MISSION: A MARK OF THE CHURCH?
TOWARD A MISSIONAL ECCLESIOLOGY

By

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This thesis proceeds from a conviction that ecclesiology and mission, often considered as distinct concepts and disciplines, are in fact integral to each other. The study attempts to show that mission is inherent in the nature of the triune God, his relationship to creation, and the redemptive agency of the church. The need for this study is particularly urgent in view of cultural changes that have ended the influence, prestige and privilege the church enjoyed for more than a millennium of Christendom. The church must be more self-aware if it would seek to fulfill its kingdom potential in the increased pluralism of the West.

The study comprises eight chapters: Chapter 1 introduces the study and makes a case for why the study is timely today. Chapter 2 examines the concept of the Mission of God and attempts to set forth a working definition and semantic taxonomy to inform the discussion that follows.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 look at the Mission of God from the perspectives of biblical studies, systematic theology, and church history, respectively. Scriptural focus is on the missional aspects of the blessing formulas in the OT and the commissioning texts of the NT\(^1\). The theological study examines missional aspects of the Trinity and expresses a perichoretic-missional ecclesiology that proceeds directly from the union of the church with Christ in his

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\(^1\) All Scripture references are from the New International Version unless otherwise noted.
missional activity. The historical study reviews several salient periods of missions history where the missional nature of the church was manifested successfully.

Chapter 6 considers the Nicene marks of the church as manifested in three major ecclesiologies and also considers contemporary developments. The arguments come together in Chapter 7, where the evidence is brought together to show that mission is indeed a mark of the church.

Chapter 8 expresses the significance of missional ecclesiology for today, setting forth some practical concepts and cautions toward implementing a missional ecclesiology.
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my loving and longsuffering wife Miłka,

for patience, kindness, and support that made this work possible

To you, my love, for your forbearance through years of study,

through long nights I spent at the computer instead of with you ~

And to my children Kasia, Kaelin, and Elijah,

for letting Daddy work so many times

when you would have preferred

me to play with you.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**.......................................................................................................................... ix

**CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION**.................................................................................................................. 1

  * Part 1–Why this study?................................................................................................................................. 1
  * Literature Review......................................................................................................................................... 2
  * Part 2–Examining assumptions .................................................................................................................. 6

**CHAPTER 2–THE MEANING OF MISSION** ................................................................................................. 11

  * Terminology............................................................................................................................................... 11
  * The need to define mission .......................................................................................................................... 14
  * Toward a working definition of the Mission of God.................................................................................. 16
  * The subject of the Mission of God ............................................................................................................ 17
  * The act of Mission ....................................................................................................................................... 17
  * The direct object, agent or instrument of Mission ...................................................................................... 18
  * The indirect objects or recipients of Mission ........................................................................................... 18
  * The motive and goal of the Mission of God ............................................................................................... 19
  * The Mission of God restated ...................................................................................................................... 19
  * The meaning of missional .......................................................................................................................... 20

**CHAPTER 3 - THE PEOPLE OF GOD AND MISSION IN THE BIBLE** ......................................................... 24

  * Focus of the Scriptural study ...................................................................................................................... 24
  * NT texts that integrate the OT .................................................................................................................... 26
  * The Missional Covenant in Genesis .......................................................................................................... 27
  * New Testament claims on the Old Testament Covenant .......................................................................... 31
  * A word study of “sending” in John’s Gospel .............................................................................................. 33
  * A brief statistical analysis of send and sent in John’s Gospel ................................................................... 34
  * John’s usage of send .................................................................................................................................... 34
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thematic Study</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinitarian Sending</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obedience to the Sender</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missional identity</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER 4–THEOLOGY-SHAPED MISSION</strong></td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Missionary God</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Divine Dance</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Mission of Ontological Mediatorship</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perichoresis and Mission</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perichoretic-Missional Ecclesiology</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Mission of Redemptive Mediatorship</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER 5–MISSION IN HISTORY</strong></td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Mission of the Church in the Book of Acts</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Mission to the Roman Empire</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ulfilas and the Mission to the Goths</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrick and Celtic Christianity</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyril and Methodius and the Slavic Mission</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER 6–THE MARKS OF THE CHURCH</strong></td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the Church?</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biblical Images of the Church</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Nicene Ecclesiology</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
THE EASTERN CHURCH: Eucharistic Ecclesiology ....................................................... 82
THE CHURCH OF ROME: Magisterial Ecclesiology .................................................... 84
THE PROTESTANTS: Confessional Ecclesiology ......................................................... 86
CONTEMPORARY DEVELOPMENTS .......................................................................... 91

CHAPTER 7–MISSION: A MARK OF THE CHURCH? ...................................................... 93
THE OBJECT OF THE EXERCISE ............................................................................ 93
ASSEMBLING THE ARGUMENTS ............................................................................. 94
WITNESSES FOR THE AFFIRMATIVE ..................................................................... 99
MISSION: A MARK OF THE CHURCH .................................................................... 105

CHAPTER 8–SIGNIFICANCE FOR TODAY’S CHURCH .............................................. 106
THE CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGE ..................................................................... 106
PREACHING THE VISION ..................................................................................... 106
PERICHORETIC-MISSIONAL ECCLESIOLOGY REDUX ........................................ 107
RISKS OF MISSIONALISM .................................................................................. 109
SIGNS OF HOPE .................................................................................................... 110

BIBLIOGRAPHY ....................................................................................................... 112
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I give final thanks to my Lord Jesus. I am overwhelmed that you have gently brought me out of the life I once led and into the new life you have given me. Thank you for forgiving and continuing to forgive my many sins. Thank you for your presence, that of the Comforter, and your continuing work in and on me. Lord, help my unbelief!
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Part 1–Why this study?

The impetus for this study grew out of a journey toward becoming a church planter for my denomination, Evangelical Presbyterian Church, a journey which began when my family and I joined a small, dying church in another organization five years ago. When we joined the church, the chair of the Outreach committee for the church asked if I would be willing to serve. Having come to Reformed convictions only a few years previously, at that time I was still more oriented toward the idea of teaching seminary or returning to the mission field in Russia, where I served in the early nineties. I knew nothing about outreach or evangelism, and had very little interest in either topic. But I reluctantly agreed, being convinced as a good Presbyterian that the local church is God’s primary means to give and confirm callings and direct his people where they should go.

Since I had no experience in the area, I first knew I needed to learn about evangelism and outreach—if God wanted me to be on the Outreach committee, then I would learn how to become the best Outreach committee member I could be. My library was full of materials on Reformed doctrines and apologetics, and I was very polemically oriented as so many new Calvinists are.

The search for materials did not begin easily. The congregation was made up of about 60 people mostly over 70 years old. One obvious question that occurred was, “What happened?” It became obvious that before we engaged in outreach it would be a good idea to get the church ready for company, and I talked regularly with my pastor over my discoveries. Here was a puzzle that was growing more interesting. In looking at materials on
congregational renewal, revitalization, and redevelopment, I found some very helpful materials that describe many of the dynamics that affect the lives of congregations and result in decline—congregational life cycles and so forth. Some of these materials were well grounded in theological principles, but most were based on organizational management models, and this was troubling—I have no quarrel with good organizational leadership, but these books that concentrated on methods seemed to be missing a larger picture.

I found a large cross-section of materials on outreach and revitalization that referred to materials on church planting, and the bibliographic rabbit trails began to move in directions that were at once more troubling and more intriguing. The old church growth materials from the seventies and eighties were mostly management methodologies, but they had begun with the ideas of a missionary who had brought home the radical (at that time) idea of using missionary principles here at home.

My first course at Reformed Seminary had been apologetics, and a book I hadn’t understood at the time turned up in my research, Lesslie Newbigin’s *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*. Rereading this book and following the bibliography led to books that discussed the problem of the church’s identity. Reading dozens of books, hundreds of journal articles and literally thousands of web pages on church planting had struck a common cord in the need for applying missionary principles of contextualization and indigenization in the West.

**Literature Review**

Recently published works are beginning to produce a somewhat richer field of resources to draw upon than existed only a decade ago. In the journey toward this study,

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several authors stood out as particularly influential in the field of applying missionary principles to ecclesiology at home in the modern West.

David Bosch was an Afrikaner missiologist who chaired the Missiology faculty at the University of South Africa at the time of his tragic death in 1992, only a few months after his masterwork *Transforming Mission*\(^2\) was published. The title of this work is double-edged: it can mean mission which transforms, or mission which is being transformed. For this book both are true. Bosch’s application of Thomas Kuhn’s paradigm theory to the study of missiology, some say, is invalid, but I found the book… transformational. It suffers from Bosch’s having accepted a biblical hermeneutic based on higher criticism, and from a lack of critical engagement with the darker side of the ecumenical (WCC) movement of the latter half of the twentieth century. Even with those faults, and they are severe, his book shows breadth and depth of knowledge in missiology that is unmatched in current literature.

J.E. Lesslie Newbigin, whose works *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society, Foolishness to the Greeks, and The Open Secret*,\(^3\) among others, were key influences in this study, was a British Presbyterian missionary in India. Returning home to the UK in the late seventies after thirty years on the mission field, he found that the religious milieu in Britain had changed. Christendom was a spent force culturally, and Britain had become a pluralist society. Newbigin was among the first to call for a mission to Western culture. His seminal contributions resulted in the founding of the Gospel in Our Culture Network, whose members continue to do research on missionary ecclesiology. Newbigin’s writing is not as systematic and structured as Bosch’s and he does not seem to have the same depth of detail as the

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Afrikaner. His biblical theology, like Bosch’s, is weakened by too much acceptance of critical theory, and his work is also flawed by more readiness to accept some aspects of postmodern epistemic categories than is warranted. But his philosophy of mission is challenging, stimulating, and on balance very helpful.

Michael Winston Goheen abandoned a Ph.D. dissertation on systematic theology to study Newbigin, and his doctoral dissertation\(^4\) traces the development of Newbigin’s thought from a Christendom establishment ecclesiology, through a Christocentric missionary ecclesiology, and finally to a Trinitarian missionary ecclesiology. His dissertation was instrumental in unraveling some of the epicyclic knots of Newbigin’s thought, and his subsequent lectures at church planting boot camps and interviews with missional pioneers are thought-provoking and beneficial.

Ed Stetzer, a Southern Baptist missiologist and researcher wrote a number of books on church planting and speaks regularly at church planting boot camps of the Acts 29 Network, Global Church Advance, and at leadership conferences. A thoroughgoing Reformed evangelical, his theology is solid and his insights laser-like. At a number of speeches (to Acts 29, to the Baptist Identity Conference, and the Southern Baptist Convention) he has mentioned the need for more research into missional ecclesiology.\(^5\)

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Christopher H.J. Wright’s massive *The Mission of God* was a work I first heard mentioned in a talk entitled “Missional Leadership: A Biblical Direction” by Jeffrey Greenman of Tyndale seminary given at the TEDS Carl Henry Center Scripture seminar in 2005. Wright’s book sets forth the Mission of God as the central organizing principle of Scripture, and proposes a working framework for a missional hermeneutic of the Bible.

Darrell Guder is the Henry Winters Luce Professor of Missional and Ecumenical Theology and Dean of Academic Affairs at Princeton Theological Seminary. A research fellow of the Gospel and Our Culture Network, Guder edited *Missional Church,* containing nine papers describing the need for a missional ecclesiology, a cultural-theological rationale behind that need, and some contours about what a missional church ought to look like.

These books all influenced the choice the topic of this study as well as the direction of research. Equally influential in shaping the direction of research as well as providing motivation for it (and often distraction from it) were hundreds of hours of lectures, sermons, boot camp sessions, and conference speeches from The Acts 29 Network, The Resurgence, The Gospel Coalition, The Carl Henry Center at TEDS, Redeemer Presbyterian Church.

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Covenant Seminary, RTS Seminary on the Go, and many, many other organizations shaped this study and my own theological journey.

**Part 2–Examining assumptions**

Any attempt to articulate an ecclesiology will be based on assumptions, some explicit, others implicit. Contemporary Western ecclesiological formulations are no exception. Nor, particularly, are those of the Reformed evangelical tradition, the stream of which the author is a part, an exception. Ideas of what constitutes the identity and nature of the church are based on a host of assumptions. What David Bosch stated regarding theology in general applies particularly to ecclesiological approaches. Western Christians have been, he wrote, “unconscious of the fact that their theology was culturally conditioned; they simply assumed that it was supracultural and universally valid.” Michael Goheen agrees, having observed two predominating practical approaches in the Reformed community two decades ago—the Church Growth and Confessional traditions—both of which had what he called “clear yet unexamined ecclesiologies.”

Thoughtful ecclesiastical leaders in the West, particularly in the English-speaking world, agree broadly that something is wrong in the church. The actual numbers of people attending evangelical worship in America has declined significantly over the past two

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16 For instance, the Radical Reformers assumed that the church was comprised of confessing, baptized believers only, a *pure church* ecclesiology. This assumption led to several other facets of their doctrine and practice.


18 Goheen, *As The Father Has Sent Me*, 18.

decades. A similar trend of numerical decline applies to the church in the UK and Europe as well, although recently the decline is offset by some growth trends in immigrant-led churches.

A growing sense of malaise has prompted responses ranging from the more radical proponents of the Emergent Church movement who advocate discarding all traditional, practical, and theological assumptions, to theological conservatives who have advocated a retrenchment of confessional positions and a wholesale rejection of innovations of any kind. Neither of these extremes has been particularly helpful in addressing the visceral ecclesiastical malaise or exploring its causes and implications. Either extreme, arguably any response at all, is premature, and may reflect a common Western penchant for activism over reflection.

Setting forth practical steps to remediate what can well be called the contemporary ecclesiastical crisis is beyond the scope of the current study. But the current crisis is the motivation behind this project, which will attempt to provide a description and analysis of some of the issues which contributed to its eventuation. The study will attempt to bring into the open some aspects of the unexamined assumptions of contemporary ecclesiology in the hope that this will be a salutary exercise. The desired goal is not a wholesale throwing out everything that has gone before, but examining, understanding, and validating those assumptions that have theological merit, and subjecting to greater critical intentionality some

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20 Dave Olson, “Twelve Surprising Facts About the American Church,” [online presentation]; http://www.theamericanchurch.org/sample/12SurprisingFactsabouttheAmericanChurchSample.ppt; Internet; accessed 15 January 2008.

of those that may be mere products of recent ecclesial culture or tradition. This study will attempt to bring some of the tools and thought processes of missiology to bear in examining ecclesiology. Stanley Skreslet’s warning to those who would attempt to research the history of mission apply: “Confessional commitments must be scrutinized, to be sure, but so must all other forms of personal, institutional, or ideological loyalty. Complete objectivity is beyond our grasp, but a measure of transparency regarding intentions and interests can be achieved.”

This study proceeds from a conviction that ecclesiology and mission, often considered as distinct concepts and disciplines, are in fact integral to each other. Further, the project is an advancement of the argument that mission is logically prior to ecclesiology and in fact exists in a causal relationship with it. As Emil Brunner has often been quoted, “The Church exists by mission as fire exists by burning.”

Daniel Migliore agrees that a core issue in the crisis is the concept of the church, specifically in the context of American Protestantism. He lists four ways the church is hindered in its ability to address the new realities, here re-ordered: (1) Loss of a compelling theological vision. The American church suffers a lack of theological clarity and has come “perilously close to losing hold of the core identifying convictions and commitments of Christian faith…that make the church to be the church.” This loss of theological vision results in the subsequent three hindrances. (2) Individualism, which “corrodes deep and lasting community” in an age “that yearns for genuine community and is increasingly aware of the connectedness of life.” (3) Secularization, meaning the accommodation of the church


to “secular models of society, whether corporation, club, support group or political party.”
The church has “allowed its life and mission to be defined by something other than the
gospel of Jesus Christ.” (4) Captivity to western cultural patterns of exclusion, injustice, and
oppression both in its own life and in its mission in the world. This is not an apologia for
contextual theologies of liberation, feminism, etc., but an exhortation to humble confession
that the church has been complicit, in many times and places, in western superiority, racism,
and oppression.24

The issue in view is a question of what and why, more than one of how. In addressing
the issue of mission, evangelicalism particularly in the pragmatic West, often proceeds
directly to the question of what the church ought to do, before pausing to reflect on
the question of what the church is and the reasons why it exists, emphasizing matters of practical
methodology over theological ontology. Christians, says Mark Galli, need to have a better
understanding of what church is before we try to figure out what the church does.25

The current study does not presume to offer a prescriptive examination of how the
curch should respond to current ecclesiological issues. Rather, it is an attempt to examine
the meaning of mission through perspectives of biblical and theological study, and a survey
of historical and contemporary ecclesiologies as they relate to mission. This project is
predicated on the conviction that mission has a proper place as a mark of the true church, a
sine qua non of catholicity and apostolicity that stands alongside the ministry of word and
sacrament as a component of the church’s identity and nature.

25 Mark Galli, “Stopping Cultural Drift: An Asian Pentecostal Argues That We Need to Know What the Church
Is Before We Figure Out What It Does,” Christianity Today 50 no. 11 (Nov 2006): 66-69.
Mission, it will be argued, is the impetus and design of the entire pageant of redemption, standing behind the self-revelation of God in Scripture, through dreams and visions of the prophets, and through the incarnation of Jesus Christ. If mission, as Christopher H.J. Wright avers, is “what the Bible is all about,” then as we consider together the narrower question of whether the same telos of mission applies also to the people of God who form so much of the Bible’s content, the answer to the question of whether mission is indeed a mark of the church should become clear.

It will be shown that the proposition of mission as a mark of the church is in no way an innovation, but in fact has been asserted and re-asserted at many points during the history of the church by some of her most able theologians, writers, churchmen and missionaries. Although mission is absent from the majority of traditional creedal formulations of the notitiae ecclesiae in the Eastern, Roman, and Protestant confessions of faith, a question that itself calls for further research, it is nevertheless encouraging to see more attention given to mission in contemporary confessional expressions.

CHAPTER 2

THE MEANING OF MISSION

Terminology

In any study of this kind there is an ever-present temptation to plunge right into the body of research under the assumption that the reader will share the writer’s communicative background and that terms used will have more or less the same meaning in the mind of researcher and reader. But even when writers and readers share in common the context of the same educational institution and similar histories of having learned and taught theological prolegomena, the possibility of assigning different meanings to terms remains. For this reason prudence dictates that a study such as this one should begin by re-stating the key terms under discussion, not with any intent of changing their denotation, but with that of recalling the commonly held meaning of terms while simultaneously taking care to explore the assumptions that underlie them.

