus obscuring both God's internal relationality and God's loving relationship with the

"God is, within Himself, a sweet society."⁶ Although the Trinity is only revealed in seed form in the Old Testament, we do see its reflection. From the dawn of creation itself, we see God the Father calling people into relationship with Himself. One of the most basic revelations of the Old Testament is that God is *personal* and that He calls us into relationship with Himself.

This is in stark contrast to other major world religions.⁷ The highest reality in Buddhism is *sunyata*, which is either defined as "emptiness" (Madhyamika view) or "mind/consciousness" (Yogacara view). In either case, Buddhism is nontheistic, affirming no God; therefore, any affirmation of a personal God who undergirds the universe is denied. The "destiny" of a Buddhist is the "nothingness" or "emptiness" of nirvana, not the fullness (*plērōma*) of the New Creation.

In Hinduism, the most prominent school of philosophy is known as *advaita* (nondualism), which draws from the great Hindu philosopher-theologian Śankara (788–820). According to Śankara, the highest conception of God or Ultimate Reality is *nirguna Brāhman*, meaning God *without* qualities. Śankara teaches that we cannot know if God is personal, nor can we confidently attribute qualities such as holiness or justice or love to *Brāhman* because, to use Śankara's words, *Brāhman* is "non-connected with the world and is devoid of all qualities."⁸ Whenever Hindus speak of God with personality, or with various qualities or attributes, this is a lower level of *Brāhman* known as *saguna Brāhman*, meaning God *with* qualities and attributes. However, for Śankara, this lower level of *Brāhman* is ultimately illusory. This so-called "personal God," known as *Īśvara*, has no actual reality and is merely a projection of imperfect and limited human descriptions of God.⁹

world" (p. 25). This is why Trinitarianism is essential to a robust response to the passionless monad of Islamic theism.

6. Timothy George, "Letters," *Christianity Today* 46, no.4 (2002): 12.

7. For a full discussion that compares the Christian conception of God with the conceptions of ultimate reality in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam, see my *Christianity at the Religious Roundtable: Evangelicalism in Conversation with Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002). See especially chapters 2, 4, and 6. For a full treatment of the viability of identifying Allah with the God of biblical revelation, see chapter 2 of my *Theology in the Context of World Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007).

8. E. Deutsch and J. A. B. van Buitenen, eds., *A Source Book of Advaita Vedanta* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1971), 160.

9. For more on the personhood of God in advaitism, see R. G. Panikkar, "The Brāhman of the Upanishads and the God of the Philosophers," *Religion and Society* 7, no. 2 (September 1960): 12–19; and see B. Malkovsky, "The Personhood of Śankara's Para Brāhman," *Journal of Religion* 77, no. 4 (October 1997): 541–62.

Islam affirms the doctrine of *tawhid*, meaning the absolute oneness of God. This doctrine is incompatible with the Christian affirmation of the Trinity, which the Muslims regard as *shirk* (unwarranted associations with God)¹⁰ or crass tritheism (Surah 5:73). However, the Islamic doctrine of monotheism (*tawhid*) protects God's otherness at the high cost of sacrificing the relational aspect of God's nature. Allah does not enter into relationship with Muslims. The very word *Islam* means "to submit" to the will of Allah. A Muslim is called to *obey* Allah, not to *know* Him. The well-known Iranian theologian of Islam, Al-Ghazali (1058–1111), summed it up well when he said, "Allah does not reveal Himself, He only reveals His will."

All of this is in stark contrast to the biblical revelation of Yahweh who is determined not only to reveal His will but also to reveal *Himself* and to enter into a relationship with His people. This is because God, by His triune nature, is inherently relational. The fall of man was not merely the entrance of rebellion into the world; it was, at a deeper level, the tragic fracturing of a relationship.¹¹ This has important implications for missions. Missionaries are "ambassadors of reconciliation," heralding how Christ has reconciled us with the Father. But this message must not become overly privatized. Missions must flow out of the very lifeblood of the church, which is the corporate expression of the community of God's inner life in the world. Missions, at its best, calls people into the new community.

Not only does God reveal Himself from creation as relational, but He also reveals Himself as holy. "Be holy, for I am holy" is one of the foundational revelations of Yahweh to His covenant people. There is no relationship with God apart from holiness. The redeemed community is to be a holy community. There is very little emphasis on holiness in the church today, and even less in missions literature. Because the focus of missions has been on proclaiming the message in a way that

10. *Shirk* in Islam is considered an unforgivable sin.

11. Eastern Orthodox theologian John Zizioulas has observed that the Trinity is best understood from the perspective of "personhood and communion." What defines a "person" (as with the Trinity) is being in relationship. For Zizioulas, a person does not become a person and then enter into relationships. Rather, to exist is to be in relationship. From this perspective, the triune God is related to history, not just in matters of salvation history such as the Red Sea, Sinai, Incarnation, Resurrection, and Ascension, but also in the very matrix of creation itself, since the Trinity is the archetype for all personhood and is reflected in the *imago dei*. For a full discussion on this, see Veli-Mati Karkkainen, *Trinity and Religious Pluralism* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), 5–6; and J. Zizioulas, *Being and Communion: Studies in the Personhood and Church* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985).

has not been properly connected to the Trinity, we easily forget that we must reflect the message that we are proclaiming. Once the church is conceptualized as the earthly reflection of the Trinity, then holiness becomes central to missions. As Lamin Sanneh has noted, "The idea of the kingdom was at bottom the idea of a fellowship, chastened, redeemed and elected to exhibit the marks of love and forgiveness. The reality of God was thus intertwined with the ethical life of the fellowship of believers who were narrowly fenced off from the world."¹²

This has enormous ramifications for missionary practice. Much of our practice has been overly privatized and focused almost exclusively on conversion as the "end" of the missionary engagement. This has produced an individualistic and minimalistic view of what it means to follow Christ. Today's emphasis on "soul winning" must become an emphasis on church planting (community building),¹³ and "conversion" must be broadened to include the end of spiritual exile and the inbreaking of the reign of God (kingdom of God) and the firstfruits of the New Creation.

