

The Princeton Theological Review

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MISSION AND ECUMENICS

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Patrick Dunn

Apologia Pro Ecclesia Sua

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A Bastard in the Royal Family: Wither Mission?

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Is God Missionary? Augustine and the Divine Missions

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Paul as Teacher, Mother, Father, and Child:

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Model for Mission to the West

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The Church's Future Witness and the Necessity of a
Dialectical/Historical Self-Appraisal

Cody Lewis Oaks

The Princeton Theological Review is a student-run, semi-annual journal that exists to serve students within the Princeton Theological Seminary body as well as the wider theological community by providing a resource that challenges, informs, and equips them to become more effective and faithful witnesses to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is committed to engaging theological issues in ways that are grounded in Scripture, centered on Jesus Christ, formed by the work of the Holy Spirit, and oriented toward the historic confessions and contemporary reflections of the church.

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PROLEGOMENA

Cambria Janae Kaltwasser

One hundred years ago, Christian delegates representing missionary societies from across the western world convened in Edinburgh to discuss the future of missionary work in the Church. The charge to carry the gospel into the world became the common ground upon which Christians of various traditions united.

It is worth asking, a century later, what has become of this charge and of this unity? Particularly as we look back on the vexed relationship between Church and empire, at a time when many would scrap the missionary paradigm as a holdover from an imperialist Christianity, how ought we as Christians act as faithful interpreters of our own history? More to the point, how do Christians now perceive the Church's responsibility to make disciples of all nations? Finally, and perhaps most centrally, what is the basis of Christian unity, the foundation around which the multiplicity of Christian communities may truthfully be called one?

The voices represented in this issue of the *Princeton Theological Review* stake their claim with the belief that mission, along with the ecumenical dialogue it engenders, is a matter intrinsic to the Church's being, a matter that can no more be swept away than can the Church cease to be the Church.

The issue begins with two reflection essays by Princeton Theological Seminary students pertaining to the relationship between the various limbs of the one body of Christ. The first essay, written by Patrick Dunn, is the winner of our theological reflection contest. Dunn draws upon his own experience as a youth on a short-term mission trip in order to consider the ambiguous consequences of the missionary endeavor for ecumenical engagement. Dunn exposes the clumsy, self-defeating manner in which western mission has often been carried out, while he simultaneously holds forth the grace that covers human feebleness. In "Apologia Pro Ecclesia Sua," Benjamin Heidgerken reflects upon his experience as a Catholic student in an overwhelmingly Protestant environment. Heidgerken challenges both the Seminary and the wider Protestant community to be more thoughtful in how it seeks to engage ecumenical discussion with its Catholic brothers and sisters.

In the following two articles, John Flett and Peter Kline address the current dearth of theological reflection on mission, each underscoring the theological problems exposed by this want of scholarship. Flett highlights the incongruity between statements of the missionary nature of the church and the subordinate position assigned the subject by the theological guild. He locates the problem in the mistaken assumption that mission is a temporary activity, a means and not an end. The theological warrant for mission is not an external command of God confined to this age, but rather, Flett argues, God's own life of self-witness. In "Is

God Missionary? Augustine and the Divine Missions,” Kline argues that the want of a doctrine of mission in contemporary theologies can, at least in part, be traced back to a doctrine of God that locates the divine missions outside of God’s eternal being. Kline looks to Augustine’s *De Trinitate* for a test case, and concludes that, while the language of trinitarian sending is real for God in Augustine’s account, it is only a provisional sending, not one in which men and women are given to participate.

Benjamin Connor focuses his critical lens on the ministry section of an important ecumenical document of the last century, Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry. After summarizing the controversies surrounding this section, Connor critiques the hierarchical understanding of ministry that he finds in the document, arguing that it emphasizes the ministry of the clergy at the expense of “the primary calling of the Christian, the baptismal basis of all Christians to serve as witnesses.”

Joel Estes, in “Paul as Teacher, Mother, Father, and Child,” offers a theological exegesis of 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12 which argues for the centrality of the missionary motivation in Paul’s exhortations to the Thessalonians. Estes asserts that the various metaphors incorporated by Paul in this text draw out the characteristics of genuine Christian witness: incarnational, contextual, humble, and transformational.

In an article entitled “Converting the West,” Jeff DeSurra draws our attention to the mission field of the western hemisphere, often neglected in recent missiology. DeSurra draws upon the theology of Lesslie Newbigin for a viable model for evangelizing the West, one which challenges the western abandonment of teleology and its compartmentalization of public and private spheres. In the final article, Cody Lewis Oakes brings forth the contribution of David Bosch regarding a dialectical appropriation of Christian witness throughout history. Oakes guides the reader through the four historical paradigms of mission identified by Bosch, stressing the need for Christians to critically appropriate the lessons of their history.