It was with some degree of unease that the word “missional” was included as part of the title of this study, for several reasons. First, it has become a buzzword, resulting in over-use that has threatened to empty it of meaning.¹ Many Christian denominations and parachurch organizations have the stated goal of urging congregations and Christians to be

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missional. Other groups and individuals have appropriated the term to make a stylistic statement which is little informed by theology, reducing the word “missional” to pop-Christian jargon meaning little more than “cool.” Still others have abducted the term to suggest that to be “missional” means accepting uncritically postmodern epistemic approaches and often rejecting confessional theology or propositional truth.

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3 Chad Hall, “Resourcing the missional leader” [online article]; (Cool Churches); http://www.coolchurches.com/; Internet; accessed 10 January 2008; Paul Urban, “Cool Missional Churches” [online article]; http://paulurban.blogs.com/paul_urban/2006/12/cool_missional_.html; Internet; accessed 10 January 2008.

4See Brian A. McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy* (El Cajon, Grand Rapids: Youth Specialties/Zondervan, 2004), 30,146,249; McLaren is eloquent, attractive and winsome, and has many interesting at at times even valid insights, but what he presents is not only an amorphous mélange of ideas, but an advancement of epistemic polymorphism that allows one to use the label “orthodoxy” wherever desired while simultaneously excluding the possibility or desirability of defining what it means; Scot McKnight, “On the Word Missional,” [online article]; http://www.jesuscreed.org/?p=2529; Internet; accessed 10 January 2008. Mr. McKnight here is mostly rambling, yet in point six makes one of the points that will be made in this study regarding the relationship between missionality and the perichoretic heart of God, again showing that there are some valid insights here, but as with all sources, *caveat lector*. 

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One of the lesser purposes of this study, then, is an attempt at a reminder that “missional” belongs in the lexicon as a term informed by theological truth. This raises a natural question: Why use the word missional when it would arguably be simpler to use the term “missionary”? A valid point, but we ought to recall that the latter term, too, has acquired its own layers of meaning in Western ecclesial parlance. Gerald Anderson refers to the “so-called ‘mystical doctrine of salt water’–the idea that being transported over salt water, the more of it the better, is what constitutes missionary service.”

George Hunsberger agrees. “In most of our churches, ask what people think about ‘mission’ and immediately you get responses about ‘people over there’ in faraway places across the globe… ‘Over there, helping the poor, recruiting members,’–these have become the operational missiologies of our churches. And they are not just uninformed notions of laypeople. They are fueled and undergirded by the guidance implicit in the language of missiological institutions and movements.”

The existence of this sort of terminological habituation has come to form such an ingrained backdrop to discussion of the themes this study examines, that it becomes helpful if not necessary to engage in a preliminary exercise of restating definitions. The goal is not to change the meaning of terms but simply to get past what can be conflicting or unwarranted assumptions, with the goal of ensuring that writer and reader reach a reasonable consensus.

The greater question at issue remains, whether mission, properly considered, is or ought to be a mark of the church. It is necessary enough to restate definitions simply to ensuring that terms are understood. But it is also the author’s conviction that the terms of

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discussion themselves, if we will but recall their full meaning, will point toward the answer to the question. The question is whether mission is a mark of the church will hinge first on the meaning of mission itself, and it is to that meaning we now turn.

The need to define mission

David Bosch observes that, “Attempts to define mission are of recent vintage. The early Christian church undertook no such attempts—at least not consciously.” Even in the early twentieth century, the church was beginning to realize that two hundred years of missionary activity had taken place without adequate reflection. In 1938 Hendrik Kraemer observed that, “To a shamefully high degree the Church, in the confusion of the times, has become confounded about its nature and mission.” Half a century later David Bosch expressed a similar concern over a “crisis in the church’s understanding of mission.” Francis DuBose likewise stated that he was “bothered by the lack of a clear biblical definition of mission,” and urged a fresh quest to better understand the meaning of mission.

The need for self-critical reflection and perspicuous definition of the nature of mission is not new, nor does the current study in any way attempt to break new ground in defining mission. Rather, it attempts to glean from the authors already cited and others a practical approach toward a working definition.

A good place to begin is a generic definition of mission to which we can add a theological layer. Christopher Wright provides a very solid start with his description of

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mission in the abstract: Mission is “a long-term purpose or goal that is to be achieved through proximate objectives and planned actions.”\textsuperscript{11} A non-ecclesial perspective helps to illustrate this generic idea: In the Second World War, the allied countries had a long-term purpose or goal of stopping the Axis Powers from achieving their hegemonic design for world conquest. That was the Mission of the war.

The mediate objectives that advanced the accomplishment of that main goal were many: campaigns, battles, skirmishes, advancements, regroupings. Organizations, military units and individuals each would have been able to declare their own specific “mission” at a given time during their participation in the war effort. A manufacturer might have had as a goal producing so many thousand rifles, a Merchant Marine fleet that of moving so many million tons of materiel from the United States to the European theatre of operations, etc. The difference between the local mission and the overall Mission was one of scope, not substance, a distinction of degree, not kind. Becoming aware of this difference is helpful in exposing and critiquing our assumptions.

The presence of unexamined of assumptions themselves forms one dimension of the problem. As Bavinck asserts, “The ancient church conducted missionary work as though it were self-explanatory; it never asked: Why do we have missions? And so it never subjected its methods to criticism. Its testimony was so spontaneous and natural that it had no need of a carefully thought out basis.”\textsuperscript{12} The church has tended to operate at some point along a continuum that runs between reflective and activistic extremes. The enthusiastic church,

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{10} Francis M. DuBose, \textit{The God Who Sends} (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1983), 14-15.}
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{11} Christopher H. J. Wright, \textit{The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative} (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2006), 23.}
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{12} J. H. Bavinck, \textit{An Introduction to the Science of Missions} (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1960), xi.}
operating even under the genuine impetus and unction of the Spirit of God, has often failed to reflect on the implications of its actions and methods, as Bavinck averred.\textsuperscript{13} Though most often a simple lack of self-critical reflection is not harmful, failure to examine and critique assumptions runs the risk of handicapping the church when it comes to multiplying, through training, the missional impulse among the current generation of would-be missionaries, and makes it harder to pass along an effective missional legacy to subsequent generations.

An effective definition of mission, then, will not attempt to change the meaning of mission, but will result from critical reflection on its commonly held meaning, while exposing and expressing the assumptions that underlie it. Such a definition can help to provide a schematic framework that can be used to train and pass along the concept and help the church to pursue its methods with greater cognizance and intentionality.

\textbf{Toward a working definition of the Mission of God}

If the generic definition of mission is clear already then we can proceed to the task of adding the theological layer, distinguishing between the generic and the theological meaning. This study will denote the latter using the phrase “The Mission of God,” meaning the long-term, overarching redemptive purpose of God that will form the taxonomic, lexical and theological context for all that follows. A working definition of the Mission of God must involve a minimum of five components: (1) A subject (who is doing something), (2) an act (what is being done), (3) a direct object, agent or instrument (4) an indirect object or recipient and (5) a motive with an intended goal or result. The target of this list is not over-simplification or reductionism, but schematization for the sake of accurate analysis.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
The subject of the Mission of God

The Mission of God is first and foremost a *theological* concept.\(^{14}\) It has as its subject the Triune God–Mission is God’s mission, not that of the church, or of Western Christians. Mission makes a statement about the very nature and heart of God–God is a missionary God.\(^{15}\) Although Bavinck began his description by identifying missions as an activity of the church, he clearly understands God as the one who is really the subject of mission. He writes, “all the time it is God who completes his work… through us.” (emphasis added).\(^{16}\) A more fully orbed discussion of God as the subject of mission follows in the section on theology proper. For the purpose of defining the term *mission*, though, identifying God as subject is sufficient for now.

The act of Mission

God, the subject of mission, is the “who” of mission. If this is so, then what is the action that makes mission? First, the action is *sending*. Wright is dissatisfied with accounts of mission that stress the etymological root in the Latin verb *mitto*, “to send,”\(^{17}\) and properly so. The mere parsing of verbs does not do justice to the concept of the sending of God. One can send a letter and expect nothing more than that it will arrive at its destination. There is more to mission than merely a Sender and the act of sending–there is an expectation of result inherent in the idea. Mission connotes intentionality.

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\(^{14}\) Note that in this section we are moving toward a generic definition of the phrase *The Mission of God*. For this reason this section will not be as richly supported with biblical references as it might otherwise have been–this section is primarily an exercise in taxonomy, which will be fleshed out biblically in chapter three.


The direct object, agent or instrument of Mission

The primary direct object of the Mission of God is God himself. God is both sender and sent. Were God not triune, this would be a paradox, but in the divine economy of three divine persons who share one essence, the missionary Father sends his missionary Son and the missionary Spirit. The study will return to consider the doctrine of God and the Trinity during consideration of the theological aspects of Mission and their implications for the nature of the church. For the immediate task of looking for a working meaning of the term Mission, it suffices to assert the Son and the Spirit as the primary agents of Mission, sent by the Father.

The indirect objects or recipients of Mission

If God is sender, then to whom or what are the Son and the Spirit sent? At this point the definition becomes a bit more complicated, as there are multiple recipients of the act of mission. The first and widest recipient category of mission is the world under which rubric can be understood the whole of the cosmos. “God so loved the world that he sent is only begotten Son…” John 3:16a. But the Son and Spirit are not sent to the world in the abstract. The cosmos of matter and energy in motion considered apart from humankind has no need of the divine Mission. While the world itself receives and will ultimately receive the benefit of mission, the primary recipients are those who bear the image of God. The Son and Spirit are sent to the human race.

Here Mission becomes recursive, as among those who are recipients of the action of Mission are some who are themselves invited to join in the Mission as its agents and heralds, and join with the Son and the Spirit in advancing the redemptive plan. Being a recipient of mission is not only a matter of grace and privilege, but privilege becomes responsibility and
those to whom the Son and Spirit were sent, are themselves sent, and join in putting into effect the Mission of God for the whole world. In the words of Edward Dayton and David Fraser “the church is a result of and participant in the mission of God.”

As Bavinck observes, “God is concerned not only with individuals, but also with ‘the world,’ and in turning to the world, God takes us along.”

The motive and goal of the Mission of God

Thus far we have seen that God is the subject, Sending is the action, the Son and Spirit are the primary agents, and the whole world and humankind are the recipients (some of whom are subsequently sent themselves) of the Mission of God. The design or telos of the Mission of God is the redemption or reconciliation of the fallen world to God, and its restoration to a state that fully glorifies him as creator, sustainer, and redeemer.

The Mission of God restated

With a summary description of the five components of The Mission of God, then, we can restate a working definition. The Mission of God describes the sovereign action of the Triune God, as the Father sends the Son and the Holy Spirit as his agents to redeem the fallen race of mankind. In turn God invites the redeemed to participate in the redemptive program of reconciling his people to himself, restoring his image within them and appointing them his caretakers and regents in the created realm. The entire pageant of redemption is subsumed under the rubric of Mission, and the ecclesiastical dimension of the redeemed as God’s instrument of his mission is subsumed under this head.

18 Edward R. Dayton with David A. Fraser, Planning Strategies for World Evangelization (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1990), 45.

19 Bavinck, An Introduction to the Science of Missions, 43.
This chapter in no way sets forth a comprehensive theology of mission, a project well beyond the scope of the entire current study. It does provide a beginning point for using mission as an integrative perspective through which the various theological disciplines can be viewed. More importantly, looking at the theological disciplines through the lens of Mission as defined here will point toward an answer to the question at issue in this study, namely, whether Mission is a mark of the church.

**The meaning of missional**

Having sketched a working definition of the Mission of God, it becomes possible to look at the meaning of the term missional for the purposes of this research paper. Interestingly, the word has existed for more than a century, with its earliest identifiable (by this researcher) use in print by C.E. Bourne in 1883, where Bishop William G. Tozer is referred to as “the Missional Bishop of Central Africa.” But the term was not used in anything like the contemporary meaning until a century after this first print usage. Francis DuBose uses it widely in his *God Who Sends* exactly a century after Bourne.21

If the word missional were merely an adjectival form of the word Mission, then its meaning would be roughly, *of or relating to the Mission of the Triune God, specifically, the sending by the Father of the Son and the Spirit to the world in order to advance the divine plan of redemption leading to a restoration of the whole world.* Such a definition limited to these theological contours would be accurate as far as it goes, and this is more or less the way DuBose uses it. In the decade following, though the word began to take on new layers of meaning, juxtaposing the concept of cultural engagement with the theological meaning of

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mission discussed thus far, as in, “missional encounter,” or “missional encounter with culture.”

This usage of the word comes about in the context of a network of theologians principally in the mainline-ecumenical theological stream who were influenced inter alia by the thought and writings of Bishop J.E. Lesslie Newbigin. The influence of Newbigin led to the formation in the English-speaking world of the “Gospel and Our Culture Network,” whose affiliated scholars attempted to formulate new strategies for cultural engagement in the light of the waning influence of Christendom and a marked diminution of the church’s cultural influence, power, and privilege. This movement emerged coincident with a sense in Western culture generally of the accelerating pace of change as the culture entered a period of what Alan Roxburgh called “liminality”—a time of cultural transition during which external events produce internal or affective discomfort and a loss of confidence, and ultimately prompts response.

Ecclesial responses to cultural change varied. The Gospel and Our Culture Network was one response, again informed by mainline and ecumenical backgrounds. Some younger evangelicals coalesced in an adoption of postmodern epistemological categories and rejection of anything that was suspected of having its origin in Enlightenment or modernist categories, and a loose coalition of the more theologically radical of these elements adopted the moniker

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23 Refer back to the literature survey in chapter one for a list of some of Newbigin’s more significant works.


“Emergent.” Fundamentalists and traditionalist evangelicals redoubled efforts at political action and made efforts to restore the church to its prior position of political dominance and cultural impact. A prominent spokesman for this stream of response to cultural change was the late D. James Kennedy, who said in 2005, “Our job is to reclaim America for Christ, whatever the cost.”

Among the responses to the climate of cultural change however was a new wave of church planting by younger church leaders who were evangelical in theology and background yet thoughtful in cultural engagement. Some of these leaders who had previously been associated with the “Emergent” postmodernist ethos distanced themselves from the radicals. They maintained a contemporary stylistic approach while embracing some of the aspects of cultural engagement advocated by the mainline-evangelical streams of the Gospel and Our Culture network. Leaders in this stream recognize the need for cultural engagement and contextualization while maintaining solid evangelical (often Reformed!) theological commitments, as in the case of the Acts 29 Network of churches. These groups found their best self-reference in the term missional, which bore fruit in the form of church planting networks that are doctrinally sound yet culturally relevant, and have achieved a degree of success unprecedented among evangelicals, mainlines, or emergent.

The process of doing research for this study has given its writer a great deal of admiration and respect for this last group of church leaders and their use of the term

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missional, which is theologically and culturally informed, biblical, and relevant. Any attempt to define the term missional without including both its theological and cultural dimensions is hobbled and inadequate. With the foregoing analysis in mind then, this study proffers the following definition of missional: an adjective connoting relationship to the eternal redemptive mission of God, seeing in view the sending of the Son and the Spirit to the world and the sending by the Son of the church into the world, for its restoration through Jesus Christ, in a way that fully apprehends the need for cultural relevance, contextualization, and engagement. Missional is a word, then, which is firmly grounded in its theological meaning but flexible in its cultural expression, but cultural expression should always be governed by theological meaning.
CHAPTER 3

THE PEOPLE OF GOD AND MISSION IN THE BIBLE

Focus of the Scriptural study

The aim of this section of the study is a survey of Scripture focusing on passages that concern the origin and development of the people of God with specific attention to the nature of their calling and election in covenant relationship with God. The space constraints and scope of the paper do not allow for a full diachronic survey of the whole of Scripture, and so it will take a more limited synchronic look at several relevant passages, sampling the Bible with the aim of seeing if there is discernible divine design in the calling that can be identified as missional in nature. The study will also briefly compare some aspects of the missional perspective with some of the other approaches to Biblical Study.

Christopher Wright has suggested that a proper approach to Biblical study will use what he terms a missional hermeneutic. This approach, argues Wright, is not so much a matter of looking at Scripture in search of proof-texts that constitute a “biblical apologetic for mission,” but rather approaches all of Scripture using mission as an integrative principle. Mission becomes in such an approach the focus of hermeneutical coherence for all of Scripture.¹

Such an approach could take one of several forms. One could adopt the approach advocated by Newbigin, much of whose theology was informed by Michael Polanyi’s

coherence theory of truth. This would take the form of a universal intent toward the interpretation of the story the Bible tells. This approach to scripture would resonate well with the presuppositional affirmation of the self-witness of Scripture affirmed by, among others, John Frame. For the same reasons it also does not conflict with the redemptive-historical and biblical-theological approaches to Scripture that have such a well-honored place in the Reformed tradition, but also addresses some of their shortcomings.

As regards practical implementation of such an interpretative framework, Michael Barram helpfully suggests that a missional hermeneutic would be concerned primarily with articulating the kind of questions we ask of the text, and cites five missional questions paraphrased from Darrel Guder: (1) How does this text evangelize us (the gospel question)? (2) How does the text convert us (the change question)? (3) How does the text read us (the context question)? (4) How does the text focus us (the future question)? And finally, “How does the text send us (the mission question)?

This approach has the advantage of greater apprehensibility and also avoids the problems of unarticulated assumptions.

However valid such an approach may be in helping to bring the perspective of Mission to Scripture, and however helpful it may be to discerning the missional purpose of texts, it should not be used uncritically. As Donald Bloesch notes, “every scriptural text can be law or gospel depending on how we relate it to Jesus Christ.” Mission as hermeneutic apart from always remembering the grace of God revealed in and through Jesus Christ can

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5 Michael Barram, “Located’ Questions for a Missional Hermeneutic” [online article]; (The Gospel and Our Culture Network); http://www.gocn.org/articles/article.cfm?id=23; Internet; accessed 10 January 2008.