In my experience of working in India, I have found that discipleship often *precedes* conversion by many years. This seems counterintuitive in the West, because Christendom always assumed a larger Christian context, making it easy to live as a Christian, since Christian ethics and values were presumably infused throughout the whole of society. However, in India, it often takes many years for someone to comprehend the gospel message and what it means to follow Jesus Christ. Lengthy periods of instruction and modeling often take place long before someone receives Christian baptism. This is closer to Jesus' model exemplified in the Gospels, whereby intensive instruction took place with His disciples for several years before they fully understood and accepted His lordship.

The renewed emphasis on holiness, intensive discipleship, and learning to live *counter* to the culture is all rooted in the Old Testament revelation of God's holiness, which forms the basis for entering into a covenantal relationship with God. In fact, by going back to the initial revelation of God in the Old Testament, we are able to fully capture the "end"

12. Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1989), 12.

13. Christ dwells in community (e.g., 1 Cor. 5:4) as the church has declared, *ubi Christus, ibi ecclesia*—where the church is, there is Christ (Ignatius, *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans* 8.2).

goal of missions: a holy people, a community that reflects the colloquy of the triune God. This is why one of the great images of the eschaton is that of a great feast, a holy banquet, where together as the redeemed community, we celebrate the arrival of the New Creation in the presence of the triune God.

GOD THE SON: THE EMBODIMENT OF THE *MISSIO DEI*

Lesslie Newbigin observes that “the mission of Jesus was not only to proclaim the Kingdom of God, but also to *embody* the presence of the Kingdom of God in his own person.”¹⁴ One of the fundamental lessons of the Incarnation is that Jesus is not merely a messenger of good news but the embodiment of it. In Islam, Muhammad, at best, can only be the “messenger of Allah.” In fact, even Allah’s message to Muhammad must be mediated through the angel Gabriel because Allah cannot come down from his throne. The non-Trinitarian monotheism of Islam renders the kind of divine invasion represented by the Incarnation an impossibility. However, it is precisely this radical inbreaking of the New Creation that is embodied in Jesus Christ. This has important theological implications for those of us who proclaim, “Jesus is Lord!” The church as a missionary community must not only bear the message but also embody it. The church must reflect the Incarnation as an ongoing expression of the unfolding drama of God’s mission in the world.

The Son of God’s central role in the *missio dei* must be reflected in missions. In this overview, I will identify four major themes in missions that have their locus in God the Son.

Christian Missions in History as a Reflection of the Incarnation

We have already demonstrated in our reflection on God the Father that history is the stage for the unfolding of the *missio dei*. Nowhere is this revealed more profoundly than in the Incarnation. In the presence of Jesus of Nazareth, we find the final, definitive evidence that the Trinity is not merely some interiorized, abstract speculation about a remote being but the very means through which God Himself intersects with human history to accomplish His redemptive plan.¹⁵

14. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 40.

15. God in Himself certainly contains mysteries not yet known in the “economy” of salvation history and His intersection with His creation. Nevertheless, nothing about Himself that is revealed “in

Likewise, Christian missions happens in particular, real-time, historical and cultural settings. Missionaries are both bearers of a message and embodiments of that message. Whenever a missionary crosses cultural boundaries, learns a new language and culture, and seeks to communicate the gospel, this is a reflection of the Incarnation itself. From the perspective of the Trinity, Jesus is the archetypal missionary. The first Western missionaries to arrive in Papua New Guinea may have believed that no one had ever traversed such a vast cultural divide as they. However, their experience pales in comparison to the great gulf that the Son of God crossed in the Incarnation. The apostle Paul captures this well in his rendering of the ancient Christ hymn, found in Philippians 2.

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a human being, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! (Phil. 2:6–8 TNIV)

This early hymn is probably based on that well-known Servant Song of Isaiah found in Isaiah 52:13 to 53:12.¹⁶ This Christian reflection on Isaiah’s fourth Suffering Servant Song, demonstrates not only Jesus’ solidarity with those among the faithful Jewish remnant who were suffering, but also His fulfillment of the eschatological hope that Jews held for their future deliverance from bondage and exile. Christians realized that this eschatological hope had already broken into the present age through Jesus Christ who, through His suffering, had rescued the human race from its bondage and exile.

The conclusion of the Christ hymn makes even more explicit the connection between the exaltation of the Suffering Servant and the unfolding Gentile mission.

history” will ever contradict that which is not yet known or revealed. Thus, while affirming the great continuity between the “immanent” and the “economic” Trinity, I would not affirm Karl Rahner’s famous “rule” that the “economic Trinity” is the “immanent Trinity” and the “immanent Trinity” is the “economic Trinity.” See Karl Rahner, *Trinity* (New York: Seabury, 1997), 22.

16. James Ware, *The Mission of the Church in Paul’s Letter to the Philippians in the Context of Ancient Judaism* (Leiden, Netherlands; Boston: E. J. Brill, 2005), 225. See Richard Bauckham, *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 58–60.

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil. 2:9–11)

The allusions to the Suffering Servant of Isaiah extend only through verse 9. Beginning with verse 10 the focus shifts from a description of Christ's sufferings to a Christological reflection upon the ultimate purposes of God. In short, it is a glimpse into the *missio dei*. The hymn anticipates the cosmic victory of Christ, His reign over all nations, and the eschatological universal worship of the triune God, which is anticipated in Isaiah 45:22–23 and ultimately finds its fulfillment in the New Creation.¹⁷

Authentic, biblical missions must envision itself as a reflection, as well as an ongoing extension, of this hymn in the world. From this perspective, missions represents countless reenactments of the Incarnation on a small scale. The church, of course, has not always been faithful to this vision. Nevertheless, it is essential that as a new generation of missionaries crosses cultural boundaries and enters the histories and narratives of new people groups, that they be trained to go forth as servants. Missionaries should be a reflection of the Suffering Servant, who entered our history and embedded Himself in our narratives, for the sake of our salvation. Missions also must constantly bear in mind the goal, the final vision, of all missions, which is the cosmic exaltation of Christ and the worship of the triune, living God by all nations. Thus, the historical presence of the church in the world, which both bears and embodies the gospel, finds its locus in the Son.