6 Donald G. Bloesch, “A Christological Hermeneutic: Crisis and Conflict in Hermeneutics” [online article]; (Religion Online); http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=0; Internet; accessed 10 January 2008.
easily become a methodological yoke, one more form of legalism and therefore an obstacle to the very gospel proponents of missional thinking would hope to lift up and promulgate.

**NT texts that integrate the OT**

One way of ensuring a healthy Christocentrism in the application of a missional hermeneutic is by reading the Old Testament texts through the lens of the New Testament. Christopher Wright points out that Luke provides the messianic-missional hermeneutic of the Hebrew canon in chapter 24 of his Gospel. Describing the post-resurrection discourse of Jesus with the disciples who he met on the Emmaus road, Luke wrote these words:

> “He said to them, ‘This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.’ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.”

To use Christopher Wright’s words, “Jesus himself provided the hermeneutical coherence within which all disciples must read these texts, that is, in the light of the story that leads up to Christ ( messianic reading) and the story that leads on from Christ (missional reading).” Jesus himself asserts that the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms are all fulfilled in himself, and here he obviously has more in mind that what are ordinarily considered messianic passages—Jesus is speaking of the whole of the Old Testament. The Old Testament is part of one story, and that story ultimately is about Jesus Christ and his mission, continued in the New Testament.

Another gospel-centric hermeneutical principle for looking at the OT Scripture comes from the pen of Paul the apostle, who wrote these words:

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“The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you."”

This passage from one of the earliest letters in the Pauline corpus points to a pattern in the book of Genesis which links covenant and mission, and forms a valuable set of associations between the people of God and the Mission of God in the covenantal calling of Abraham, whose calling has as its purpose the blessing of all nations.

**The Missional Covenant in Genesis**

Abram’s father Terah had gathered his possessions and extended family including Abram his son and Lot his grandson, and moved from Ur of the Chaldeans intending to make a new home in Canaan. Instead, the family settled in Haran. Haran is the setting for this passage from Genesis:

““The LORD had said to Abram, 'Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.

‘I will make you into a great nation
and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you.’””

This text is the first expression in Genesis of the Abrahamic covenant. As William Dumbrell observes, the actual language of covenant does not appear until chapter 15, but the details of that chapter clearly show the ratification of the covenant in the context of an

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9 Galatians 3:8.
10 Genesis 12:1-3.
already existing relationship.\textsuperscript{11} In the language of sending in this passage, God does not indicate anything about where Abram is to go, only that he is to be obedient to God’s call to do so. In the initial commission there is no indication of a design or goal in the sending of Abram. God sends, Abram goes. But the sending is not without promise. First, God makes a threefold promise of progeny, prosperity, and protection: Abram will have descendants who will multiply to become a great nation, and Abram himself will have a legacy of renown. God promises to bless those (plural) who bless Abram and to curse the one (singular) who curses him.\textsuperscript{12} This, it may be argued, shows an expectation that those who bless Abram will be greater in number than those who oppose him.

Of special interest for this study is the formula of blessing which occurs here and in several other texts. Abram will be blessed in order to be a blessing. We cannot help but to recall the discussion in the defining of the Mission of God that the recipients of the divine Mission would be sent forth as its agents. The language here is a biblical reminder of this recipient/agent dynamic. Finally, God tells Abram that all the peoples, (in some translations \textit{nations}) would be blessed through him.\textsuperscript{13} Although this is surely a messianic reference, for now the focus is on the formulaic blessing of the nations, a pattern that will be repeated as the covenant is re-affirmed to Abraham and to several of his descendants. The covenant promises made to Abram in this passage involve not only the privilege of covenantal blessing and the responsibility of being set apart from all other peoples; Abram is only the proximate recipient of blessing. From God’s perspective, all the nations of the earth are in view as the eventual recipients of the blessing. Abram is sent not only from Haran, but in the sending he


\textsuperscript{12} Keith Nigel Grünberg, \textit{Abraham, Blessing and the Nations: A Philological and Exegetical Study of Genesis 12:3} (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 171-175.
becomes the missional agent of God’s blessing for the sake of all the peoples of the world, joining in God’s program of redemption. Abram is the progenitor of the covenant people of God in a genetic as well as a spiritual sense, and in Abram the covenant people of God are included in his commission to be a blessing to all the nations of the earth.

At the oaks of Mamre the theophanic Angel of Yahweh appears to Abraham in the company of two others, who are simply described as “men.” The text says:

“Then the LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.”

The passage begins with perhaps the only glimpse we have of the internal deliberations of the divine council. Here again in v. 18, the blessing formula of “all nations being blessed through him” Just as importantly the rationale for Abraham to keep the way of the LORD is set forth in this passage: Abraham is to keep God’s ways so that Yahweh will bring about what he has promised him, i.e. the blessing of the nations. The covenant people of God are to be what Michael Goheen calls a “so that” people, meaning a people cognizant of the missional calling they have received in the blessing of God, intended to make them agents of blessing to all.

God reiterates the same formula of blessing in his theophanic encounter with Abraham’s grandson Jacob at Bethel, when the latter was fleeing in exile from Esau.

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“Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to
the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be
blessed through you and your offspring.”

This is the third recurrence of the blessing formula of God in which the blessing of all
countries is communicated to the patriarchs as the ultimate design of their own blessing from
the hand of God. Texts containing the “all nations” formula of blessing in Genesis chapters
12, 18, and 24 provide manifest and multiple attestation to the missional focus of the
covenant between God and his people. The covenant people of God are also the
commissioned people of God, who are to become the agents of blessing to all the peoples of
the earth in God’s redemptive and restorative design. Christopher Wright calls these texts
“the launch of God’s redemptive mission.”

A missional hermeneutical approach does justice to the formulaic promises of
blessing to all nations in the Genesis text surveyed, taking into account their historical
context as well as their eschatological import. The seminal contribution of Meredith Kline
regarding the literary structure of Old Testament covenants prompted a review of two of his
works to see if there was any acknowledgment of their missional aspects. Alas, for all his
brilliant exposition of the eschatological intrusion of God’s redemption through the
covenants, he does not seem to have recorded anything resembling acknowledgement of the
covenant blessing of all nations in missional terms.

The mission is implicit also in the messianic promise of the Davidic covenant that his
descendant will reign forever. This promise, though lacking explicit reference to the
nations, certainly expresses the same cosmic dimensions of the redemptive mission of God.

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16 Genesis 28:14.
17 Wright, The Mission of God, 212.
More explicit, though still nascent, is the ecclesiastical promise inherent in the prophecy of Jeremiah that he would put his law in the minds and write it on the hearts of his people Israel, that he would be their God and they would be his people, and that the descendants of Israel would never cease to be a nation before him.\textsuperscript{20} This is not only an ethnic promise, but also has ecclesiastical and cosmic implications.

**New Testament claims on the Old Testament Covenant**

The New Testament community’s consciousness of continuity with the Old Testament is a theme which comes to light often. As Louis Berkhof observes, the covenant of Abraham is “still in force and is essentially identical with the ‘new covenant’ of the present dispensation.”\textsuperscript{21} It is this continuity and identity of covenant to which our attention now turns.

In the opening passages to Luke’s gospel, Simeon, a righteous and devout man, awaits the comfort (\textit{paraklesis}) of Israel and Zion, recalling Isaiah 40-66.\textsuperscript{22} Simeon connects the salvation of Israel with the messianic presence of God made manifest to all nations:

“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.”\textsuperscript{23}

\begin{enumerate}
\item 2 Samuel 7:5-16.
\item Jeremiah 31:33–40.
\item Andrew Perriman, “A Light of Revelation to the Gentiles,” [online article]; (Open Source Theology); http://www.opensourcetheology.net/node/1097; Internet; accessed 22 January 2008.
\end{enumerate}
Simeon recalls the prophecies of Isaiah 42:6 and 49:6, seeing the child Jesus as a gift to the covenant people of Israel for her redemption, and recalling the missional covenant that equally promises messianic redemption through Israel for the Gentile nations. This continues the very same theme of Israel as blessed by God to be a blessing to the nations in the Genesis blessing formulas.

One of the most direct witnesses to the consciousness of the New Testament community of its continuity with the Old Testament covenant is found in Paul:

“Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: ‘All nations will be blessed through you.’ So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.”

The apostle draws a direct connection with the promise of redemption for the nations in the Abrahamic covenant to New Testament Gentile believers, evoking the very passages that have been listed from the blessing formulas of Genesis in making his case. Let us not forget the context of the epistle, which is Paul’s polemical response against those who are trying to make redemption primarily ethnocentric, requiring the adoption of Judaism’s cultural and cultic practices for membership in the covenant community. It is against any such idea that Paul here asserts that Gentile believers are heirs by faith of Abraham, the man of faith. The connection is clear and incontrovertible—there is absolute redemptive continuity between the OT and NT covenantal communities, and this continuity is inherent in the covenantal promises given to Abraham that his descendants would bless all nations. The nations themselves join Abraham’s ethnic progeny in the promise as recipients of blessing.


commissioned to bless the nations. The recursive promise of the missional covenant extends to all of God’s people.

A word study of “sending” in John’s Gospel

If the New Testament community sees itself in continuity of the Old Testament covenant people, the contours of blessing and commission from the covenantal passages already discussed would be sufficient argument alone to suggest a missional identity and nature of the community, i.e. the church. But the New Testament community had more than just the prior revelation of God to look back on—revelation continued and God himself in the person of Christ actively works to build the new community of faith. A continuing revelation of the constitutive nature of the community, if the commissioning formulas from the old covenant still hold, should include some indication of continuing commission.

This would mean that understanding of the Gospel texts will necessarily include the concept of sending. As already discussed, the Mission of God is more than mere sending. Nevertheless *sending* and *sent-ness* form an important theme in the Gospels, and for the purpose of this project a word study on terms relating to sending is useful in illustrating some of the missional contours of the Gospels. The Gospel of John was chosen for just such a word study which it is hoped will be informative not only for the understanding of Christ’s mission in the Gospel, but for a greater understanding of the missional calling of all Christians as not only those who are called by God, but sent by him as his agents.

The evangelist John shows that Jesus’ cognizance of having been sent by the Father informs the ministry of John the Baptist and of Jesus himself. More significantly, the *sent-ness* of Jesus informs today’s Christians by providing instructions for how we ought to
comport ourselves as the community of those sent by Christ: “…As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”

A brief statistical analysis of send and sent in John’s Gospel

The English verbs send and sent occur in some form in some 57 verses from John’s Gospel. The following table lists the derivations of these verbs in their respective forms and how many times each occurs:

- Sent/Send (αποστελλω)–27 occurrences
- Who sent (πεµπω– participial noun form)–27 occurrences
- Send/Will send/did send (πεµπω simple verb form)–5 occurrences
- One who is sent (αποστολος noun form)–1 occurrence

John’s usage of send

John uses principally two Greek verbs that are translated as some form of to send in English: πεµπω and αποστελλω. By comparison with other biblical texts, in the synoptic Gospels and the LXX, the verb πεµπω is most often used in the sense of simple sending, most often with an inanimate object such as a message, a gift, or some sort of goods, but less often a messenger or servant with an errand to run. A different verb, αποστελλω, also denotes the authoritative sending and commissioning of a person as a delegate or representative of the sender, and has the additional meaning of the sending of a military force

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to fulfill a specified mission or task, more specifically the sending of a naval fleet to conduct military operations.\textsuperscript{28}

John shows some tendency to use the two terms as synonyms, but as a matter of style he shows a preference for using \textit{ἀποστέλλω} when he is using a simple active verb tense (send, will send, did send), and is more inclined to use \textit{πεµπω} in its participial noun form, as the statistical study shows. John uses \textit{πεµπω} much less often as a simple verb. Interestingly, in verse 20:21, which is cited very often by proponents of a missional hermeneutic and missional methodologies, the evangelist uses both verbs, \textit{ἀποστέλλω} and \textit{πεµπω}, in the same verse. His usage of both verbs in this verse arguably shows he is comfortable with using them as interchangeable synonyms, and seems to use them both for the simple stylistic reason of avoiding redundancy.

**Thematic Study**

The verse discussed above where John uses both \textit{πεµπω} and \textit{ἀποστέλλω} is an appropriate place to begin a thematic study, inasmuch as this verse is important to the theme of mission. The entire verse reads:

“Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."

Just three chapters earlier John recorded Jesus expressing the same general theme, though that occurrence took place in the context of his high priestly prayer of chapter 17, uttered to the Father instead of to the disciples:

“As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.”\textsuperscript{29}


\textsuperscript{29} John 17:18.
The thought underlying both these verses, expressed first in Gethsemane to the Father in a prayer for future believers who would become believers through the message of the disciples, and later in a post-resurrection appearance to a subset of the eleven, is clear: Jesus not only calls his people, but sends them. The Vulgate renders both πεµπω and αποστελλω as the Latin verb mitto, the etymological root of the English word mission, and by extension, of missional as well. Mission, or sent-ness, comprises a necessary and present reality in the essential nature of the community of the faith and proceeds from these two logia of Jesus, as well as other commissioning statements in the Synoptics and Acts. The words of Jesus here underscore that the missional sent-ness of his people proceeds through him, but ultimately from the Father.

The sending of Christian disciples is a Trinitarian sending, and the high priestly prayer reminds us whose mission or sending it is: it is the Mission of God, or Missio Dei. This little Latin phrase appeared first (at least in the sense of its twentieth century usage) in the writings of German missiologist Karl Hartenstein as early as 1934. Prior to this the phrase did appear in writings of the church, but it found its way into the general missiological lexicon only after the 1952 Willingen Conference of the International Missionary Council.

The words of sending in the high priestly prayer that refer to future believers, and those in the post-resurrection sending of the disciples after Jesus breaths on them and bids them receive the third Person of the Trinity, are significant for our ecclesiological understanding. In fact, they form one more important argument for the idea of mission, of sent-ness, as a mark of the church.

31 Art McPhee, “The Missio Dei and the Transformation of the Church; Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology 2 no. 2 (Fall 2001), 6-12.
Trinitarian Sending

The passages mentioned from John thus far are juxtaposed with the admonition to unity among the believers, also from the high priestly prayer:

“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”

Here in the words of Jesus, John records for us something of the mystery of the oneness of the Father and the Son in their perichoretic interpenetration. The passage also illuminates for us the invitation to join in the fellowship of the triune community in the mystery that is union with Christ. The study will examine this more closely in the section on theology proper in relation to ecclesiology.

John records also the same Trinitarian unity of the Father and the Son in the verses where he records Jesus speaking about sending his Spirit to believers:

“But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”

“When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me.”

“But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.”

Jesus says the Father will send the Spirit in his name (14:26), that he himself will send the Spirit from the Father (15:26) and in the same verse that the Spirit proceeds from the

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32 John 17:20-23.
Father; and underscores that he, the Son, will send the Spirit (16:7). Jesus makes clear that he has in mind not only the first generation of disciples, but later believers as well, even ourselves: (17:20) “I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word…”

The passages cited show the participation of all three persons of the godhead in the missional sending of the church. Interestingly, the sending is simply asserted. In these commissioning passages there is no explicit elucidation of the rationale or telos of the sending. Though made explicit in other passages these Johannine pericopes do not include any such utterances regarding ends or goals of sending.

**Obedience to the Sender**

Even in the absence of explicit expression of the motive and goal of the sending of believers in these selections from John’s Gospel, they can be inferred clearly. If the church is sent by the Son even as the Son was sent by the Father, then the Son’s obedience to the Father who sent him forms the pattern for the church’s obedience to him who sends her. The Father sent Jesus on a mission proclaiming the inbreaking reign of God, as messenger and redemptive agent. Jesus sends the church on a similar mission of proclaiming the inbreaking reign of God and its incarnational manifestation through their very lives, empowered by the Spirit for the sake of the world.

How does this work out in practice? Firstly, the church’s message is not its own, but the message of the Son, after the example of Jesus in v. 7:16b “My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me.” Again, in v. 12:49 “For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the

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35 John 16:7.
Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment as to what to say and what to speak.”

Though the message of the church is not its own, if the Son has sent the church, then her message has the authority of the Son, and by extension, of the Father: v13:16 “Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him.” Moreover the church, when it communicates the message of the Son to the world, speaks with His authority, and the sent church incarnates the very presence of him who sent her: v13:20 “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me.”

**Commissioning formulas in Matthew and Luke-Acts**

The sampling of biblical texts selected has not include many of the more generally known, “classical” commissioning texts such as the Great Commission in the end of Matthew’s Gospel account, or the parallel commissioning texts in Luke-Acts. I will list them here in order to draw only a few ancillary observations from them.

The concluding passage of Matthew’s Gospel ends with a final exhortation from Jesus, which Walter Kaiser sees as echoing the blessing formulas of the Abrahamic covenant, underscoring the unity of the people of God in mission:

> “Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

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The evangelist records the words of Jesus which add the imperative command to “disciple all the nations” in the original (hear the echo of the Abrahamic covenant in this language specifically), with specific instructions on what form this discipleship is to take: baptizing them, i.e. initiating them as members of the covenantal community, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. The latter command will of course include compliance with the moral content of the teaching of Jesus, but also here is an echo of the commission itself. As with other examples cited, the command is recursive, commanding the disciples to go and make disciples, who will be commanded to go and make disciples, and so forth.

The parallel commissioning passages in Luke-Acts read as follows:

“He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. 49I 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." 38

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." 39

Luke’s record adds another dimension which is not present in the prior commissioning texts. There is the commissioning to be witnesses, but in the Lucan writings Jesus adds a promise of supernatural equipping to fulfill the commission. The Johannine account includes Jesus saying that after going to the Father he will send the Paraclete, but Luke places the pneumatological promise specifically in the context of commissioning, and adds to John’s promise of the Spirit’s revelatory role the specific concept of supernatural empowerment. Luke echoes the blessing/commission formula, then adds this additional

ingredient, but key for the current discussion is that the promise of power is placed within the context of a missional sending. Note also that Luke’s selection of specific various events and speeches is not a bald recording of history. Consummate historian though he is, Luke specifically advances a theological purpose. Here he is setting forth not only the fact of the commissioning of the believers and the promise of supernatural empowerment. Bosch notes that the presence of Jesus is the prior reality: because Jesus is present with the disciples, they go out in mission. The commission-promise is teleological, and sets up the context for all that follows in the account of Acts. As Joel Green notes, the significance of Spirit-anointing in and presentation of Jesus as the Son of God is paramount in the developing narrative.

The telos that underlies the commissioning makes it appropriate here to devote a few words regarding the larger theological nature and extent of the commission that is in view. Often in the view of evangelicals the commissioning texts connote only the soteriological dimension of Christian witness, but the promise/commission formula posits a mission which is much more fully orbed. The Mission of God to be undertaken by the disciples is not just mere kerygmatic proclamation, but the active incarnational witness of the intruding eschatological kingdom. The promised power of the spirit includes charismatic gifts which are given not only to empower the church to carry out its ministry, but an actual foretaste or pledge of intruding eschatological reign of God.

Missional identity

The words of Jesus recorded by John make clear that the disciples were sent by the Son to the world, and the commissioning passages briefly reviewed here show the consciousness of the early church of being sent as agents of the Mission of God. The accounts compel the notion that commissioning, missional sending, forms an inexorable component of the faith community’s identity. This intentionality and vision of the people of God in motion, acting upon and putting into effect the redemptive plans of God, stands in stark opposition to the concept of the church as a static institution, the privileged recipient of the power and presence of the Spirit of God, an end in and of herself. She is rather God’s instrument and agent, a means to God’s end, namely, the fulfillment of God’s project of redemption and restoration, incarnating the inbreaking eschatological reign of God wherever she, the church, is.

Summary

To close the chapter let us return to the question behind the study, namely whether mission should be considered a mark of the church. The basic argument of this biblical section is as follows:

Premise 1: The Old Testament covenantal formulas of blessing constitute God’s sovereign election of a covenantal people who are blessed by God and commissioned to bless the nations; Premise 2: The New Testament community sees organic continuity between itself and the covenantal community of the Old Testament; Premise 3: The New Testament community of faith sees its missional sending as an inherent part of its identity and nature. Conclusion: The New Testament community sees itself as blessed to be a blessing to the nations, i.e. the missional covenant applies to the new covenant community no less than the
old covenant community. The covenantal formula of blessing and commission is in fact a 
constitutive element of the community which calls itself the people of God.

The concept of “marks of the church” would come along later in the historical 
development of the church, but the concept of being sent on mission visibly informs one of 
the assumptions behind the early activity of the church. With the support of a biblical case 
for mission as integral to the identity of the church in place, now we will look at the 
development of the concept of the church with specific regard to theology and ecclesiology.
CHAPTER 4
THEOLOGY-SHAPED MISSION

A Missionary God

Ecclesiology and mission always proceed from theology proper. God is. That fact is logically prior to every other possible fact of theology. The earlier chapter that attempted to set out a working definition of mission contained this statement: “Mission makes a statement about the very nature and heart of God—God is a missionary God.” This statement deserves more than just assertion if it is to stand. More importantly for the current discussion, attention is due to how the theological dynamic of mission must be addressed in the church’s relation to mission.

The Divine Dance

The Westminster Confession of Faith makes a succinct statement of the triune nature of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit:

“In the unity of the Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost: the Father is of none, neither begotten, nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.”

The divine community, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is complete and exists in exceeding love, fellowship and joy. The divine persons eternally love one another, rejoice in

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one another, serve one another, affirm one another in perfect, unbroken fellowship whose excellence so far exceeds the categories of human relationship that it is beyond our ken even to imagine. “God is love,” wrote John in his first epistle. Jonathan Edwards writes, “Tis common when speaking of the Divine happiness to say that God is infinitely happy in the enjoyment of himself, in perfectly beholding and infinitely loving and rejoicing in his own essence and perfections.” Timothy Keller acknowledges Edwards’ influence, and observes that the simple statement from John’s letter expresses an eternal truth about the nature and being of God. Only if God exists in community would the statement be true of him in an eternal sense. Love presupposes a subject and object, and thus “God is love,” could not be true of a unitary God who had not created anything to love. Says Keller, “the very heart of reality, the meaning of life, the very essence of community is because of what has been happening in the interior life of God for all eternity. This is the … divine dance.” The creation bears magnificent witness to not only to God’s power, but his infinite artistic creativity. Why did God create? Poet James Weldon Johnson offers these words in explanation:

AND God stepped out on space,
And He looked around and said,
“I’m lonely --
I'll make me a world.”

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2 1 John 4:8.


Lovely poetry, perhaps, but as Paul Thigpen observes, these words contain a very common theological error. God has never been lonely. On the contrary, out of the overflowing joy in the Trinity, as Keller observes, creation was “rejoiced into existence.” Creation is an act of grace, by which God sovereignly chose to create a world inhabited by a race of those who would bear his image, just for the joy of giving them existence and to share the joy of the divine community and love.

**The mission of ontological mediatorship**

In chapter one, the working definition of mission was set forth primarily in categories of redemption and restoration, put into motion to reconcile a fallen race and a fallen world to God—the reconciliation of parties estranged by sin. One aspect of the divine mission of the Son goes back a bit further, logically and temporally. The Son and the Spirit, co-eternal with the Father, both have creatational and revelatory roles. The Father sends Son and Spirit. The existence of the Son prior to the incarnation of Christ, then, is not just a speculative idea, but has significance for the creation of the world and its continued existence, as will be shown. This creation and sustaining aspect of the mission of God is not only redemptive, but also has an ontological aspect.

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7 Keller, “Father Son and Holy Spirit.”


9 Here I use the terminology of *ontological mediatorship* guardedly, knowing that the term has been used by some either to advance the idea of creation being inherently fallen and at odds with God, or else as a thinly disguised universalist polemic. That is not my purpose here—when I refer to *mediatorship*, I mean the instrumentality of the Son and the Spirit in the creating and sustaining of the created realm. The “media” in *mediator* here is meant as *instrument* or *means*. The Son and the Spirit manifest the presence and power of the Father to and in the creation. The quality of mediation here is not one of reconciliation of estranged parties but of agency. The redemptive mediation of Christ, his sinless life and Atoning death by which he reconciles us to God is qualitatively different and refers to a another vital aspect of the mission of the Son. We are estranged from God by our sin, and Jesus reconciles us to God as the one mediator between God and men. When I speak
The first chapter of Genesis identifies the role of the Spirit in creation, just as the first chapter of John asserts the role of the eternal Logos, the second person of the Trinity, as God’s agent of creation. In the act of creation, the Son and Spirit share the role of ontological mediation. The Father remains transcendent, and is mediated to the creation in and through the work of the Son and the Spirit. Creation then is one part of the ontological mediation of the Son and the Spirit, which has at least one other dimension as well. Luke records the words of Paul to the Athenian philosophers at Mars Hill: “For in him we live, and move, and have our being.”10 Later from Paul’s own pen we have these words:

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”11

These Pauline passages make reference to the mediatorial role of the Son not only in creating, but also in sustaining the creation. This seems to indicate that we creatures lack the inherent property of being or existence. Our existence is contingent and extrinsic, and depends moment by moment on the sustaining power of the Son. The eternal Son has a role that transcends soteriology—this is a cosmic Christology.12 Moreover, the writer of Hebrews gives a glimpse of one other aspect of the Son’s sustaining role:

“The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.”13

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of the Son and Spirit as ontological agents of God in creation, sustaining and revelation I in no way intend to diminish the need or value of the Atonement. My thought here does not follow Torrance or Barth when they talk about ontological mediation!

11 Colossians 1:15-17.
13 Hebrews 1:3.
Here again the creational role of the Son is underscored, and the nature of the sustaining mediation of the Son is clearly asserted as being his powerful word. This seems to connote that the sustaining of all things is the Son’s conscious act. The conscious sustaining of all things by the Son in fact underlies what are commonly called the relative divine attributes of omnipresence, omnipotence, and omniscience. God’s conscious awareness of everything and everyone in creation is necessary to its very being. And without too many inferential leaps, it means that if the Son stopped consciously thinking about anything or anyone in creation, even for a moment, that something or someone would cease to exist.

Apart from the creative-sustaining agency of the Son, another aspect of his mediatorial role is revelatory: The Son is the mediator who perfectly manifests the Father to the created realm. C.K. Barrett affirms the revelatory (and ontological) mediatorial role of the Son, especially as revealed in John, whose Christology he sees as “much more systematic and thought through than that of the Synoptics.” For John, says Barrett, “Jesus is the Gospel, and the Gospel is Jesus.” He reveals God’s self-communication to the world as the ontological mediator between God and humanity.14 Teresa Okure agrees, asserting, “Jesus makes visible the invisible God.”15 And the revelatory mediation of Jesus is also affirmed by Calvin, who wrote, “Had man remained free from all taint, he was of too humble a condition to penetrate to God without a Mediator.”16

Likewise, no one has seen the Father at any time, yet Adam and Eve speak with God face to face in the Garden. Abraham encounters YHWH in one of the “men” who visits him

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at the oaks of Mamre, and it is in this context that one of the covenantal blessing formulas occurs. Here, the process of redemption is already in play, but even had there never been a fall, there still would have been a mediatorial role for Christ in manifesting ontologically God to the creation and revealing God in a way apprehensible to creatures. As Basil the Great writes, “The hypostasis of the Son becomes the form and face and knowledge of the Father, and the hypostasis of the Father is known in the Son.” Even in a world without the Fall, the revelation of God to us through the Son would be a necessary act of grace.

The Mission of the Son, therefore includes these aspects that precede the Fall and therefore do not specifically include any redemptive aspect: (1) the missional sending of the Son [and the Spirit] ontologically mediating the divinity in the act of creation itself; (2) The missional sending of the Son as agent of God’s power of being to the creation, sustaining it; and (3) the missional sending of the Son to mediate ontologically the infinite God to the finite creation [can we say the Son is a missionary to finitude?], or ongoing presence and revelation.

The primary point of this portion of the discussion is support for the affirmation that God is a Missional God, underscoring the concept that missional sending proceeds from the very heart and nature of the Triune God in relation to the created realm.

**Perichoresis and Mission**

Thus far the discussion of this chapter has dealt with theology proper, the nature of the Triune God, with specific attention to the idea that Mission is inherent in the being of God. Earlier the word “perichoresis” came up, as we looked at “the divine dance.” This

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doctrinal term, etymologically from the Greek *perichorein*, means to contain or penetrate, and refers to the unity of the persons of the Trinity being so complete that they interpenetrate one another. Another Greek word which is etymologically related is *perichoreuein*, meaning “to dance around,” and is the probable source of the image of the Trinitarian community in a divine dance.¹⁸

This doctrine is also known as the co-inherence of the divine persons.¹⁹ John of Damascus defines the doctrine in this way in his discussion of the Trinity:

“The subsistences dwell and are established firmly in one another. For they are inseparable and cannot part from one another, but keep to their separate courses within one another, without coalescing or mingling, but cleaving to each other. For the Son is in the Father and the Spirit: and the Spirit in the Father and the Son: and the Father in the Son and the Spirit, but there is no coalescence or commingling or confusion. And there is one and the same motion: for there is one impulse and one motion of the three subsistences, which is not to be observed in any created nature.”²⁰

The previously quoted section from the prayer of Jesus in John 17 is worth citing again here, as the words of Jesus are the source of the Damascene’s doctrine above:

“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”²¹

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²¹ John 17:20-23.
Like John of Damascus, Thomas F. Torrance holds a view of perichoresis which is intimately connected with the *homoousion*, the shared substance of the divine persons, and governed by the mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son and the Spirit.\(^{22}\)

The evangelist records the words of Jesus and provides a glimpse of the perichoretic reality in the union of the Father and the Son. But John’s perichoresis goes further than just theology proper in this passage. Of direct significance for the current discussion is what David Crump calls the perichoretic soteriology which comes forth in the prayer of Jesus.\(^{23}\) Crump’s concentration on the soteriological significance of the passage misses the main object of Christ’s prayer: Jesus is praying specifically for unity among believers. Crump is correct in identifying the soteriological implications, but here we can only conclude that Jesus is setting forth a doctrinal key to the nature of the church. The unity of the church, if we read the prayer in John 17 correctly, proceeds from the church’s union with Christ. Christ is in the church, and the Father is in Christ. Jesus thus invites the church collectively into perichoretic community.

Immediately preceding the quoted pericope, the prayer of Jesus includes a commissioning formula which provides the context for this important expression of soteriological and ecclesiological significance, the “sending” logion just two verses prior:

“As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.”\(^{24}\)

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\(^{24}\) John 17:18.
Perichoretic-missional ecclesiology

The language of “sending into the world,” and the identification of the mission of believers with that of Jesus himself in the presence of the language of Jesus in the Father and Jesus in the believers in divine-human union sets forth three vital dimensions of ecclesiological importance: *communio* (union with Christ), *communitas* (union with each other), and *commissio* (missional sending.)  

25 This ecclesiology of union with Christ and with one another through Christ in relationship and sent-ness forms the kernel of what I would like to call a *perichoretic-missional ecclesiology.*

The mission of redemptive mediatorship

In the incarnation, the primary role of Jesus is as mediator in a specific redemptive sense. The discussion here will not attempt to explicate in detail the doctrine of soteriology, but instead will set forth the main mediatorial roles of Jesus, then examine their relationship and extension to the calling of the church.

The first formulation of the mediatorial roles of Christ is confessional. The Westminster divines record the ordination of Jesus as the sole mediator between God and man, the Prophet, Priest and King, the Head and Savior of his church, the Heir of all things, and Judge of the world, among other things.  

26 The Westminster Larger Catechism explains the roles in a bit more detail. In the office of prophet, the role of Christ is to reveal to the church the whole will of God concerning salvation and the building up of the church. His priestly office is executed primarily and supremely in his atoning death on the cross, as Jesus offered himself as a perfect sacrifice to reconcile his people to himself. Finally, the

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Catechism explains the kingly role of Christ as that of ruling the church, calling a people to himself, legislating laws and penalties for their discipline, giving saving grace to the elect, rewarding obedience and correcting their sin, ordering all things for his own glory and for the good of the elect. As king Christ also takes vengeance on those who neither know God nor obey the gospel.  

The confessional formulation of Westminster is accurate theologically but is organized in a way that is often difficult to use for teaching. Alan Spence provides a threelfold description of redemptive roles that is helpful in this regard. Spence lists three soteriological themes: (1) Jesus Christ as Victor, (2) Jesus Christ as Mediator, and (3) Jesus Christ as Exemplar. Let us consider these roles, but in an order to which we are more accustomed.

First, Jesus as Mediator puts into effect the atonement. This is the primary role we evangelicals most often think of when we consider the redemptive work of Christ. John Murray lists the specific categories of the atoning work of Christ as sacrifice, propitiation, reconciliation and redemption. The perfect obedience of Jesus to the will of the Father, possible only for the theanthropos, the God-man, gave him the opportunity of presenting himself as the perfect sacrifice for sin. This sacrifice is salvation by works, the perfect works of Jesus on our behalf. The atonement is put into effect when our sin is imputed to Jesus, who, taking our sin onto himself, propitiates for it. The wrath of God directed toward our sin

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is poured out on him, and he bears the full force of our chastisement. Finally, the righteousness of Jesus is imputed to us, his people. The result is our reconciliation with God, and our redemption from the penalty of sin and bondage to it.

The second category we will consider is Christ as Victor. On the Cross Jesus Christ vanquished the powers of evil and darkness. Bruce Demarest recalls the claims of Gustaf Aulen’s *Christus Victor*, that the often crude metaphors of the early fathers conveyed important truths regarding the victory of Christ over sin, Death and the devil. Jesus struggled with and vanquished malignant spiritual powers, recalling the antithesis prophesied in the *protoeuangelion* of Genesis 3:15. The victory of Jesus has great import for the missional people of God. While we are not called to a naïve triumphalism, we should realize that every form of bondage has been broken by Jesus on the cross, and those who live in union with him can expect to walk in victory. This doesn’t mean there will not be resistance—in more primitive cultures demonic encounters are all too common, and as the end of Christendom eventuates in greater religious pluralism and confusion, such encounters can be expected to increase during the missional engagement with the emerging spiritualities of Western culture. Western Christians are unaccustomed to letting themselves be wielded by Christ as instruments of his victory—here we have much to learn from our brothers and sisters in the two-thirds world, whose Christian leaders deal with spiritual conflicts on an almost routine basis.

A third category of the redemptive work of Jesus is his role as Exemplar, and it is this role that is also important for the church on mission: Christ as Example. Ordinary Christians cannot atone for the sins of the world, but we are called to take up our cross daily. This does

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not mean that we are to carry the cross, but to die on it. In practical terms, this is an exhortation to follow the example of Christ, who calls us to a new dimension of faithfulness.

For the church on mission, faithfulness means Christ-likeness. Yes, we are to guard our theology carefully. Yes, we are to remember that we are part of a historic community that has a rich legacy and an equally rich testimony of truth. And yet it also means finding ways to incarnate the witness of Christ in our lives as Christ followers in the cultural context, the time and place where he has placed us as his witnesses. Todd Heistand sketches out four concrete shapes this might take in the missional context many of us find ourselves in here in the prosperous West. (1) Reject individualism, (2) Deconstruct comfort, (3) Confront consumerism, (4) Pursue Justice. On consideration, these steps belong under the rubric of Christ as victor, since they confront some of the idols of contemporary Western culture.

Summary

This chapter has outlined the contours of a Trinitarian theology proper showing the importance of relational community in the Godhead that precedes creation. Out of the love and joy of the Trinitarian community God brings forth creation.

A missional sending of the Son and Spirit establishes them as the agents of creation. The eternal Son’s mediatorial role precedes soteriology, as he, together with the Spirit, mediates the transcendent Father to all of creation, heavens and earth, in categories of creation, sustenance, and ongoing presence. An additional mediatorial role is ascribed to the eternal Son of revelation, which has both pre-soteriological and redemptive dimensions. The

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main point of this discussion was to establish that the Missional nature of the Son is larger than simple redemptive categories.

A final brief look at the redemptive mediation of Christ reminded us of the accomplishments of the atonement in his redemption/reconciliation, victory over the malevolent forces of sin, darkness, and the devil, and his example which we are to follow to the extent that we as disciples are called to do.

The nature of perichoretic community into which we are invited when Christ redeems us, the unified community that we enjoy in him, and the missional calling to follow him in his redemptive mission are all integral components that inform theologically what here has been described as perichoretic-missional ecclesiology. Three components of such a church in this mold were listed as: *communio* (union with Christ), *communitas* (union with each other), and *commissio* (missional sending to the world). These three dimensions are all relational and form the basic shape of what a missional ecclesiology and the marks should characterize such a church.