Incarnation as Translation

The Incarnation is the ultimate act of translation. Andrew Walls, who has made translatability a centerpiece of his missiology, comments that “when God in Christ became man, Divinity was translated into humanity, as though humanity were a receptor language.”¹⁸ As noted

in chapter 2, the story of the Incarnation is not merely that God became a man but that God became a *particular* man. This act of divine translation in the Incarnation provides the theological foundation for our commitment to the infinite translatability of the gospel in all of the real and specific historical contexts and narratives that make up our world.

The primary way Christians think about the “translatability” of the gospel is in terms of linguistics. This remains a good place to start, because there are several important features of translatability that are illustrated quite well by the process of linguistic translation. Even a cursory knowledge of church history will reveal that the church has sometimes struggled over the notion that the Scriptures could be (or should be) translated into vernacular languages. Because the *Koine* Greek of the New Testament did not conform to classical Greek, there was a long period of time when it was regarded as a kind of specialized, sacred language of the Holy Spirit. This view was used by some as a theological argument either against translating the New Testament at all or limiting translation only to Latin, which was also considered a sacred language in the West. However, in the late nineteenth century, scholars such as Adolph Deissmann and A. T. Robertson demonstrated persuasively that the Greek of the New Testament was not specialized at all but was actually the common language of the first-century marketplace. This underlined the powerful theological point that God was prepared not just to speak to humanity but to do so in the common language of the streets. This has helped the church to recognize that the gospel of Jesus Christ potentially can be translated into any language in the world.

Another important lesson from the linguistic translatability of the gospel is the reminder that Christianity is the only world religion whose primary source documents are in a language other than the language of the founder of the religion. This is one of the many stunning differences between Christianity and all other world religions. Muhammad spoke Arabic, and the Qur’an is in Arabic; the Brahmin priests in India spoke Sanskrit, and the Upanishads are in Sanskrit. Jesus taught in Aramaic, and yet the primary documents that record Christ’s teachings are not in Aramaic but in Koine Greek. This vitally important theological point about the translatability of the Christian gospel dramatically contrasts, for example, with the Muslims, who maintain that the Qur’an is untranslatable and the

17. Ware, *The Mission of the Church*, 229.

18. Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), 27.

Word of Allah can be conveyed only in Arabic.¹⁹ In contrast, at the very outset of the Christian message, the linguistic translatability of the message was testified to and even enshrined in our primary source documents.

The translatability of the gospel, however, extends far beyond linguistics.²⁰ Not only is the gospel *linguistically* translatable, but the gospel also is *culturally* translatable. In other words, Christ's entry into the world and taking on "the very nature of a servant," as the hymn reminds us, serves to destigmatize *all* cultures, making the whole world a potential extension of the inbreaking kingdom. If the Son of God could enter into the backwaters of an oppressed, despised people living on the margins of a first-century empire, then, by extension, the gospel can enter with confidence into any and every culture. This is the theological basis for the whole field of contextualization. Indeed, Lesslie Newbigin links the Incarnation with contextualization when he says that "true contextualization happens when there is a community which lives faithfully by the gospel and in that same costly identification with people in their real situations as we see in the earthly ministry of Jesus."²¹ Thus, the Incarnation effectively throws open the door for all the strategic, missiological reflections on contextualization and how the gospel maintains its universal qualities even when it is embodied within a potentially infinite array of cultural particularities.

Incarnation and the Global "Ephesians Moment"

India received her independence on August 15, 1947, at midnight. Reports of the event noted that at the stroke of midnight crowds numbering up to a million, including Nehru and Mountbatten, gathered at the Viceroy's House to celebrate. However, there was one man who was not there and did not celebrate. That was Mahatma Gandhi. He said that despite all his labors, marches, protests, and imprisonments, he saw August 15 as a day of mourning, because India was partitioned and divided. India could not dwell together in unity. This, it seems, is one of the marks of our time. Our

19. This is why the persistence by pre-Vatican II Roman Catholics to keep the Mass in Latin was closer to the Islamic conception of the nontranslatability of the Qur'an than the Christian position that has prevailed.

20. Missiologists are indebted to Lamin Sanneh for his work in moving the concept of translatability outside the technical world of linguistics and textual work.

21. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 154.

world is full of discord and disunity, whether it is in Sudan, the Balkans, Iraq, or in the towns and cities in our own backyard.

Jesus Christ initiated a new community that began within the rather narrow confines of first-century Jewish culture but quickly spread beyond it. As the church crossed more and more cultural frontiers, the community of those who followed Christ became increasingly more diverse, and the potential for division rose.²² Early on, there was considerable pressure placed on the new Gentile believers to completely conform to all the Jewish social and cultural practices. In fact, there were those who insisted that they take on the full requirements of the Torah. However, once the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1-35) allowed the Gentiles to enter the church without leaving their own culture, the church had to find creative ways to simultaneously celebrate its unity and its diversity. The church was to be as diverse as the human race but still be one in Jesus Christ. The barrier between Jew and Gentile in the New Testament prefigures all such ethnic, cultural, and caste barriers that separate people of all times and places. However, in the gospel, those who were enemies and "far away" have now been brought near in Jesus Christ. For, as Paul declares in Ephesians 2:14, "He himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility." This is what Andrew Walls called the "Ephesians Moment"—the coming together of diverse cultures into a new identity in Jesus Christ.²³ The dominant metaphor of the Christian community, which simultaneously celebrates diversity and unity, is the *body*—diverse parts and varied functions but one body. The church is the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27). This radical extension of the Incarnation should transform our conception of Christian missions.