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CHAPTER 5
MISSION IN HISTORY

This chapter will examine briefly characteristics in the development of the mission of the church through a survey of selected representative episodes in the development of mission. The selected episodes illustrate aspects of some of the positive and negative dynamics that have shaped or hindered the spread of the church.

The mission of the church in the book of Acts

In the book of Acts, Luke records the growth and spread of the little flock that began explosively on the day of Pentecost. The believers in Jesus, led by the apostles, shared the good news of Jesus wherever they went. After three years of theological training and mentorship with Jesus, the apostles must have been at once thrilled and overwhelmed at the launch of the Christian community. In one day they went from being fugitives hiding in an upper room to the leaders of a vast multitude that clamored to know more about the crucified and risen Savior. They were touched by the power of the preached word.

Just prior to his ascension, Luke recorded the prophetic promise Jesus had given his disciples:

“‘This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. 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, first in Jerusalem and Judea, then in Samaria and to the uttermost parts of the earth.”¹

Jesus had delivered on his promise in a way none could have predicted. One can only imagine what the experience must have been like for Peter, James, John and the other nine apostles as the thrill of the multitudes thronging to join the church gave way in their minds and affections to what must have been an almost unbearable consciousness of the weight of responsibility involved in leading the fledgling church.

Pentecost had overthrown the linguistic pandemonium of Babel.² Almost immediately ethnic tension grew between the Hellenists and the Hebrews over distribution of food.³ Vestiges of Babel still linger in a fallen world’s church.

The mission of the church was very nearly aborted by the centripetal institutionalizing impulse, and proceeded only under the dual centrifugal incentives of persecution from the outside and conflict from the inside. The early Christians surely experienced conflict and persecution as threats to the life of the church. But these threats were possibly, in God’s providence, the very instruments that motivated its mission and saved it. As it was in the beginning, it is now and ever shall be: Hendrik Kraemer’s words describe this dynamic. The church, he says, “has always needed apparent failure and suffering in order to become fully alive to its real nature and mission.”⁴

Surveys of the early history of the church commonly describe the outward progress of the Gospel against outward persecution and internal heresy and conflict. Again hear the

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words of Hendrik Kraemer: “Strictly speaking, one ought to say that the church is always in a state of crisis, and that its greatest shortcoming is that it is only occasionally aware of it.”\(^5\) This was arguably the case with the Jerusalem church, which would have experienced the persecution and conflict as the crisis, but remained blissfully unaware that the real crisis that threatened its very existence was the relentless institutionalizing impulse. It was this impulse God had to overcome providentially.

At the same time that same institutionalizing impulse that threatened mission would absolutely vital to the development of the church’s theology and identity and the emergence of its catholicity and ecumenicity (both of which can be expressed in a single Russian word, sobornost’).\(^6\) This impulse toward institutionalization may in fact be analogous to the immune system of the body—absolutely necessary to its function but absolutely destructive when it over-functions. The life of the church emerged historically in and through the constant tension between its centripetal institutionalizing impulse and its centrifugal missionary passion.

This tension continues as an influence in the shaping of the church even to our day. Most of the contemporary problems plaguing the church can be traced to an issue of giving too much priority to one or the other of the two forces.

The Mission to the Roman Empire

Luke records in the book of Acts the missions of Paul to Galatia, Pamphylia, Iconium and the other provinces of Asia, as well as Cyprus, Macedonia, Achaia and the Peloponnesus. Acts ends with the arrival of Paul in Rome, but the apostle’s letter to the Romans, probably

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\(^5\) Ibid. 24-25.

written from Corinth,\(^7\) records the existence of a Christian community already there. The missions and letters of Paul record the burgeoning vitality of the Gentile mission, which was based of operations at Antioch on the Orontes in Syria.\(^8\)

The character of the Antiochene church deserves attention. The city was built by Seleucus I Nicator as the western capital of the Seleucid kingdom about 300 BC, named in honor of his father Antiochus.\(^9\) In the time of Paul, it was the third largest city in the Roman empire, behind only Alexandria and Rome itself.\(^10\) A cosmopolitan city with a rich diversity of ethnic presence owing to its position on several major trade routes,\(^11\) Antioch was an urban center of strategic importance in commercial, cultural and military terms. And as a territorial urban center, it becomes the archetype of the strategic territorial cities that became the hubs of Paul’s missionary activity.

The leaders of the church at Antioch reflect an astonishing diversity as well. Luke wrote that the persecution after the stoning of Stephen scattered all “except the apostles”\(^12\) through Judea and Samaria. Those who were scattered later traveled to Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews. But some men from Cyprus and Cyrene, Luke tells us, went to Antioch and began to tell Greeks also.\(^13\) With this account, Luke records the


\(^{8}\) Acts 11-13.


\(^{12}\) Acts 8:1.

\(^{13}\) Acts 11:19-20.
events that led to the Antioch church. He said nothing about the organization of the church, only that many converted.\(^\text{14}\)

When what could be called the “home office” at Jerusalem heard about this upstart Gentile church at Antioch, they dispatched Barnabas, a Jewish believer from Cyprus\(^\text{15}\) to meet the fledgling church. Barnabas had the heart of a missionary, and became a leader in the Antioch church, but brought Paul down from Tarsus and together they discipled the Antiochene believers.\(^\text{16}\) The leaders of the church that commissioned Paul and Barnabas according to a supernatural revelation included three Jews: Barnabas, Manaen, and Saul (Paul). Two of the leaders—Simon called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, may have been from Africa.\(^\text{17}\) *The ethnically diverse leaders of an ethnically diverse church commissioned Barnabas and Saul on the first organized mission, to an ethnically diverse world.*

To this point the church had grown organically, without a focused, intentional strategy for apostolic witness and mission. The extended period of missionary activity that would begin with this first Pauline missionary journey would establish the centers from which Christianity would spread to the remainder of the empire. Paul’s consciousness of this fact is evident in his confident proclamation that he had “fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ…from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum.”\(^\text{18}\)

Several features of the Pauline mission and the shape it gave to the subsequent mission in the Roman Empire are noteworthy. Firstly, the mission in the empire was primarily urban. By AD 300, the cities of Rome were predominantly Christian, while the

\(^{15}\) Acts 4:36.  
\(^{18}\) Romans 15:19.
countryside remained pagan (the word *pagan* itself is from the Greek word for someone from a rural area). 19

Although many histories of mission have suggested that Christianity spread primarily among the dispossessed and disenfranchised, sociologist Rodney Stark disagrees, suggesting that there is an emerging scholarly consensus that in fact Christianity grew most among the urban middle and upper classes. 20 This is harmonious with the idea of a mission centered on cities. Tim Keller observes that the city considered in the abstract is a cultural/mining development center, meaning that it draws together the dynamic human resources that shape culture. The city is the key place to reach the culture, the region, the world. 21 Though Paul never articulated a systematic urban strategy, reaching regional centers is precisely the pattern that emerges from Luke’s account of his mission.

A second aspect of the Roman mission is that Christianity spread primarily through laypeople. Paul was an apostle, but he made his living as a tentmaker, as did Priscilla and Aquila. As Latourette observes, “The chief agents in the expansion of Christianity appear not to have been those who made it a profession of a major part of their occupation, but men and women who earned their livelihood in some purely secular manner and spoke of their faith to those whom they met in this natural fashion.” 22

Another important aspect of the urban mission in the Roman Empire was the generosity, hospitality and mercy of Christians. Rodney Stark describes the pestilential squalor of most ancient cities and the plagues that periodically swept through the cities and

decimated the population. Christians tended the sick when unbelievers would throw their own relatives onto the street for fear of contagion, sometimes becoming sick themselves, but declaring their joy at the privilege of giving their lives for others, after Christ’s own pattern.23

We must not however pass on without looking at an important dynamic that emerged in the early Gentile mission. When Barnabas and Paul returned to Antioch after the first missionary journey, they joyfully reported the results of their mission.24 Conflict soon arose in Antioch, as self-styled leaders “from James,” (the home office in Jerusalem) began preaching throughout the region of Phoenicia up to Syria that being a Christian required compliance with Jewish cultural and cultic requirements, including circumcision.25 Adherents of the “southern Galatian theory” of the time and occasion of the letter to the Galatians (including the author) hold that the same teaching threatened the churches resulting from the mission of Paul and Barnabas in the regions around Iconium, Lystra, Derbe and down to Antioch in Pisidia and Perga. Accordingly, Paul wrote the letter to the Galatians at some time in close proximity to the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15, in AD 49-50,26 (incidentally making Galatians the first of Paul’s epistles and among the earliest of the written documents of the New Testament.)

The specific dynamic important for our study here is one of ecclesial culture. The leaders of “the circumcision” levied cultural requirements on top of the gospel, making it necessary for converts to cross a cultural gulf in order to become a Christian. This dynamic

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24 Acts 14:27.
is a manifestation of the earlier described tension between the centripetal impulse to institutionalize and the centrifugal urge of mission. For the Judaizers, circumcision and the other attendant ritual cleanness requirements were more than just a matter of custom—they were necessary for salvation. The urge to elevate cultural requirements to the level of law and levy regulations beyond those of the gospel–legalism–is a relentless temptation to those of us who are religious. The tendency toward legalism is nowhere so prevalent as it is in the realm of religious norms. This reality comes through in the Pauline corpus–Paul exhorts believers not to let others judge them because of food, drink, festivals, new moons or Sabbaths, food sacrificed to idols, and other such customs. Paul exhorts that those who have gospel freedom comport themselves with gentleness and understanding toward those who have religious scruples over and above the gospel—“weaker brothers.” But the weaker brother principle is an ever-present hazard to mission.

In review, the mission to the Roman world began with the missionary journeys of Paul and spread around the strategic centers where he began churches. The mission to the empire was primarily urban, undertaken by a diverse group of primarily lay believers, and involved incarnational ministries of mercy as well as kerygmatic proclamation. The churches thus established were key to the later development of the church in its expanding mission. Other developments, particularly theological controversies that required apologetic response, took place in the ecclesial environment the mission in the Roman empire provided. The presence of these conflicts helped to shape important components of ecclesiology and

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28 Colossians 2:16.
29 1 Corinthians 8.
30 Romans 14.
the emergence of early catholicity. We will discuss that development in the next chapter. A small number of developments in the history of mission require our attention first.

Ulfilas and the mission to the Goths

Ulfilas (ca. 311- ca. 381) is known to us primarily from an epitome of the works of the Arian church historian Philostorgius and a letter of Auxentias to the Byzantine court of Theodosius at Constantinople. Ulfilas was the descendant of Cappadocian Christians–his grandparents were captured by Gothic raiders in Cappadocia. Consecrated as a bishop by the Arian Eusebius of Nicomedia, he spent time as a missionary in Decia and later fled with some of his converts to Moesia. Though his confession preserved in the letter of Auxentius shows he remained an Arian throughout his life, nevertheless the missionary practice of Ulfilas is remarkable for his pioneering missionary methodologies that would become tools for the discipline of missiology only more than a thousand years later in the modern missionary movement.

The Goths among whom Ulfilas ministered were preliterate, and he devised an alphabet for them from Greek and Runic letters. Writings which use his alphabet are the earliest extant form of any Teutonic written language. Ulfilas translated all of the Scriptures into the common vernacular of the Goths except the books of the Kings, which

31 Patrick Healy, “Ulfilas,” [online article]; (Catholic Encyclopedia Online); http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15120c.htm; Internet; accessed 22 January 2008.
were primarily narratives of military exploits, and he thought it wise not to excite the military passions of the warlike Goths.\textsuperscript{35}

Ulfilas’s Gothic translation is the earliest record of the translation of the Bible into the local language of a people group,\textsuperscript{36} and as such is a significant event in the history and development of mission. Though the heretical theology of Ulfilas is an acknowledged fact, nevertheless his example of missional contextualization reflects a commitment to reaching those to whom he was called. He did not demand that the Goths cross cultural lines and become Romans in order to accept the Christ he preached. His was an early example of a missional ecclesiology in action.

**Patrick and Celtic Christianity**

Patricius, (Patrick’s Latin name) was born in Britain, but raised as a citizen of Rome. The dates of his life are commonly held as somewhere from AD 376- 458.\textsuperscript{37} Patrick was captured as a youth by Irish raiders and taken to Ireland as a slave, where he was forced to herd sheep and work as a domestic servant and farm hand. Though born in a Christian home, Patrick was not a pious young man. During his captivity, however, he began to pray to God and grew to be a passionate believer. According to his *Confession*, Patrick received a dream in which God told him, “behold, your ship awaits,” and Patrick managed to escape and find his way home to England.\textsuperscript{38}


\textsuperscript{38} Patrick, *Confession*, [online document]; (Academy for Ancient Texts); http://www.ancienttexts.org/library/celtic/ctexts/p01.html; Internet; accessed 22 January 2008.
Patrick departed to go to Rome, but stopped in Auxerre in Gaul, where he met and placed himself under the tutelage of Bishop Germanus. He studied under Germanus for decades, and was himself consecrated as a bishop either by Amathorex or Germanus himself.\[^{39}\] In his forties, Patrick returned to Ireland to take the gospel to his former captors. His mission was one of the first to go beyond the contiguous borders of Roman dominion.

Patrick’s missionary methodology was to engage the local king or tribal chieftain in hope of their conversion or at least their clearance. If he obtained permission, he would camp near a settlement with his apostolic (here the word is synonymous with missionary) team and meet with people, seeking those who seemed receptive.

George Hunter describes the development of a local faith community. Patrick and his team would pray for the sick and provide counseling, pray for good fishing, and engage in open-air speaking which probably included telling Bible stories, singing songs, or even drama. Through friends and family members, the little band of believers would grow as a ministering community of faith within the local tribe. If God blessed these efforts over time, a church would result, and the people and the apostolic band would build a chapel. The resulting church within the tribe would have been astonishingly indigenous.\[^{40}\]

Hunter’s description of the church movement that spread from Patrick’s mission is a community very different from the Roman church. Just as Ireland was outside of Rome’s imperial dominion, the Celtic Christian community was outside of the Roman church’s ability to shape and control, and the so the church that grew and flourished in the soil of Ireland took on its own shape, a movement more than an institution, with more participation.

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from laity and less from clergy. Patrick had founded a church which broke the Roman mold and was both catholic and barbarian.\(^{41}\)

Celtic Christianity would be criticized and wondered at, but the missionaries who spread from the beginning Patrick had made would evangelize the painted Picts in Caledonia (now Scotland) and set up monastic communities that preserved the Western canon of literature in their scriptoria after Rome was sacked.\(^{42}\)

The signal achievement of Patrick was no less important than that of Ulfilas. Part of the latter’s genius was in recognizing the reality that the Scriptures needed to be expressed in the language of the people to whom they were brought—linguistic indigenization. Patrick’s brilliance was no less significant—one of his contributions was the realization of the principle that Christianity does not exist in the abstract, but is always instantiated among real people in some real cultural context. This means that there is no such thing as \textit{biblical Christianity} in the abstract, but there can be a whole host of authentic, culturally indigenous, \textit{biblically faithful} expressions of Christianity. Patrick realized there was nothing particularly holy about the Roman way of doing church, its organization, architecture, modes of dress, even hairstyles. One could diverge widely from all of those cultural norms in favor of indigenous ones, and remain faithful to Christ and Scripture. The result in practice was an authentically Celtic church that was also authentically biblical. Many were Patrick’s detractors, who identified Christianity too closely with “the Roman way.” They would level the same critiques against Aidan, Columba and the others who inherited Patrick’s missional mantle, but criticisms notwithstanding, Celtic Christianity was one of the great achievements of the early mission of the church.

\(^{41}\) Ibid., 26-27.

The Celtic church was characterized more by the centrifugal missionary impulse than
the centripetal institutionalizing one, and did not develop centralized organizational
structures. Rome increasingly adopted a principle of enforcing cultural uniformity over
indigenization. Ultimately, after 300 years of Celtic Christianity had flourished in Celtic
cultural forms, the church was forced into the Roman mold. Benedictine rule was enforced
on Celtic monasteries, Celtic leaders pressured to conform. Centripetal institutionalizing
prevailed ultimately, but the fragrance of the flower that was Patrick’s missional genius
remains.

Kyril and Methodius and the Slavic Mission

The brothers Kyril and Methodius were born in Salonika (Thessalonica). Previously
they had worked among the Khazars near the Azov sea, but since Kyril and Methodius spoke
Macedonian, the local language used in Great Moravia, they soon received another
assignment. Prince Rastislav wanted to reduce the influence of the German (Eastern
Frankish) princes, whose priests were establishing churches in his area. Rastislav appealed to
the greater power of Byzantium for help, and the emperor dispatched Kyril and his brother
Methodius to Moravia.

The activity of the missionaries, writes B. N. Florya, “was significant not only for the
development of Slavic culture, but more widely for that of world culture, because it was this

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44 Kyril is ordinarily transliterated as Cyril, but here I have chosen to spell it according to its Slavic
pronounciation.


46 Kerry Kubilius, “Cyril, Methodius and Cyrillic,” [online article]; (Eastern European History);
mission that resulted in the creation of written language and literature for the Slavs.\(^{47}\) Kyril devised an alphabet of 40 letters which he called Glagolitic.\(^{48}\)

At first, as Florya notes, the missionaries “limited their translation into the Slavic language several of the most widely used prayers and confessional formulas, avoiding the possibility of ‘enlightenment’ on the same level as Greek and Latin.”\(^{49}\) Kyril and Methodius translated enough texts to perform liturgy, selecting sections from the Gospels, Acts, and liturgical prayers. The language they translated, which was northern Macedonian, became known as Old Church Slavonic, which is the language still used by the Russian Orthodox Church for its liturgy. For their contribution, Kyril and Methodius are known as the Apostles to the Slavs.

The written language they created survives, albeit in modified form, Glagolitic having been modified into the Cyrillic now used in Orthodox areas of Eastern Europe and Russia. It is ironic that the Eastern Church to which Kyril and Methodius made such a seminal missiological contribution, translating the liturgy into the local vernacular of the people they worked among, now venerates that dead language, which it uses in liturgy to this day. The author served as a missionary in Russia in 1992-1993, and had the opportunity to talk with literally hundreds of people who shared the experience of not being able to worship God in a language they understood. The Eastern Church has much rich theological, liturgical and artistic tradition the wider church can appreciate and learn from, but it has forgotten the missionary treasure it now holds in cold, skeletal hands.