Once the church really experiences the "Ephesians Moment," missions is liberated from being merely the aggrandizement of a religious institution or organization. Missions becomes an extension of a dynamic, living *community*, the body of Christ. Andrew Walls points out the two dangers that afflict missionaries when they fail to conceptualize missions within the biblical vision of the church as the body of Christ. First, there

22. The Acts 6 dispute between the Aramaic-speaking Jews and the Greek-speaking Jews or the Acts 15 dispute between the Judaizers and Paul's party are early examples of how the early church effectively responded to division.

23. Andrew Walls, "The Ephesians Moment," in *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002), 72-81.

is the attempt to make our particular version of Christianity the norm for everyone, thereby linking the gospel with some form of cultural imperialism. Second, there is the postmodern attempt to make every version of Christianity equally “valid and authentic,” and “we are therefore each at liberty to enjoy our own in isolation from the others.”²⁴ Christian unity is not a celebration of uniformity, but neither is diversity a celebration of fragmentation. Despite our many failures to realize this vision, the Christian church remains the most ethnically, racially, and culturally diverse movement on earth. Missions should be the greatest force for racial and ethnic reconciliation, as more and more peoples of the world experience the “Ephesians Moment.”

In fact, the more ethnically and culturally diverse the church becomes, the greater the realization of the glory of the triune God. Walls says that “if the incarnation of the Son represents a divine act of translation, it is a prelude to repeated acts of re-translation as *Christ fills the Pleroma again*.”²⁵ In other words, as missionaries transmit the gospel, it is not merely a one-way street, because as we witness the reception of Christ among new peoples, it becomes part of our own discovery and re-discovery of even greater insights into the fullness of Christ. We would be underestimating the full significance of Acts 10 if we read it only as Peter’s communication of the gospel to Cornelius followed by the conversion and baptism of Cornelius’s household. Acts 10 is certainly a testimony to the cultural translatability of the gospel as it crosses the barrier between Jew (Peter) and Gentile (Cornelius), but it also demonstrates that gospel communication is never a one-way street. Cornelius was converted and became a follower of Christ. However, Peter also was transformed by the encounter. His preconceived theological categories were shaken. Peter was surprised and caught off guard by the magnitude of the *missio dei*. God’s plan was bigger than Peter had realized. In that sense, Acts 10 is the story of a double conversion—Cornelius became a follower of Christ, and Peter gained a deeper insight into the fullness of the *missio dei*.²⁶

24. Ibid.

25. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, xvii, emphasis mine.

26. This pericope in the New Testament has an interesting parallel with the encounter of Jonah with the Ninevites. Jonah, like Peter, would not have gone to the Gentiles except through divine prompting and initiative. Jonah, the reluctant and resistant missionary, finds unexpected faith and responsiveness among the “pagan Gentiles.” The text is unclear how Jonah’s faith was

All authentic missionary exchanges should reflect this “double conversion” as we think more and more globally about God’s work. As the Christian community expanded beyond Jewish and Hellenistic culture and began to enter into Chinese, Indian, African, Korean, and others, we gained more insights into the beauty and fullness of Jesus Christ. In this vein, Jonathan Edwards saw the church as an “emanation” of God’s glory in the same way that a tree puts forth buds, branches, leaves, and fruit to display its glory. The more the church grows, writes Edwards, the more it testifies to the “abundant diffusion” of His own “fullness” and “glory.”²⁷ Although God is complete in Himself, His inner life continues to “flow forth,” making more and more people “partakers of him.”²⁸ Consequently, our understanding and insight into the full nature of God in Jesus Christ continually expands as more and more people groups come to the feet of Jesus. This is why missions cannot be relegated to merely a task of the church. Missions is the very means by which the church becomes the body of Christ, realizing and manifesting the fullness of Christ.

Hebrews 11 famously celebrates the men and women of the old covenant who lived by faith. However, the chapter concludes by saying that they did not receive the promise because God had an “even better plan for us. His purpose was that only in company with us would they be made perfect” (Heb. 11:40 GNT). Apparently, it is also true that only in the company of the full global church will any of us be made complete in Christ.

Incarnation and Holistic Missions

As noted in chapter 1, one of the tragedies of the transition to a post-Christendom context was an increasing emphasis on the privatization of faith. Postmodernism embraces only the subjectivism of one’s personal narrative and not any claim for an objective metanarrative that is binding on all. Thus, Christianity was banished from the public square, “except when it was trotted out as part of a civil religion designed to rally the

expanded by the experience, but the opportunity was there for Jonah to experience a deeper conversion as he saw the surprising expansiveness of God’s work in the world.

27. Jonathan Edwards, “Some Objections Considered Which May Be Made Against the Reasonableness of What Has Been Said of God’s Making Himself His Last End,” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. John E. Smith et al., vol. 8, *Ethical Writings* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 433, 439.

28. Ibid., 461–62.

citizens in time of war.”²⁹ As broadly surveyed in chapter 1, the collapse of Christendom and the rise of postmodernism took its toll on all the major expressions of Christianity. However, the movement toward the privatization of faith among evangelical Christians is a particularly complex story. The common assertion that liberal Protestants embrace a “social gospel” while evangelicals embrace “personal evangelism” is not only historically inaccurate but also grossly unfair to the diversity within both traditions. Historically, evangelicals have been at the forefront of many major social changes, including child labor laws, the abolition of slavery, and prison reform. Evangelical missionaries built schools, orphanages, and hospitals all over the world. Likewise, mainline Protestant churches have produced some of the most inspiring examples of evangelistic fervor and dedicated church planting.

The fundamentalist-modernist controversies of the 1920s and 1930s did tend to reinforce the evangelical emphasis on personal conversion. Furthermore, the popular, pietistic stream within evangelicalism had always tended to emphasize that change happens “from within” and social change occurs “one person at a time.” Thus, evangelicals were more likely to privatize social responsibility than to reject the notion of social action. For example, they were far more likely to engage in practical social assistance, such as a homeless shelter or a soup kitchen, than to address the larger, institutional and systemic root causes of evil.

The evangelical renewal that occurred after World War II was quite vocal in rejecting an overly privatized gospel and emphatically opposed popular fundamentalist notions of cultural separatism.³⁰ In 1954, Harold Ockenga, widely regarded as the leader of evangelicalism, spoke at the inauguration of E. J. Carnell as president of Fuller Theological Seminary, the early flagship school of evangelicalism. In the speech, Ockenga coined the phrase “new evangelical” when he said,

The new evangelical embraces the full orthodoxy of fundamentalism in doctrine, but manifests a social consciousness and responsibility which was strangely absent from fundamentalism.

29. Craig A. Carter, *Rethinking Christ and Culture: A Post-Christendom Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006), 19.

30. I am referring to the evangelical movement centered on Carl F. Henry, Harold J. Ockenga, Billy Graham, the National Association of Evangelicals (1943), and *Christianity Today* (1956).

The new evangelicalism concerns itself not only with personal salvation, doctrinal truth, and an external point of reference, but also . . . believes that orthodox Christians cannot abdicate their responsibility in the social scene.³¹

A “new evangelical,” by definition, was someone who was doctrinally orthodox *and* socially engaged. In the last decade, the increased awareness of globalization has made everyone, including evangelicals, aware that companies like Nike and the GAP used “sweatshops” in the developing world to produce their goods. Younger evangelicals were deeply concerned when they learned, for example, that a woman in Haiti makes only six cents for sewing a “101 Dalmatians” outfit that Disney sells for twenty dollars. The result was a dramatic interest and participation in social involvement that addressed structural and systemic sources of evil, not just the outward symptoms. Robert Webber in the *Younger Evangelicals* has documented the growing interest in social engagement at every level by the newest generation of evangelicals.³²

The best thing about these changes is that they have stimulated a renewed interest in the holistic ministry of Jesus as a model for Christian engagement in the world. It is hard to make a convincing case that missionaries have not been actively engaged in social concerns. Where missionaries have had difficulty is in articulating the *relationship* between evangelism and social action. Some missionaries have tended to see social action as a foothold or platform to evangelize, thus creating a hierarchy that validates social action only if it leads to explicit evangelism. Others have seen social action as a natural expression of Christ’s love and, therefore, as a valid expression of the good news, even if it is not accompanied by, or does not lead to, a specifically articulated evangelistic call.

The holistic ministry of Jesus fully embodies both evangelism *and* social action, integrating them and putting an end to any lingering mistrust between the two. In a summary of Jesus’ ministry, Matthew records that

31. Harold John Ockenga, “Theological Education,” *Bulletin of Fuller Theological Seminary* 4 (October–December 1954): 4. Similar statements can be found in Carl Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of American Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947).

32. Robert Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenge of a New World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002).

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Jesus went about “preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness” (Matt. 9:35). Later, Jesus sent His disciples out to “preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick” (Luke 9:2). Once missiology is reconceptualized within a Trinitarian framework, then Jesus is seen as the archetypal missionary who embodies the *missio dei*. Thus, a fresh examination of Jesus’ ministry has a way of resolving many of the traditional tensions that have caused unnecessary discord. Jesus represents the inbreaking of the reign of God, the firstfruits of the New Creation. There are no disembodied souls in the New Creation. The lordship of Jesus Christ lays hold of the whole of creation, body *and* soul, humanity *and* the environment. We need to be constantly rescued from our natural tendency toward an overly parochial view of the *missio dei*.

In chapters 15 to 17 of this text, we will encounter a wide range of missionary models of witness, some of which seem to focus more on evangelism and church planting, while others seem to focus more on our social and cultural witness in the world. However, it is important to recognize that effective Christian ministry in any particular setting must be viewed through the broadest lens. No one ministry can fully reflect the expansiveness of the *missio dei* in the world. Only *together* can we manifest the fullness of Christ to a lost world.

GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT:

THE EMPOWERING PRESENCE OF THE *MISSIO DEI*

In his survey of the development of Christian doctrine, Jaroslav Pelikan observes that the doctrine of the Trinity represents the apex of doctrinal development in the early church. However, the recognition of the full deity of Jesus Christ came far more quickly than the recognition of the Holy Spirit’s full deity within the triune Godhead. The Nicene Creed of 325 reflects the late emergence of pneumatology by simply stating, “We believe in the Holy Spirit,” without further commentary. This rather sparse affirmation is often attributed to two reasons. First, the first ecumenical council that met at Nicea was preoccupied with responding to a wide range of challenges to the deity of Jesus Christ and was not in a position to consider the deity of the Holy Spirit. Second, New Testament evidence supporting the deity of the Holy Spirit is considerably less than the testimony to the Father and the Son, so it took longer to fully consider the case. As Gregory of Nazianzus commented, the Scripture did not “very often call him God in so many words,

as it does first the Father and later on the Son.”³³ As late as 380, Gregory admitted that “to be only slightly in error [about the Holy Spirit] was to be orthodox.”³⁴ It was not until 381, in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, that the church articulated the version of the Nicene Creed that is so widely affirmed today: “We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceedeth from the Father, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets.”³⁵

Even though the deity of the Holy Spirit was resolved by 381, discussions about the exact nature and relations of the Trinity continued for almost a century.³⁶ All of this had a profound, cumulative, effect on theological discourse concerning the Holy Spirit. Because the ecumenical discussions about the Holy Spirit were focused primarily on the *person* of the Holy Spirit (i.e., His deity and relationship within the Trinity), there was a serious neglect throughout the patristic period of a full development of His *work*. In short, the “immanent” discourse about the Holy Spirit consistently trumped the needed “economic” discussions. Because these discussions emphasized the person of the Holy Spirit more than His work, the deliberations and writings of the patristic period were more weighted toward technical, abstract formulations. The result was that the Holy Spirit often was not thought of in personal terms. The dominant images of wind, fire, water, and oil are all impersonal images, which suggest an impersonal force rather than the empowering presence of the living God. Yet, in the New Testament, the Holy Spirit is the acting, personal subject of more than a dozen verbs.³⁷

33. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 1, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100–600)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 212. For a fresh analysis of Paul’s understanding of the deity of the Holy Spirit and his Trinitarian theology, see Gordon D. Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 827–45.