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\(^{48}\) Kubilis, “Cyril, Methodius and Cyrillic.”

\(^{49}\) Florya, “Prinyatie Khristianstva v Velikoj Moravii, Chekhii, i Pol’she,” 126 (my translation).
Summary

This chapter has looked at a number of specific periods of missionary activity. While it is a questionable exercise to make a small number of incidents normative for the larger development of the church, it is possible to consider the results of different episodes and consider the factors that led to the results, positive or negative. Only through a long-term view of history is it possible to begin to consider the real impact of any given period of missionary activity on the progress of the Mission of God.

Conspicuously absent from the current study are two periods— the Protestant Reformation and the modern missionary movement.

Although the Protestant Reformation was without a doubt one of the greatest periods of spiritual revival and awakening in the history of the church, I have not included a segment from it in this study because the Reformers operated in a Constantinian cultural milieu. Everyone born in Europe was part of the church— the Reformation churches identified themselves not over against unbelief, but polemically, over against the church of Rome and to a lesser degree against other churches that had also broken with Rome, i.e. the churches of the continental radical reformation.

I have not included a survey of the modern missionary movement for two reasons. First, the earlier period of modern missions is tainted by its association with the spreading of European culture as much as that of Christianity. And while undoubtedly a tremendous amount of good was done, it is difficult for much of the modern missions movement to escape the association it has with colonialism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The periods of activity that were examined, however, describe for us several principles that are germane to the question at hand: should mission be a mark of the church?
The brief survey of the Roman mission sketched out the principle of the tension between the centripetal, institutionalizing impulse and the centrifugal, missionary impetus as a reality that is ever present. When one force overcomes the other absolutely, the results can be disastrous.

In this chapter we also looked at three periods of missionary activity that set forth example of contextualization and indigenization of (1) language in the case of Ulfilas, (2) culture in the case of Patrick, and (3) liturgy in the case of Kyril and Methodius. These values, governed by fidelity to biblical theological principles, are key components in developing a working missional ecclesiology.
CHAPTER 6
THE MARKS OF THE CHURCH

What is the church?

This study began with an exercise in exploring assumptions, and as it approaches its end we must continue to do so. Why ask the question, what is the church? Everyone knows what the church is. But what is it we know? What mental image should the word church conjure in our minds? Propositions mean things, so prior to any examination of the marks, we ought to try to be clear on what we mean by the church. Second, what is it that we mean by “marks”? If the church exists, it has certain attributes, and some of those attributes will define its church-ness or lack thereof. With this in mind it is appropriate to look at the meaning of the word church.

It shouldn’t be surprising that the word church means more than one thing. When we say church, we could be talking about one of three things: (1) The church which is the universal, gathered church of Jesus Christ consisting of all believers in all times and all places, (2) A community of believers in a specific city or region, as in the church in Corinth; or (3) A specific local congregation. The first meaning here speaks of a spiritual reality, in traditional terms, the church triumphant, or the invisible church. The second and the third are expressions of the empirical realities—the church militant or visible church, though with differing emphases.
Here it is necessary to accept a practical bias. The perfected saints who make up much the gathered church no longer have to deal with issues such as mission, sacraments, etc. that are before us in the empirical church, so this study limits the discussion to the latter two, empirical meanings of church. Those of us in the empirical church have one foot in the spiritual reality, so to speak, and the other in the practical realities and issues of grappling with what church is and how we live into that definition—mostly we have spent too little time reflecting on this. A related question before us is how the empirical church relates with the universal church—how is the spiritual reality of the gathered church appropriated and experienced as a practical reality in the empirical church? The question of the marks of the church speaks to this relationship more than the issue of “who’s in, who’s out,”1 that it is often associated with. Keeping the questions raised here in mind, let us look at the idea of the church. We begin by looking at the Bible’s view of the church, followed by a survey of some of the factors in the early historical development of the church that prompted closer scrutiny of its meaning and identity, coalescing in a confessional formulation. Following this is an overview of three major approaches to the doctrine of the church, and the chapter will close with a look at some contemporary developments.

**Biblical images of the church**

*The People of God.* God called Abram to leave Haran and go into a land he would show. The word for covenant, *berit’*, does not occur in this passage but the call of Abram is certainly the proto-covenant that is ratified in the covenant of Genesis 15 and 17, and affirmed to Abraham’s progeny. The Abrahamic covenant, writes John Murray, “underlies the whole subsequent development of God’s redemptive promise, word, and action. It is in

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terms of the promise given to Abraham, that in him and in his seed all the families of the earth would be blessed, that God sent forth His Son...It is in fulfillment of this promise to Abraham that there is now no longer Jew nor Gentile, male nor female, bond nor free, that Christ is all and in all, and that all believers are blessed with faithful Abraham.”

The promise of the Abrahamic covenant is the first step in the establishment of the people of God. In Exodus 6:7, God told Moses to tell the Israelites that he would redeem them from the yoke of slavery in Egypt and that, “I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God.” This articulates what O.P. Robertson called the Immanuel Principle, “the heart of God’s covenants and the goal of the history of redemption,” reaffirmed throughout the Pentateuch.

The Assembly. The NT Greek term for church, ekklēsia, is used in the LXX to translate the Hebrew qāhāl, which describes an assembly. This language denotes not simply a gathering of people, but a lawful assembly. This language, often interpreted as congregation connotes more than mere gathering of people in one place, there is first of all a special solemnity and formality in the gathering, and also purpose for the gathering—the worship of God and also commissioning of the people.

The Body of Christ. Paul uses the beautiful language of the church as Christ’s body, composed of many and differing parts, working together in unity and harmony, in 1 Corinthians 12:12-20. In Colossians 1:18 and 2:19 and in Ephesians as well Paul uses the same language to remind Christians of the mystical union we have in Christ, and in the

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3 Quoted in Dennis J. Ireland, “Drink My Water and You’ll Never Thirst Again,” [online article]; (Reformed Quarterly, Spring 1999); http://www.rts.edu/quarterly/spring99/water.html; Internet; accessed 22 January 2008.

Ephesians passages reminds believers that this union is supernatural: as Christ’s Body we
are seated with him in the heavenly realms, in what Kent Hughes calls “a dynamic unity of
cosmic dimensions.”⁵ This imagery also evokes strongly the perichoretic communion of the
church with God through Christ and the Spirit, which I alluded to in Chapter Four.⁶ Clement
of Alexandria uses the same image calling the “spiritual body” the “holy church.”⁷

The image of the church as the Body of Christ leads organically into the concept of
the church as ongoing incarnational presence which is spiritually joined with Christ and its
ministry. In the words of Alan Hirsch, the church is driven by an incarnational impulse
which “draws its inspiration from the Incarnation and …is energized by the mission of God.”
(emphasis in original)⁸ In no way should the idea of the church as the incarnational presence
of the Body of Christ be understood to denigrate or minimize the unique and unrepeatable
Incarnation of Jesus. Rather, understanding mission incarnationally could, as Darrell Guder
observes, “prove to be a remarkably integrative way to approach the church’s missionary
vocation.” Even so, Guder provides a word of caution: “As we seek to explore the missional
significance of the incarnation, we need to resist every temptation to dilute the uniqueness
and centrality of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ…”⁹

_THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE SPIRIT_ This term is not a biblical image of the church per se,
appearing in the doxological benediction of Paul to the church at the close of his second letter

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⁵ R. Kent Hughes, _Ephesians: The Mystery of Christ_ (Wheaton: Crossway, 1990), 43.
⁶ Here is should be noted that the language of the Body of Christ is also used sacramentally: the Roman
Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches will use this phrase specific reference to the host of the Eucharist and
the sacramental words of instantiation according to the doctrine of transubstantiation in those confessional
streams of the church.
⁷ Clement of Alexandria, _Stromata_, VII.14, [online version]; (Early Christian Writings Online);
to Corinth\textsuperscript{10} and in the middle of the apostle’s prayer of encouragement and exhortation to the believers at Philippi.\textsuperscript{11} And yet it is important to include this image as we recall the promise of the Spirit given to the believers by Jesus that they would be “clothed with power from on high,\textsuperscript{12}” with a specific association between the Spirit and the church’s missionary witness to the world: “you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”\textsuperscript{13} The coming of the Spirit at Pentecost played “a determinative role in establishing and developing a sense of mission in the young church,” says James Dunn.\textsuperscript{14} The intimate connection between the fellowship of the Spirit and mission in this context is significant for the current study.

\textit{A Spiritual House.} The image of the church as a spiritual house or building is the metaphor Peter chose in his second epistle, calling the people of the church “living stones” and Christ the “living stone” and the “chief cornerstone.”\textsuperscript{15} Paul uses precisely the same language that the church is the household of God, “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.”\textsuperscript{16} The apostle to the Gentiles builds on this metaphor, saying that the “whole building is joined together… a holy temple in the Lord… And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.”\textsuperscript{17} Here some observations are in order. Paul’s image of the building up

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{10} 2 Corinthians 13:14.
\item \textsuperscript{11} Philippians 2:1.
\item \textsuperscript{12} Luke 24:49.
\item \textsuperscript{13} Acts 1:8.
\item \textsuperscript{14} James D. G. Dunn, \textit{Jesus and the Spirit} (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 154.
\item \textsuperscript{15} 2 Peter 2:4-8.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Ephesians 2:19b-20.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Ephesians 2:21b-22.
\end{itemize}
of the church as the household of God is in the context of a passage on the unity of the church, a polemic against Jew-Gentile division. Those who have come into the household of God through the work of Christ (the mission of Christ!) are joined together without distinction with the people of the covenant. And lest we forget that we are brought together for a purpose, Paul’s encouragement comes after a reminder that the unified church is “God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”\(^{18}\) The works to which the apostle refers surely includes participation in the continuing mission of God to all the nations, that all might be brought into God’s household.

Scripture is resplendent with much more rich imagery describing the church. All of the images, including “the bride of Christ,” “the flock of Christ,” “a building fitly framed together,” in addition to those that have been discussed here, are as Derek Thomas reminds us, “metaphors of unity and coherence,” providing a valuable corrective against the temptation for Post-Enlightenment individualists to see the New Testament data in strictly individual terms.\(^{19}\) The biblical images also provide a window on some of the aspects of the church in specific relation to its connectedness with the ongoing mission of God.

**Pre-Nicene ecclesiology**

The early church expanded and its identify formed against the backdrop of a number of challenges. One of the early struggles regarded the authority of the Old Testament and the nature of the continuity between Judaism and Christianity. This issue forms a significant part of the context for the Pauline epistles to the Galatians, Ephesians and Romans, and a

\(^{18}\) Ephesians 2:10b.

considerable body of literature of the early church fathers as well. The Jewish/Gentile
dynamic was an important formative influence for the early church in its theological and
cultural identity.\textsuperscript{20}

A second influence was that of the dispute between Christianity and classical thought.
John the Evangelist appropriates Greek philosophical language and imbues it with Christian
meaning in a masterful example of contextualization. A powerful example is seen in John’s
use of the concept of the \textit{Logos}, as Leon Morris describes.\textsuperscript{21} In the first centuries of the
church the early fathers were forced to address natural questions that arose regarding the
teaching of the church. The writings of the Apostolic Fathers, so called because they either
knew or were closely associated with the apostles who were eyewitnesses of Jesus, included
a variety of literature addressed to the church and show various aspects of its early formation
and life. Most generally their tone is pastoral and aimed at encouragement, exhortation, or
correction.\textsuperscript{22} The primitive ecclesiology of the Apostolic Fathers builds mostly on the
biblical images. For instance, in chapters III-VII of the \textit{Shepherd of Hermas}, the image of
living stones is used in the description of the church as a tower and includes an early
enumeration of church offices.\textsuperscript{23}

As the memory of the apostles receded further into history, the church was confronted
with theological challenges that forced the consideration of what constituted the true teaching
of the church. The apologists of the next two centuries accordingly addressed increasingly
an audience of outsiders, in contrast to the Apostolic Fathers who wrote primarily to the

\textsuperscript{20} Jaroslav Pelikan, \textit{The Christian Tradition Vol. 1: The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition} (Chicago:


churches. In this period the idea of apostolicity as a criterion of the true church emerged, notably in the teachings of Ireneaus and Hippolytus.\textsuperscript{24} In the same period Cyprian of Carthage, in his dispute with Pope Stephen I over the validity of baptism by heretics,\textsuperscript{25} penned the aphorism most identified with his name: “Outside the church there is no salvation.”\textsuperscript{26} The Donatist controversy that resulted in Cyprian’s axiom and other subsequent Christological and Trinitarian controversies raised the question of what constituted the true church and membership therein.

**One Holy, Catholic and Apostolic church**

This four-part formula: “One, Holy, catholic and apostolic,” expresses the marks of the church according to the Nicene Creed. It is brought up here as it is the most significant and lasting early attempt at enumerating the characteristics of the church, though the meaning of these attributes, depending on the background of the believer, will differ in nuance and emphasis. But the formula of Nicaea is the background for the ecclesiological approaches we will survey. First it will be helpful to engage in a brief generic look at each of the four Nicene marks.

**One.** The mark in view is unity. There is only one church. We can agree with the Roman Catholic catechism which says the unity of the church is grounded in her source: the unity of the triune God, in her founder: the Word made flesh, the prince of peace who

\textsuperscript{23} Hermas, *The Shepherd*, Roberts-Donaldson Translation, [online version]; (Early Christian Writings Online); http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/shepherd.html; Internet; accessed 22 January 2008.


\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.

reconciled all men to God by the cross, and in her soul: the Holy Spirit, dwelling in those who believe and pervading and ruling over the entire church. Unity is of the essence of the church.\textsuperscript{27} Though the church exists in what Richard John Neuhaus calls “wonderful and maddening confusion of diversity,”\textsuperscript{28} the church is one.

\textit{Holy.} The holiness of the church proceeds directly from the same sources as her unity. Though made up of sinners, often in error, complicit in oppression, unrighteousness and all manner of wickedness in its empirical form, the church is nevertheless a holy church, made so not by her own actions, but by the atonement of Christ and his righteousness. This is more than a mere juridical position—the holiness of the church expresses a spiritual reality as genuine as the image of God in every person. Marred and stained though it is, holiness remains a primary attribute of the church.

\textit{Catholic.} This attribute refers to the wholeness, deriving etymologically from \textit{kata} + \textit{holos}, according to the whole. Hans Küng states that, “‘Catholic Church’…quite unpolemically, refers here to the increasingly apparent reality of a whole church, within which the individual churches are bound up together, a general and all-embracing church.”\textsuperscript{29} This universality of the church is also expressed by the \textit{ecumenicity} of the church, also expressed as its \textit{sobornost’}, to use the Russian word favored by the Eastern Church, which term acknowledges at once the variety of ecclesial expressions. The concern for a renewal of

\textsuperscript{27} Catechism of the Catholic Church, Second edition, [online edition]; (Part One: The Profession of Faith, The Vatican Archives Online); http://www.vatican.va/archive/catechism/p1s1c1.htm; Internet; accessed 30 January 2008.

\textsuperscript{28} Richard John Neuhaus, “What is the True Church? Part 6: Roman Catholic View,” [online recording]; (Fall 1997 Francis A. Schaeffer Lecture Series); http://www.covenantseminary.edu/resource/Neuhaus_FSL97Q_06RomanCatholicView.mp3; Internet; accessed 14 November 2007.

\textsuperscript{29} Hans Küng, The Church (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967), 297.
ecclesiology with emphasis on the catholicity of the church, gave rise to ecumenical movement, especially in the last century.  

*Apostolic.* This term among the marks of the church is one where there is the most diversity of opinion regarding its meaning. Clearly it hearkens back to the twelve Apostles, eyewitnesses of Jesus who learned in the Savior’s presence and whose teaching framed the early church. But beyond the fact of relating in some way or another to the Apostles, views of what constitutes the mark of apostolicity vary, and the discussion of some of the major ecclesiological streams will focus on the distinctive conceptions of this term for each stream.

**The Eastern Church: Eucharistic Ecclesiology**

For the church of the East, the unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity of the church are all centered in the Eucharist. The essence of the triune God far transcends human ability to approach or know God as he is, and so the Eucharist, along with icons, become the means through which the transcendent God becomes immanent. The Eucharist, in the words of John Zizioulas, is “the locus for the proleptic presence of the eschaton in history.” And despite there having been no visible reference to the Eucharist in Clement of Alexandria’s reference to the “medicine of immortality,” this image has become deeply ingrained in the Eucharistic consciousness of the Eastern Church. It is the Eucharist that is the source of the church’s life, the act in liturgy by which believers receive the divine medicine and celebrate their union with Christ. The ministry of the Eucharist is what the church is for, and becomes

the premier, even the sole, mark of the church: “Where the Eucharist is, there is the church. Or, the church makes the Eucharist, the Eucharist makes the church.”

The apostolicity of the church is found also in the service of the Eucharist: the central place in the Eucharistic liturgy is taken by the one who stands in the place of the apostles, and this is the origin of the episcopacy as well. Nikolai Afanas’ev writes:

"Is there or could there be anything of greater significance than the person who, in the Eucharistic service, occupies the place of the Apostles? ... If we will understand the importance of this position [in the performance of the liturgy], then we will come close to solving the problem of the rise of the episcopacy... On the basis of Eucharistic ecclesiology I think we can confirm the origin of the ministry of the one [priest] who stands before the local church. The position he stands in contains the very Eucharistic nature of the church."

The essence of Orthodox theology is its “sacramental, liturgical, mystical ethos,” writes Alexander Schmemann. This is manifested primarily in the rite of the Eucharist, consisting of two complementary movements: one of ascension toward the throne of God, laying aside all earthly cares, to feast upon and offer Christ. Through participation in the Eucharist, the Christian experiences full participation in the divine life (theosis) and then returns, yet mystically remains connected proleptically to the heavenly reality. The Mission of the church is bound up in the rite of the liturgy and the Eucharist, which is the presence of the eschaton on earth, though an ontological abyss remains between the old and new worlds that will not be bridged in this aeon.