34. Pelikan, *Emergence of the Catholic Tradition*, 213.

35. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 14, *The Seven Ecumenical Councils* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 163. It should be noted that the phrase “and the Son” (*filioque*) was not inserted after the phrase “who proceedeth from the Father” until the year 589 at the third council of Toledo in Spain, although it was not included in the liturgical Latin version of the creed until 1014. The Eastern Church does not accept the addition of this phrase.

36. We should also remember that an acknowledgment of the deity of the Holy Spirit must not be confused with a full affirmation of the Trinity. The Trinity was not officially declared until the fifth ecumenical council in Constantinople in 553.

37. For example, the Spirit searches (1 Cor. 2:10), knows (1 Cor. 2:11), teaches (1 Cor. 2:13), dwells (1 Cor. 3:16; Rom. 8:11; 2 Tim. 1:14), accomplishes (1 Cor. 12:11), gives life (2 Cor. 3:6), cries out (Gal. 4:6), leads (Gal. 5:18; Rom. 8:14), bears witness (Rom. 8:16), has desires (Gal. 5:17), helps us

The Reformation's emphasis on the authority of Scripture, ecclesiology, and Christology, as crucial as it was, meant that there was a further delay in a full theological development of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, and several vital aspects of His work were neglected in post-Reformation Protestant theology, which focused on solidifying and organizing the theological developments of the Reformers. Over time, Western theological traditions that developed greatly limited the active role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church. The result was a pneumatological deficit that is only now becoming painfully apparent. A typical example can be found in Louis Berkhof's *Systematic Theology*, a classic text in Reformed theology that is still in use today. Berkhof discusses the work of the Holy Spirit but limits it to applying the work of Christ into our lives (e.g., regeneration) and in personal holiness (e.g., sanctification). In his development of ecclesiology, Berkhof is silent about the role of the Holy Spirit in empowering the church for witness and mission or in enabling the church as a whole to live out in the present the eschatological realities of the New Creation. It is not unusual to find Western systematic theologies that do not even develop the person and work of the Holy Spirit as a separate category of study but develop their theology of the Holy Spirit as subsets under the doctrine of God and the doctrine of soteriology.³⁸

The twentieth century has simultaneously ushered in a renewed emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit as well as a major renaissance in Trinitarian theology.³⁹ The emergence of global Pentecostalism has stimulated an unprecedented emphasis on the *work* of the Holy Spirit. Likewise, such influential theologians such as Karl Barth, Karl Rahner, and Jürgen Moltmann have all made the doctrine of the Trinity the centerpiece of their theological work. The result of both of these developments has served to mature our understanding of the Holy Spirit and thereby to understand better the role of the Holy Spirit in the *missio dei*. As with the other persons of the Trinity, four themes will now be examined.

(Rom. 8:26), intercedes (Rom. 8:26–27), works (Rom. 8:28), strengthens (Eph. 3:16), and grieves (Eph. 4:30).

38. See, for example, Henry C. Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979).

39. Space does not permit a discussion of significant preparatory movements that laid the groundwork in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, such as the Wesleyan Holiness Movement and the Keswick revivals.

God the Spirit Empowers the Church for Witness

The church is, fundamentally, a community of proclamation. In this respect, Pentecost is the crucial dividing line between the Old Testament *kahal* (congregation) and the New Testament *ekklēsia* (church). The Old Testament was centered on the temple, the priest, the altar, the sacrifice, and the gathered congregation. After the Resurrection, the church was sent out into the world, as each of the postresurrection appearances of Jesus to His church made clear. However, just prior to His ascension, Jesus instructed His disciples to wait for the presence and empowerment of the Holy Spirit before they went forth as His community of proclamation. Jesus said, "I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). At Pentecost the church was equipped to be the community of proclamation that embodies in word and deed the inbreaking of God's reign. The Cross, the Resurrection, and Pentecost collectively serve to mark the fulfillment of the old covenant. The new order is breaking into the present, and it must be proclaimed to all nations. As Harry Boer in *Pentecost and Missions* says, "Pentecost was the death-knell of temple, priest, altar, sacrifice, law and ceremony."⁴⁰ The term "death-knell" should not be taken to mean the end of these realities but the culminating fulfillment of them all into the greater reality that is found in Jesus Christ. In comparison to the new reality of Jesus Christ, those former realities are only a shadow (Heb. 8:5; 10:1). The result was a transformation in the people of God from a geographically defined, ethnically narrow movement to a global movement that was being extended to every nation on earth.

This new proclamation was explicitly understood as an extension of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in and through the church. While this global dimension was foreshadowed from the beginning, it was the death and resurrection of Christ, followed by Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit, that marked the end of shadows, types, and anticipations and

40. Harry Boer, *Pentecost and Missions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 113. With one exception, the Greek term for a Jewish gathering or community, *sunagōgē*, is never used of a Christian gathering in the New Testament. Paul uses the word *ekklēsia* to describe Christians who are gathered in a particular place for worship. Later, he extends the meaning of *ekklēsia* to include all Christians everywhere, even those who are in heaven. For a full discussion on the use and development of *ekklēsia* in Pauline writings, see Robert J. Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community*, rev. ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007), especially chapters 2 and 3, pp. 26–46.

began the actual inbreaking of the New Creation.⁴¹ The central way the Holy Spirit brings the New Creation into the present is through empowering the church to proclaim the gospel in word and deed in the midst of all contextual challenges that the present evil order presents.