The Eastern Orthodox Church has been termed a non-missionary church, which characterization Schmemann attempts to reject. He writes, “A theology of mission is always

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35 Schmemann, Alexander, Church, World, Mission: Reflections on Orthodoxy in the West (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1979), 209-216.
the fruit of the total being of the church and not a mere specialty for those who receive a particular missionary calling.”

The author could not agree more, but Schmemann goes on to conflate the mission of the church with the rites of liturgy and the Eucharist, suggesting that in conducting them the church fulfills its missionary imperative.

At least one voice is calling the Eastern Church to recover its long-held missionary tradition: Anastasios Yannoulatos, who helped to start a missionary movement in the Orthodox Church called *Poreftentes* (Go ye!). Yannoulatos challenged the missionary apathy that long prevailed in the Eastern Church, daring its believers to recall the meaning of “one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.” The *apostolic* in the creed does not refer only to apostolic succession, but it more importantly, said Yannoulatos, had reference to “apostolic fire and zeal to preach the gospel ‘to every creature.’” (Mk 16:15) We can only say as evangelicals, “Amen,” to Yannoulatos, who is the current primate of Albania. May his missional vision see full fruition to the glory of Christ.

**The Church of Rome: Magisterial Ecclesiology**

If the Eastern church has as its theological and affective center the rite of the Eucharist, then for the Catholic church its being is to be found primarily in the authority or the church and the priesthood. Before his ascension to the pontificate, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger wrote that the unity of the church, “refers first to a local unity–only the community united with *the bishop* is the ‘Catholic Church,’ not the sectional groups which have broken away from it, whatever their reasons for splitting may be.” (my italics) Likewise the second mark, catholicity, of the church is also found in the bishops: “Thus the word

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36 Ibid.

‘catholic’ expresses the episcopal structure of the Church and the necessity for the unity of all the bishops with one another…” Though the creed makes no reference to this unity as inhering in the bishopric of Rome, writes Ratzinger, “this idea was taken for granted from the start.”

Catholicism will see the apostolicity of the church in the bishopric as well: the bishops stand in line of apostolic succession. The mark of holiness is a place where we evangelicals will find more agreement with Rome. Again Cardinal Ratzinger:

“The Church is not called ‘holy’ in the Creed because its members, collectively and individually, are holy, sinless men—this dream…has no place in the waking world…Because of the Lord’s devotion, never more to be revoked, the Church is the institution sanctified by him for ever, an institution in which the holiness of the Lord becomes present among men.”

Here we as evangelicals can come to a fairly close consensus on the matter, for this language is very similar to the Protestant idea of saved yet a sinner still, on a collective scale. We can also speak approvingly of much of the doctrine embraced in the ecclesiology of Vatican II, particularly with regard to mission. *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church published by the Vatican II Council under Pope Paul VI, recovers a bit of the apostolic vision:

“The lay apostolate, however, is a participation in the salvific mission of the Church itself. Through their baptism and confirmation all are commissioned to that apostolate by the Lord Himself… Thus every layman, in virtue of the very gifts bestowed upon him, is at the same time a witness and a living instrument of the mission of the Church itself according to the measure of Christ’s bestowal.”

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38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
Mission formed the heart of the motivation behind the Evangelical-Catholic dialog that resulted in the *Evangelicals and Catholics Together* document, and we can view with approbation much of what is written in that document. Its signatories affirm together the Apostolic Credo, and the document recognizes that there are still points of division over which Evangelicals and Catholics remain at odds. But it stands as a witness to a spirit of ecumenicity around the historic essentials of the Christian faith and the call to missional witness in the world which we cannot and should not dismiss lightly.

**The Protestants: Confessional Ecclesiology**

Some will immediately object to the lumping of Protestants together under a single rubric of Confessional Ecclesiology, and this would be not entirely without justification. Nevertheless, while Rome and the East have remained content with explicating the confessional formulas of Nicaea and the other Ecumenical Councils for their theologies and specifically ecclesiologies, the Protestant Reformation became the occasion for those churches which broke with Rome to consider their own theologies, resulting in several new confessional expressions. This section will briefly survey two streams of Protestantism that flow from the Magisterial Reformation, namely the Lutheran and Anglican Churches on one hand, and the Reformed Churches on the other.\(^{41}\)

**Lutheran and Anglican Churches.** Luther’s doctrine of the church, in its concise formulation, is shaped by two formative elements, the Word and the sacraments.\(^{42}\) These form the marks of the church as expressed in the Augsburg Confession of 1530, article VII of which reads as follows:

\(^{41}\) The Anabaptist tradition of the Radical Reformation embraces a sectarian ecclesiology which does not fall under the rubric of what is here classified as confessional ecclesiology.

\(^{42}\) Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology*, 40.
“The Church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered.”

Luther’s own definitions varied. In the Smalcald Articles of 1537, he defined the church as “the holy believers and lambs who hear the voice of their shepherd” (III:IX). But in his treatise On the Councils and the Church in 1539, he lists seven marks: (1) Proclamation, (2) Baptism, (3) The Eucharist, (4) Church discipline [which Luther calls the power of the keys], (5) A properly ordained ministry, (6) Catechesis, and (7) “Possession of the sacred cross” or discipleship.

The Church of England broke with Rome hierarchically under Henry VIII, but remained in every other respect, excepting fealty to the pontiff, Catholic. Anglicanism under Henry retained seven sacraments— for Henry’s treatise A Defense of the Seven Sacraments Pope Leo X conferred upon him the title of Fidei Defensor (Defender of the Faith) in 1521. Only when Henry’s young son Edward VI acceded to the throne in 1547 did the Church of England break theologically with Rome as well, led by the Duke of Somerset who was royal protector, and Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury. Like the Lutheran church, Anglicanism retained a monarchial episcopate and a view of apostolic succession not very far removed from the Roman Catholic view. Despite having distinctly different views of the sacrament of communion, the Lutheran and Anglican churches are similar enough that they

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43 Augsburg Confession, VII.I, [online version]; (Lutheran Church Missouri Synod); http://www.lcms.org/graphics/assets/media/LCMS/augsburgconfession.pdf; Internet; accessed 30 January 2008.

44 Eugene F. Klug, “Luther’s Understanding of ‘Church’ in His Treatise On the Councils and the Church of 1539,” Concordia Theological Quarterly, 44 no. 1, Jan 1980, 27-38.


have explored close fellowship, dialogue and mutual practice.\textsuperscript{48} Like the Lutheran Augsburg Confession, the Anglican \textit{Thirty-nine Articles of Religion} affirm two marks of the church:

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“The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly ministered according to Christ's ordinance.”\textsuperscript{49}
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\textit{Presbyterian and Reformed Churches}. The Presbyterian and Reformed Churches find their common origin in the church of Geneva under John Calvin.

The English-speaking Presbyterian churches flow from the leadership of Scottish Reformer John Knox. Knox fled to the continent along with large numbers of English Protestants when Mary Tudor, who was Catholic, came to power in 1553 upon the death of her Protestant brother Edward the VI at the tender age of sixteen. Knox was assigned by Calvin to pastor a church of exiles in Frankfurt, then at Geneva under Calvin’s tutelage.\textsuperscript{50} He returned to Scotland in 1559 to found the Presbyterian Church there. Nearly a century later, a committee of divines (theologians) convened by the British Parliament at Westminster authored the Confession of Faith (1646) that continues to be used by most Presbyterian Churches.\textsuperscript{51}

The Reformed Churches in Europe also have their origin in Calvin’s Geneva, and are similar to the Presbyterian churches in doctrine and structure. Their confessions are known together as the Three Forms of Unity consisting of: (1) \textit{The Belgic (or Netherlands)}

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{48}{Ola Tjorhom, “The Porvoo statement: a possible ecumenical breakthrough? - for European Anglicans and Lutherans”[online article]; (The Ecumenical Review, Jan 1994); http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2065/is_n1_v46/ai_14935600; Internet; accessed 30 January 2008.}
\footnotetext{49}{Articles of Religion (Protestant Episcopal Church of the US version), XIX, [online edition]; http://anglicansonline.org/basics/thirty-nine_articles.html; Internet; accessed 30 January 2008.}
\footnotetext{50}{Anthony Curto, “John Knox: The Years of Preparation,” [online article]; (\textit{Antithesis}, 1 no. 2, Mar/Apr 1990); http://www.reformed.org/webfiles/antithesis/index.html?mainframe=/webfiles/antithesis/v1n2/ant_v1n2_knox.html; Internet; accessed 30 January 2008.}
\end{footnotes}
Confession (1561) composed principally by Guido de Bres for the Reformed Church of the southern lowlands, now Belgium and Holland, 52 (2) The Heidelberg Catechism (1563), prepared by Zacharius Ursinus and Caspar Olevianus at Heidelberg University, 53 and (3) The Canons of Dordt (1619), composed at the Synod of Dordrecht, convened in the matter over the Remonstrance of the followers of Jacob Arminius. 54 Reformed churches achieved significant presence in the countries of Belgium, France (the Huguenot Church), the Netherlands, and South Africa. (A Reformed church also exists in Hungary which embraces Calvinistic theology and Episcopal structure.)

The Reformed churches were influenced greatly by Calvin’s doctrine of the church described in Book IV of The Institutes. Calvin devotes the entirety of Book IV to ecclesiology and sacraments, including a chapter on the office of the magistrate. Like Luther, Calvin advances two marks of the church: “Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ’s institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists.” 55 Calvin devotes significant attention to church discipline, but does not go so far as to call “the power of the keys” or discipline generally a mark of the church. 56

Calvin contributed a distinctive view of the offices of the church, listing four: (1) Pastor, (2) teacher, (3) Presbyter, and (4) deacon. He held that three of the five ministry

56 Ibid., IV.I.22; IV.XII.
offices listed in Ephesians chapter 4 (apostles, evangelists and prophets) were not permanent, but (significantly for the current study) for a time during which churches were to be established where none existed (emphasis added).\(^{57}\)

Another distinguishing image that Calvin used was that of the church as mother\(^{58}\) and teacher.\(^{59}\) The latter image, the church as “school of God”\(^{60}\) is noteworthy for the current study, as it is the likely source of what, in practice, is arguably the most distinctive characteristic aspect of Reformed churches: the teaching of the church. For the Reformed tradition, the word apostolic in the Nicene confessional formula evokes first and foremost in the minds of Reformed believers, the idea of apostolic teaching. The teaching of the apostles, the doctrinal confession of the church, is the heart of Reformed ecclesiology, and because of this significance, Reformed churches emphasize the ministry of teaching and value it above all other aspects of the church. It is no accident that the office of the pastor under my own Presbyterian tradition has the title of Teaching Elder, though as John Robbins notes, the distinction between ruling and teaching elder is foreign to Scripture, which says all elders should be able to teach,\(^{61}\) but I digress. The importance of the didactic model of the church as manifested in the Reformed confession is difficult to overestimate. It has given Reformed Churches a theological vigor and rigor arguably unmatched in the ecclesial realm. But the classroom model may have other effects as well, which we will touch upon briefly in the concluding chapter.

\(^{57}\) Ibid., IV.III.4.

\(^{58}\) Ibid., IV.I.1; IV.1.4.

\(^{59}\) Ibid., IV.1.5.


The Scottish Confession acknowledges the same two marks of the church as Calvin and Luther, “first, the true preaching of the word of God …; secondly, the right administration of the sacraments of Christ Jesus.”

By the time of Westminster nearly a century later, Presbyterianism had elevated church discipline to the status of a mark of the church. While Westminster does not use the language “marks of the church” it does state that particular churches, “…are more or less pure according as the doctrine of the gospel is taught and embraced, ordinances administered, and public worship performed more or less purely in them.”

The Belgic Confession explicitly lists three marks, “the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached,” “the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ,” “if church discipline is exercised in chastening of sin.”

Lutheran and Anglican churches, then, share in common an episcopacy not far departed from that of Rome, though the ecclesiology is decidedly much more confessional than magisterial, to use the terms offered here. The Reformed churches share in common a view which holds the preaching and teaching of the Word of God in the highest place, and derive their identity from this distinctive.

**Contemporary developments**

The Protestant confessions concentrate on their doctrinal distinctives, and the chief distinctive of Protestant doctrine is without question that of soteriology, specifically the doctrines of grace. The soteriological emphasis was noted by B.B. Warfield: “…the Reformation, inwardly considered, was just the ultimate triumph of Augustine’s doctrine of

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63 Westminster Confession of Faith, XXV.IV.

64 Belgic Confession of Faith, XXIX.
grace over Augustine’s doctrine of the Church.”\textsuperscript{65} One searches in vain for a robust expression of mission in most of the Protestant confessions. This is in part probably because at the time of the Reformation, every person born in Europe was baptized into the church. The Reformers distinguished themselves polemically from Rome and other churches such as those of the radical Reformers; Christendom was not considered a mission field.

The 1996 Cambridge Declaration signed by many respected Reformed scholars, pastors and teachers, is sadly silent on the matter of mission.\textsuperscript{66} It is a confessional document which calls for greater confessional commitment. It is an excellent document for its purposes, but suffers from its lack of missional concern.

The Reformed churches have been the target of criticism from believers who hold other soteriological convictions who claim that the Calvinism we hold and love will be harmful to missions. Doctrinally those critiques are misplaced. But the deepest affections of the Reformed tributaries of the Protestant stream are less on mission than they are on theology generally and soteriology particularly. Those of us in the Reformed tradition ought to be willing to acknowledge this fact with honesty and humility, as we consider, finally, whether mission is or ought to be embraced as a mark of the true church.

\textsuperscript{65} Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, \textit{Calvin and Augustine} (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990), 322.

CHAPTER 7
MISSION: A MARK OF THE CHURCH?

The object of the exercise

Thus far the study has set forth evidence and arguments from several perspectives representative of the major disciplines of theological study with an aim to support the proposition that mission is, and in fact always has been, a mark of the church. The perspectives presented have included a sampling of thematic texts from the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, a presentation of theological concepts that relate to the question at hand, brief examination of a selected few episodes and periods from the church’s history, and a very brief and generalized overview of some major distinctive ecclesiological approaches.

The hoped-for result of the exercise has to bring the reader to a state of remembrance. Rather than imparting any new knowledge at all, the aim has been to bring about a slapping-of-the-forehead recognition that this idea of mission being a mark of the church was something we knew all along, but somehow had slipped from the forefront of our theological awareness and become one of those unexamined, unspoken, unwritten assumptions that everybody knows but nobody articulates.

As I write this chapter the winter chill still lingers outside, but signs of spring are coming, and with springtime will come a season of opening up things stored away for winter. Inevitably in the process of going through the housekeeping chores of putting away winter things and digging out what is needed for the coming warm season, a lost tool or memento
crops up in an unexpected place, and fills us with delight at having found what we had lost but which we had forgotten to miss. There are plenty of stories for children and grownups alike that aim at reminding us that often what we long for is in our own back yard. Likewise in the journey of faith, often the best discoveries of all are when God reminds us about things we’ve always known.

Assembling the arguments

In the introduction to the study I spoke about a general sense of unease in the church, a growing awareness that something is wrong. There is something like a crisis in the church, centered mainly around the church not being sufficiently self-aware in a sense of understanding its own nature and purpose. The resultant loss of compelling theological vision is a key contributor to the emergence of other symptoms of the problem. Problems often contain implicitly their own solutions, and such is the case here. If one of the key problems is involved with the loss of the church’s sense of identity and a compelling theological vision that articulates it, then the solution, it stands to reason, would be to seek to better understand the nature and identity of the church. That understanding would become a key integrating principle of a compelling theological vision which would help the church to wake up to its nature, identity, and divine design.

The next step, described in chapter two, was an effort to put forth a schematic working definition of mission—not a sound bite to be memorized and regurgitated, but a set of ideas that expressed at least a minimum set of categories which enable an expression of the reality of mission. Chapter two looked at mission in terms of its subject, action, instrument, recipient, and intended result. God is the subject. The action is the project of redemption and reconciliation, the instruments are God himself and his people, the intended recipients
are the unredeemed world, and the intended result is a new creation restored and reconciled
with its creator in blessed harmony forever. Mission is part of the fabric of the world itself,
as God unfolds the pageant of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration around us and
invites us to participate in it.

We next considered the biblical texts to see if this concept of mission finds expression
there. The primary area of focus in the Old Testament involved the formulas of blessing
associated with the Abrahamic covenant in Genesis: Abraham would be blessed to have
descendants and pre-eminently one descendant, a legacy of blessing. But the covenant was
not just one of privilege—it entailed responsibility as well. The ultimate intended recipient of
blessing was the nations, all the peoples of the world. Abraham would be blessed in order to
be a blessing. The blessing of Abraham included descendants who would become a people, a
nation, and from this nation a person, the Messiah, in and through whom the people, children
of Abraham, would participate in the continuing carrying forth of the blessing. Abraham was
blessed with a mission. The children of Abraham were blessed with a mission. The OT
covenant is has an essentially missional nature—the promise of blessing contains the duty of
mission.

In the NT we surveyed the concept of sending in one of the Gospels as a
representative sample, finding that Jesus saw himself as sent and as sender. Multiple
attestations in the Gospel of John alone include the idea of Jesus sending his followers as he
was sent into the world by the Father. His people would be sent to continue and fulfill his
messianic mission. We also surveyed some of the texts of commissioning. The survey
intentionally did not focus primarily on what has become known as the Great Commission in
Matthew 28:18-20, but looked at other texts to ensure that we were on good exegetical
ground and not trying to force a missional template onto the NT Scriptures. If the OT texts indicate a missional identity for the people of God, and if the NT texts contain a similar identity, and if there is organic unity between the OT and NT people of God which continues in its application to the church, then missional sending to the nations for their redemption is a constitutive element of the identity of the church.

Chapter four looked at theology proper as a basis for ecclesiology. The triune God exists in a community of perfect love, joy, fellowship, and service in what we called a divine dance. The perfect unity of the persons of the godhead is complete, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit sharing a unity of essence and mutual interpenetration called *perichoresis*. This is expressed biblically in language like that of Jesus, who spoke of being *in* the Father, and the Father being *in* him.

The eternal Son and the Spirit have missional, mediatorial roles which are ontological and redemptive. Ontologically the mission of the eternal Son is to manifest the presence of the Father, and together with the Spirit to participate in the creation and conscious ongoing sustenance of the creation. The Son and Spirit have revelatory mediatorship roles in the world as well, the Son being always the revelation of the Father in the created realms of earth and the heavens. These roles are part of the missional being of the Son and the Spirit which are not a wretched expedient forced by the Fall, but part of the nature of God and that of creation.

The Son is sent on a mission of redemption to the world to reconcile his people to God, with the Spirit giving new life through the Son to the community of the Redeemed. The people of God are not only reconciled to God in a juridical relationship, but through the Spirit receive union with Christ, invited into the divine dance to participate in the
perichoretic divine life of the divinity, expressed in the language of the Eastern church as *theosis*. And part of participation in the divine dance is receiving the missional calling of the Son: “As the Father sent me, so I send you.” To be in Christ means to be in mission.

In chapter five we looked at periods of the church when this missional component of its identity was manifested in the life of the church, and examined some of the principles of missional practice including the reality that the mission to all the peoples of the earth means allowing the Gospel to flower in the cultural soil where it is planted, manifesting a culturally distinct yet biblically faithful expression of the Gospel reality. We looked at the ongoing tension between the centripetal institutionalizing impulse and the centrifugal missionary impetus, and how allowing one or the other to gain preeminence can result in disaster.

Finally we looked at the historical development of the notion of marks of the church, and how the idea of marks of the church has found expression is some of the major confessional streams of Christianity according to the framework of one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. We surveyed the ways the empirical churches view the term of *apostolicity*—the Eastern Orthodox Church understanding this in the apostolic presence of the priest who conducts the Eucharist, the Catholic idea of apostolic authority of the bishops of the church, and the Protestant view of apostolic teaching and doctrine. And yet we are reminded that in its original, extra-ecclesial meaning, apostolic had something to do with sending, and not just sending, but a missional sending.

Mission, it emerges, seems to always have been an essential part of the church in its identity, nature, and being. And yet it does not seem to have formed a major component in the church’s own expression of its confessional identity. Why is this so?
I think that a sociolinguistic insight may be helpful here. Communicative context is a term which refers to a relationship between culture and language. High-context cultures are those in which much of communication is implicit, assumed and unsaid, based on shared history and experience. In low-context cultures most communication is explicit rather than implicit, and shared history, experience and assumptions are not taken for granted. Every culture is somewhere on a continuum of context. Cultures in the West tend to be lower context and therefore more explicit in communication, while those of the East are more apt to be high-context with greater degrees of implicit communication.¹

The church arose in the East, and developed as a community with a rich tradition and historical background. Church, generally speaking, has tended to rely heavily on shared experiences and traditions–ecclesial culture is by and large a high-context affair. Individual congregations tend to be governed by a whole host of unspoken assumptions, rules and shibboleths that form invisible badges of insider and outsider.² Mission has always “been there” for the church, but here Bavinck’s observation cited in Chapter Two of this paper bears repeating: “The ancient church conducted missionary work as though it were self-explanatory… Its testimony was so spontaneous and natural that it had no need of a carefully thought out basis.”³

I would also add the opinion that it seems consonant with the foregoing that the missionary impulse has been an expression mostly of the affective dimension of the church’s life, rather than part of its cognitive dimension. Those who engage in missionary work may

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¹ Michelle LeBaron, “Communication Tools for Understanding Cultural Differences,” [online article]; (Beyond Intractability); http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/communication_tools/; Internet; accessed 30 January 2008.


have been more inclined toward activism than contemplative pursuits-this is an area that
would probably be fruitful if taken up by a researcher with some expertise in psychology and
counseling rather than a theology student!

But whatever the reasons for it not having been expressed, the fact remains that
mission is part of the identity and ethos of the church from its very origins. The church has
always been missional, although it has not always done a good job of remembering it.

Witnesses for the affirmative

If the last assertion is true, then there should be little problem finding prior
expressions of mission as an essential part of the church’s essential nature. G.C. Berkouwer
sets forth a powerful and elegant testimony for mission as essential:

“The credo of apostolicity does not give the Church a reason for self-complacency;
rather, it sets her face to face with the most critical question of her existence: the
question of the power, the clarity, and the boldness of her proclamation... The results
for the Church’s authority are catastrophic, because no theory or ecclesiology can
hide the lack of boldness and apostolicity forever...”

“This so-called “great commission” was seen in connection with other statements
about being witnesses “in Jerusalem and in Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the
earth... The calling... has a special urgency. It is in no sense accidental or
secondary...Jerusalem is not a stopping place for God’s action, but the point of
departure for a movement that embraces the whole creation...In times when this
movement seemed to have come to a standstill, such universal statements always
caused a bad conscience. Urgent voices of protest sounded again, recalling that the
Church cannot be truly the Church without this movement and perspective and that
this dynamic belongs to her essential structure.”

Wolfhart Pannenberg agrees with Berkouwer’s assessment of the relationship
between the mission of the church and the mark of apostolicity forming an essential
ingredient of the being of the church. Pannenberg writes:

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5 Ibid., 392-3.
“The universality of the church and its faithfulness to its apostolic mission belong together, because the mission of the apostles was directed toward the whole of mankind...thus the permanent identity of the church and its alteration are united in the process of its mission.”

“Karl Barth brought all of this to expression pointedly when he said that the actual Church becomes evident in that she fulfills this commission as a mark of the Church, an 'external sign by which the true community of Jesus Christ may be infallibly known.' If that is not present, it is an alarming sign that something is decisively wrong in the inward relation of the community to its own basis of existence and that under the cover of sacred zeal there is a process of defection from its Lord.”

The Second Vatican Council’s Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church, entitled Ad Gentes (to the nations), and passed by a vote of 2,394 to 5(!) of the bishops present, states simply but clearly the view that mission is part of the church’s nature:

“The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father.”

All twenty-eight hierarchs of the Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas, convened at Antiochian Village, Ligonier, Pennsylvania in December 30, 1994 signed a document entitled, “A Statement on Mission and Evangelism” which includes this robust assertion:

“It is our conviction that mission is the very nature of the Church, and is an essential expression of her apostolicity, and that the Orthodox Church is therefore commanded by the Lord Jesus Christ to teach, to preach, and to make disciples of all nations.”

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7 Ibid., 393; cf. Barth, Church Dogmatics, IV, 3.2.2.. 771-2.
The Christian Reformed Church of North America published in 1987 a confessional document entitled, *Our World Belongs to God*. In poetic language strongly reminiscent (I do not know whether intentionally so or not) of St. Patrick’s Celtic Christian prayers, it sets forth 58 statements expanding on the theme “Our World Belongs to God,” in ten sections. One of the sections is a well thought-out expression of mission in eleven different facets, a poignant and beautiful call to “The Missions of God’s People,” which section is reproduced here in its entirety:

“Following the apostles, the church is sent—
sent with the gospel of the kingdom
to make disciples of all nations,
to feed the hungry,
and to proclaim the assurance that in the name of Christ
there is forgiveness of sin and new life
for all who repent and believe—
to tell the news that our world belongs to God.

In a world estranged from God,
where millions face confusing choices,
this mission is central to our being,
for we announce the one name that saves.
We repent of leaving this work to a few,
we pray for brothers and sisters
who suffer for the faith,
and we rejoice that the Spirit
is waking us to see
our mission in God’s world.
The rule of Jesus Christ covers the whole world.
To follow this Lord is
to serve him everywhere,
without fitting in,
as light in the darkness,
as salt in a spoiling world.

We serve Christ by thankfully receiving our life
as a gift from his hand.
We protest and resist
all abuse and harm of this gift
by abortion, pollution, gluttony,
addiction, and all foolish risks.
Since God made us male and female in his image, one sex may not look down on the other, nor should we flaunt or exploit our sexuality. Our roles as men and women must conform to God's gifts and commands as we shape our cultural patterns. Sexuality is disordered in our fallen world; grief and loneliness are the result; but Christ's renewing work gives hope for order and healing and surrounds suffering persons with a compassionate community.

We serve Christ as singles, whether for a time or a life, by undivided devotion to the work of God and so add our love and service to the building of his kingdom.

In marriage and family, we serve God by reflecting his covenant love in life-long loyalty, and by teaching his ways, so that children may know Jesus as their Lord and learn to use their gifts in a life of joyful service.

In education we seek to acknowledge the Lord by promoting schools and teaching in which the light of his Word shines in all learning, where students, of whatever ability, are treated as persons who bear God's image and have a place in his plan.

In our work, even in dull routine, we hear the call to serve our Lord. We must work for more than wages, and manage for more than profit, so that mutual respect and the just use of goods and skills may shape the work place, and so that, while we earn or profit, useful products and services may result. Rest and leisure are gifts of God to relax us and to set us free.
to discover and to explore.
Believing that he provides for us,
we can rest more trustingly
and entertain ourselves more simply.

Grateful for the advances
in science and technology,
we make careful use of their products,
on guard against idolatry
and harmful research,
and careful to use them in ways that answer
to God's demands
to love our neighbor
and to care for the earth and its creatures.

Since God establishes the powers that rule,
we are called to respect them,
unless they trample his Word.
We are to obey God in politics,
pray for our rulers,
and help governments to know his will for public life.
Knowing that God's people
live under many forms of government,
we are thankful for the freedoms
enjoyed by citizens of many lands;
we grieve with those who live under oppression,
and we work for their liberty
to live without fear.

We call on governments to do public justice
and to protect the freedoms and rights
of individuals, groups, and institutions,
so that each may freely do
the tasks God gives.
We urge governments to ensure the well-being of all citizens
by protecting children from abuse and pornography,
by guarding the elderly and poor,
and by promoting the freedom to speak, to work,
to worship, and to associate.

Following the Prince of Peace,
we are called to be peacemakers,
and to promote harmony and order.
We call on our governments to work for peace;
we deplore the arms race
and the horrors that we risk.
We call on all nations to limit their weapons
to those needed in the defense of justice and freedom.
We pledge to walk in ways of peace,
confessing that our world belongs to God;
he is our sure defense."\(^{11}\)

Reformed Evangelicals meeting at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School developed and
published the Gospel Coalition documents of 2007, which at once address concerns for
confessional faithfulness while also calling the church to greater gospel renewal in all areas
of life.\(^{12}\) The Coalition also produced a confessional document which sets forth its own
distinguishing characteristics of the church: (1) Her gospel message, (2) Her sacred
ordinances, (3) Her discipline, (4) Her great mission, and, above all, (5) By her love for God,
and (6) By her members’ love for one another and for the world.\(^{13}\) The framers of the Gospel
Coalition Confessional Statement hammered out a confessional ecclesiology which adds
three marks to the three marks typical of Reformed churches, two of which are specifically
missional, and one of which is implicitly so. Most significantly, the Confessional Statement
declares mission to be a mark of the church, with which statement the author can only agree
with enthusiasm.

\(^{11}\) Christian Reformed Church, *Our World Belongs to God* [online document];

\(^{12}\) Gospel Coalition, *The Gospel for All of Life: Preamble* [online document];

\(^{13}\) Gospel Coalition, *Confessional Statement* (11) God’s New People [online document]
Mission: A Mark of the Church

In this chapter we have looked at the evidence presented within this study pointing to mission as essential to the nature of the church, a sign without which a true church cannot be said to be properly constituted. We also examined statements from a variety of ecclesiological streams–Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Evangelical. All the statements set forth mission as inherent in the nature of the church, part of its essential identity and being.

Were this a court of law, and were I standing in front of a jury having summarized the arguments and evidence presented in order to defend mission as a mark of the church, at this point it would be appropriate to sum up the final statement: “Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, in the face of the evidence stated here from the definition of mission, the biblical texts of the Old and New Testaments, illustrations from the history of the church, the theology of the triune God, the confessional identity of the church, and the signed testimony of authoritative witnesses representing major ecclesiological streams of Christianity, the verdict you must reach will not require long deliberation, as it is clear and incontrovertible: Mission is a mark of the church. The defense rests.”
CHAPTER 8
SIGNIFICANCE FOR TODAY’S CHURCH

The contemporary challenge

The opening paragraphs of this study described a malaise of the church, a sense of something wrong. The central theme uniting the chapters of this thesis has been a recovery of mission as a central organizing principle, but such a recovery is no simple matter, and will require intense prayer, careful reflection, and difficult practical effort.

Daniel Milgiore’s analysis of the problem cited in chapter one is helpful here: part of the problem contains the seed of the solution. A root of the problem, in Milgiore’s view is the *loss of a compelling theological vision*.

This is hard to deny. The great theological force that drove the Protestant Reformation was the recovery of the Gospel. Salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone became the compelling theological vision that became the motive force behind the Reformation.

Preaching the vision

The pulpit is the vehicle through which any compelling theological vision is to enter the church. If the theology of mission expressed in this thesis cannot be preached, then writing it has been nothing more than an exercise of academic navel-gazing. The key word in Milgiore’s formulation is *compelling*, a word which connotes persuasive proclamation.

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While certainly there is a possibility of presenting such a vision in other venues such as Sunday School and the ministry of small groups, ultimately it must come through the preached word.

The gospel must be the key component of any compelling theological vision to be articulated, and there is no more powerful expression of the gospel than that affirmed by the Reformed community of evangelicals. The preached Gospel must be a message of the grace of a loving and merciful God extended to undeserving sinners. But part of the compelling vision that must come from the pulpit will include teaching, leadership, and direction concerning the true nature of the church in all its fullness. I think the borrowed schema of Alan Hirsch provides a helpful framework for the articulation of the compelling vision Milgiore seeks.

**Perichoretic-missional ecclesiology redux**

At this point you may be expecting me to set forth mission as the integrative principle of a theological image for the church, but I will not. Rather I will set forth what I would like to call a perichoretic-missional ecclesiology in three dimensions, cited from Frost and Hirsch in Chapter Four, the dimensions being: (1) *Communio*—perichoretic union with the triune God through Christ and the Holy Spirit; (2) *Communitas*—perichoretic fellowship and spiritual union with one another as believers in the Body of Christ; and (3) *Commissio*—missional sending forth as the incarnational presence of Christ and his agents in the redemptive work of reconciling all the world to God and extending his reign.²

*Communio*: Part of any compelling theological vision is a deeper exploration and understanding of the true nature of our union with Christ as believers, union which is

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instantiated on individual and collective levels. As believers we actually enter into and participate in the perichoretic union of the godhead, naturally in a limited sense. Nevertheless I think that failure to grasp and appreciate the full supernatural, spiritual implications of this truth deprives the church of a source of wonder and spiritual vitality. Here is where I think we as Evangelicals may be able to learn some things by listening to the voices of our brothers and sisters from the East. The mystery of the Eucharist and the doctrine of theosis both represent avenues of exploration that can be helpful for an understanding of the full dimensions of our union with Christ, and deeper contemplation upon and emphasis of the sacraments as vehicles for understanding and experiencing that union can be fruitful for the spiritual life of the church which exists, “in Christ.”

Communitas: In an age where people are increasingly isolated from one another by the minutiae of daily life and a relentless cultural promotion of individualism, there is a longing for deep, intimate community. We will not find this sort of fellowship apart from the bond of being joined together in Christ by the Holy Spirit. The “one-anothering” to which Scripture exhorts us is not nearly common enough as a practice in our churches, and we need to explore ecclesial structures and modalities that will help to foster deep spiritual community among believers so that we will truly be known by the world because of our love for each other.

The classroom model with the lector in the front and the rest of the believers as students may not be the most effective vehicle for encouraging the development of this sort of fellowship. Examples from church history can be helpful here—the conventicles of the Pietistic movement and similar meetings from early Methodism not only fostered
community, but helped to advance the mission of the church. Here is one area where further research into community structures could be a good investment of time and effort.

**Commissio:** Union with Christ and the Spirit necessarily means participation in the redemptive mission of God to all the world. A vigorous missional calling includes evangelism, but also must include service in the world and for the world without expectation of reward. The mission will include proclamation of the gospel of grace, but at the same time it must be in a spirit of humility and self-denial. We must also be humble about acknowledging the wrongs of the church in its history, and seek to be God’s agents of justice and mercy in the world. The mission of the church necessarily incorporate self-consciously being the proleptic intruding presence of the reign of God, manifesting a bit of the future consummation in the present world and participating in the incarnational presence of Christ himself, blessing those with whom we come into contact with a message of truth, love, and hope. Such a holistic expression of mission and a deep, abiding sense of missional calling can provide an integrating principle of direction which gives the gospel an expressed intentionality that previously may have been lacking—it has been present all along, but too often in the life of the church it has been an unspoken assumption which is too easily forgotten.

**Risks of missionalism**

Too often as I have been thinking about the mission of the church, trying to incorporate missional thinking into my own teaching and preaching, I have encountered a preoccupation with pragmatic methodologies that lack any theological grounding. A great risk run by anyone who will try to lead in the current environment is that of being caught up
in the latest methodological fads and fashions, thinking that mission is a stylistic or cultural phenomenon. It is not. It is a statement about the very heart and being of God.

The mission of God is not to be taken lightly - tread carefully here, for you walk on holy ground! Reverence, prayer, and biblical reflection are called for, and there is no room for crass pragmatism, gimmicks, and canned methodologies. But God is gracious, and gives us room to explore, experiment, take risks and make mistakes.

**Signs of hope**

All around I see signs of a resurgent theologically-informed, spiritually sound, and missionally vital movement of church planting in the United States and other countries of the West. The global south continues to see great growth and progress of the gospel, mostly through the efforts of our Pentecostal and charismatic brothers and sisters. In the West we should be willing to step down from our positions of influence and authority, acknowledging in humility that we can learn from our brothers and sisters in the two-thirds world. Too long we in the West have acted as if we were the experts and masters, ready to take charge and show others how mission is done. The time for that sort of arrogance is over. Let us learn to sit at the feet of our brothers and sisters and learn from them.

Some have said that the church in the West is all but doomed to continuing decline into irrelevance and obscurity. Perhaps that is so. It has happened before in church history. But we can heed the admonition of the preacher: “Do not say, ‘Why were the old days better than these?’ For it is not wise to ask such questions.”[^3] Now is not a time to reminisce and long for the good old days. Nor should we seek our own compelling vision, but we should seek to find God’s vision for our particular churches in our particular contexts, and pursue,

[^3]: Ecclesiastes 7:10.
with prayer and joy and the willingness to suffer, to glorify God in the mission to which he has called us in our time.
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117


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