Catechesis into the Life and Ethos of the Kingdom/New Creation

In the Farewell Discourse recorded in John 14–17, Jesus places a great emphasis on the coming of the Holy Spirit. Jesus promises that when the Holy Spirit comes, He will “guide you into all truth” (16:13). The Holy Spirit is the divinely appointed catechist for the church. The word *catechesis* comes from a Greek word meaning “to instruct.” It also can mean “to resound” or “to echo.” Traditionally, the church has prepared small guidebooks, known as catechisms, which summarize the basic teachings of Christianity in order to help priests (later, pastors) to instruct new believers and to help parents in raising their children. Probably the most famous Protestant catechism is Martin Luther’s *Shorter Catechism*, which was written to provide very basic instruction on the Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, and the Lord’s Prayer. Through careful and patient instruction, the disciple was able to “echo” the apostolic faith, thus providing continuity in the life and teaching of the church over the centuries.

Seeing the Holy Spirit as the great catechist for the church reminds us of the ongoing need to teach and instruct the church. The Holy Spirit teaches the church the meaning and significance of the person and work of Jesus Christ. Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would help us “remember all that I have told you” (John 14:26 GNT). Jesus Christ did not usher in merely a “way of salvation” but a “New Creation.” Gordon Fee, in his magisterial work on the Holy Spirit, *God’s Empowering Presence*, correctly observes that “the one feature that distances the New Testament church the most from its contemporary counterpart is the thoroughly eschatological perspective of all of life.”⁴² For us, eschatology is about some vague, distant events that scholars and laypeople argue about. In contrast, the early church realized that the future had already been set into motion and was breaking into the

41. It will be explored in detail in chapter 4 how the promise to bless all nations/people groups was part of God’s original plan, as promised in the Abrahamic covenant.

42. Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, 803.

present. This is why we are defining missions as the global announcement and embodiment, through word and deed, of the inbreaking of God’s reign and the New Creation. This is why Paul declares that we are those “upon whom the end of the ages has come” (1 Cor. 10:11 RSV). The most basic prayer of the church is the Lord’s Prayer, a portion of which says, “May your Kingdom come; may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10 GNT). This is not a prayer that merely anticipates a future, eschatological event, when God’s kingdom comes and God’s will is done. It is a prayer for the church to embody the present realization of the future kingdom in the midst of the present, evil order.

The Holy Spirit, as the great catechist, teaches us and empowers us to live the life of the future in the present. Of course, the Holy Spirit’s work of teaching is evident all over the world and in the whole church. However, it seems that since the missionary movement represents the extension of God’s reign among new people groups, many of whom have no knowledge of Christianity, it is particularly important that we reflect the Spirit’s catechesis in all that we do.

Suffering and Persecution and the Missio Dei

The expectation that Christians will be persecuted was among the first casualties of the domesticating influence of Christendom. In Christendom, the line between the church and the world was virtually erased, thereby blunting important aspects of the Holy Spirit’s work. Paul makes regular references to his suffering and the suffering of others for the sake of the gospel.⁴³ In fact, suffering and persecution form an integral part of Paul’s understanding of the public witness of the gospel. In mission studies, persecution often has been understood only within the context of particular resistant people groups and/or political situations that prohibit the public profession of Christ. However, for Paul, suffering is an ongoing reflection of and participation in the sufferings of Christ (Rom. 8:17; 2 Cor. 1:5–7; Phil. 3:10; Col. 1:24) wherever the true church is. Persecution produces perseverance (Rom. 5:3), enables us to rely upon God (2 Cor. 1:9), and prepares us to share in the eschatological glory that is to be revealed (Rom. 8:18–25). For Paul, suffering is a normal expectation

43. Rom. 5:3; 8:17–18; 2 Cor. 1:5–7; 11:21–29; Eph. 3:13; Phil. 3:10; Col. 1:24; 1 Thess. 1:6; 2 Thess. 1:4–5; 2 Tim. 1:8, 12; 2:3, 9, 11.



for Christian witness (Rom. 8:35; 2 Cor. 12:10; 2 Tim. 1:8, 11–12; 2:3, 9). In fact, Paul states this explicitly when he instructs Timothy, saying, “Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus *will be persecuted*” (2 Tim. 3:12).⁴⁴ This language must seem like an alien world to those who have only known the cheap grace of Christendom.

In contrast, we discover in the New Testament that suffering is one of the ways in which we embody the gospel and reflect Christ’s work in the world. Jesus anticipates that the church would be “brought to trial before rulers and kings.” When that occurs, He admonishes us to not worry “about what you are going to say or how you will say it . . . for the words you will speak will not be yours; they will come from the Spirit of your Father speaking through you” (Matt. 10:18–20 GNT). Jesus envisions persecution as one of the ways in which the Spirit of God proclaims the gospel, through His church, to the rulers of this present age. As we move into a post-Christendom, increasingly post-Christian context, we need to better prepare students to understand the dynamics of persecution and to develop a theological understanding of persecution as a normative part of the church’s life and witness. This transition can be greatly aided as we learn valuable lessons from the emerging new generation of missionaries coming from the Majority World. Many of these missionaries come from contexts where Christianity is a persecuted and misunderstood minority. These new missionaries are proving to be far more adept at helping new Christians understand how to inhabit a post-Christendom world or a culture where some other world religion dominates the religious and political landscape.

Missionary Witness as a Dynamic Overflow of the Spirit

Since the advent of Protestant missions, the dominant motivation for missions has been an appeal to the “missionary mandate.” Thus, missions became a response of obedience to a particular set of commands, most notably those texts commonly referred to as embodying the Great Commission. In contrast, Lesslie Newbigin pointed out that in the New Testament, we do not witness the burden of obeying a command but rather a vast “explosion of joy.”⁴⁵ Jürgen Moltmann describes missions as the joyous

44. Emphasis mine.

45. Lesslie Newbigin, “The Logic of Missions,” in *New Directions in Mission and Evangelization*, vol. 2, ed. James Scherer and Stephen Bevans (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994), 16. Original context found in *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 116–27.

invitation to all peoples to come to a “feast without end.”⁴⁶ Missions, of course, is never *less* than a command of Christ, but it is certainly far *more* than that. The perspective of the New Testament is never, “How can we motivate someone to go?” but rather, “Who could possibly be silent in light of the resurrection of Jesus Christ?”

Harry Boer (in his *Pentecost and Missions*) rightly points out that none of the key figures in the book of Acts ever makes a direct appeal to any of the Great Commission passages to justify his preaching, even when questions are raised about the emerging Gentile mission. He further points out that the earliest believers who took the initiative to preach the gospel to Gentiles (Acts 11:20) were very likely not even present at any of those postresurrection commissioning events.⁴⁷ However, this is less a statement about the importance of Jesus’ final commission in their minds than a statement about the effect of the transformative events of the Resurrection and Pentecost in the lives of those earliest witnesses. The nineteenth-century missiologist Gustav Warneck (1834–1910) was probably correct when he stated that “the Great Commission was the silent presupposition underlying the witness of the earliest Christian community.”⁴⁸ However, the point is that the Great Commission cannot, and should not, be viewed in isolation from either of the two determinative, supernatural events that precede and follow the commission; namely, the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. It was the transforming reality of these two supernatural events that thrust the early church outward into that “explosion of joy.”

Understanding missions as an extension of the Holy Spirit’s life and work through the church and into the world carries with it a wide range of implications for missions, many of which will be developed in more detail in chapters 14 through 16. However, in a more general way, three representative examples will be noted here. First, this new perspective should help to liberate missionaries from an undue emphasis on human strategies that have been articulated in isolation from the Spirit’s work. Contemporary missiology places great emphasis on the skill of human efforts, sociological models, and elaborate strategies, but comparatively

46. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (London: SCM, 1975), 75.

47. Boer, *Pentecost and Missions*, 43.

48. As quoted in Boer, *Pentecost and Missions*, 36.

less emphasis on conceptualizing missions as *primarily* an extension of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. We need to prepare missionaries not only in what to say and do, but more importantly, in how to *live* as a disciple of Jesus Christ in the world.

Moonjang Lee, one of my colleagues who teaches missions at Gordon-Conwell, once surprised some of our students in a chapel service where he was preaching. He commented that no missionaries should go out onto the field until they are certain that their own spirituality is deeper than those to whom they are being sent. We have emphasized so much the inherent power of the Christian message that we sometimes forget the importance of the messenger whose life fully reflects what it means to live in the power of the Holy Spirit under the lordship of Jesus Christ.

Second, the underdeveloped doctrine of the Holy Spirit has limited the church's ability to integrate missionary training with important biblical themes such as the role of persecution or the role of signs and wonders in the proclamation of the gospel. Yet even a casual reading of the book of Acts reveals that signs and wonders and persecution often accompany and attest to the faithful preaching of the gospel.

Third, placing missions within the larger context of the Holy Spirit's work in bringing in the New Creation has important implications for how we understand and define the "task" or "goal" of missions. In missions writings dating back to the nineteenth century, there is a great deal of emphasis on "completing the task" and "fulfilling the Great Commission." Probably the most famous missionary slogan emerged out of the Student Volunteer Missionary Movement: "*The Evangelization of the World in This Generation*." Since that time, the language of "completion" and "fulfillment" has typified evangelical missions literature. In the twentieth century, the most important movement that focused the church's energy on "completing" the Great Commission was the A.D. 2000 movement. The motto of the A.D. 2000 movement was "A Church for Every People and the Gospel for Every Person by 2000."

All these movements have wonderfully served the church. Indeed, the global church is stronger today because of the zeal, commitment, and the genuine Christian fruit these movements produced. However, we must increasingly recognize that the language of "completion" can be comprehended only when missions is built on the foundation of Christendom, not on the foundation of the Trinity. Through the lens of the

missio dei, we no longer isolate soteriology from pneumatology and eschatology. Therefore, even when every person has had an opportunity to hear the gospel, or even if a church is planted in every people group of the world, missions will not be over. Once missions is linked inseparably to the triune God, then the church recognizes that the ultimate goal of missions can be found only in the New Creation. This does not negate important goals such as planting a church in every people group in the world. However, it does mean that the church must always live in the tension of "unfinished business." The mission of the church (missions) is to participate in the *missio dei* by continuing the mission of Jesus throughout the world until the end of history.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has sought to provide a broad framework for the reconceptualization of missions within a Trinitarian framework. Once the *missio dei* becomes the generative center of all missiological reflection, it changes the way we think and conduct ourselves as ambassadors of God's mission in the world. We find ourselves transcending the competitive aggrandizement of a particular denominational work. Instead, we become heralds who embody the inbreaking of the New Creation. The triumphalism of human agency and ingenuity are replaced by a deepened humility and awe that God would use us, alongside Christians from all over the world, in the accomplishment of His unfolding plan of redemption in the world. As David Bosch said in the conclusion of his *Transforming Mission*, "It is not the church which 'undertakes' mission; it is the *missio dei* which constitutes the church. The mission of the church needs constantly to be renewed and re-conceived."⁴⁹ The chapters that follow are an attempt to renew missions for the twenty-first century by reconceiving each element within the larger context of the Trinity and the *missio dei*.

49. David Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 519.