As a body, the articles in this issue speak, from various corners of the church and with various interests, to the inescapable charge laid upon the Church to testify to her Lord in all times and places. If it is the case that missionary witness is fundamental to the meaning of Church and to our unity as a body, then it is an issue that concerns the Christian lay person no less than the pastor, the church practitioner no less than the theologian. It is the hope of the editors of the *Princeton Theological Review* that in presenting this issue, we give witness to the author of the Church’s life, her savior, Jesus Christ.

THE PRIEST AND THE PAUPER

Patrick Dunn

If American Christianity was a hotel, then short-term mission trips would be the complimentary shampoo—mildly useful, attractively packaged, impractical, unique but oddly uniform, a mitzvah and a ready-made memory in one. My first such trip as a teenager was filled with other bewildering firsts—my first trip with a church youth group, my first trip outside the country, more than that, the first plane ride I can remember. It was also my first exposure to missions, both as a concept and in its concrete, short-term form, a form which at the time I loved, later loathed, then respected, then again detested, then grudgingly tolerated, and now strangely admire. But this, I promise, is only half about me and my neuroses.

I was an adolescent on the church's fringe when a friend invited me on the trip. My friend, I now suspect, hoped that my part in evangelism might evangelize me, as if the holy water I poured out would accidentally splatter my own sinful head. Our mission took us to the state of Quintana Roo, Mexico. Bordering Belize, Quintana Roo forms the sole of the peninsular boot kicking the Gulf northward. It's a land of famous beaches with pleasantly alliterative names—Cancun, Cozumel, Playa del Carmen—strung like pearls of white sand along the turquoise Caribbean. Not far inland, however, it's a land of dense forests, marshes, and poor villages populated by indigenous Mayans. The centerpiece of our week was three days spent deep in the hinterland, taking with us a sort of holy road show intended to win the lost for Christ. Our specialty was straight pack-the-pews, come-to-Jesus, revival-style evangelism featuring mimed skits on spiritual themes, a film version of Luke's gospel, then a rousing sermon and altar call by a local Presbyterian pastor. My assignment was to haul equipment, much to my dismay; I couldn't even land a role as an extra in the skit.

Our first stop was a dusty village called Tabi. We headed for the town square which, like so many in Mexico, was bordered by an old cathedral looming well above the other buildings. At dusk we began to unload. Curious onlookers gathered and we handed them fliers announcing the evening's event. Once my job was finished I loitered at the edge of the square. Suddenly, the bells high atop the cathedral began to peal. With a grinding creak the massive wooden doors swung open and a young man in a priest's flowing cassock emerged. He began to shout, pointing at townspeople, waving his arms, gesturing towards the dark interior of the cathedral. I knew not a lick of Spanish, but even I understood the priest's agitation. He grabbed the arms of passing villagers, physically dragging them away from the Americans and towards the open door. A few followed, a few laughed in his face, but most politely demurred.

The priest was hanging off the elbow of a weathered old man when he noticed me for the first time. His eyes grew wide. He stopped for a moment and

we stared at each other. There was a trace of fear, a dash of anxiety. He clearly had no affection for me, and I—watching him sling villagers from my path with no less zeal than if I had been the bogeyman on a round of infant-snatching—found it increasingly difficult to wish him the peace of Christ. Confusion reigned. I was surprised, indignant even. Why would a priest interfere in the work of his fellow Christians? I had, after all, been given a sacred mission to load and unload the generator which would power the projector which would show the movie which would preach the gospel which would save the souls of his people. Who was this priest to stifle me, the hands of God? At least so said my self-righteousness, a feeling all the more ironic since I couldn't have clearly articulated the Christian message if you had spotted me the Old Testament. Beyond indignation, though, there was sadness, a vague feeling of betrayal, not by the priest, but by my own leaders. Why was I here if I wasn't wanted, doing a thing that didn't need doing? Neither of us knew what to say, so we stood there, each a foreigner to the other in every sense. The priest continued on his mission, to save his people from our mission, which was to save them. He failed; the crowd grew ever larger. The novelty was too much.

Once the show began the villagers stood in a large semi-circle just beyond the arc of the stage glow. The priest mingled with the edges of the crowd, tugging at shirt-sleeves and whispering in ears, waving his hands toward the cathedral. When the Mexican pastor traveling with us spoke of his own faith, the priest threw up his arms, sighed audibly, and retreated. At the altar call townspeople stepped forward to make a confession of faith, perhaps for the first time ever, perhaps for the first time since that morning's mass. Some wept, some hugged their children closely. Deep in the shadows, the young priest leaned against the doorway of his church and tapped his foot. When the evening was over and the emotions were spent, the villagers filed out of the square. They passed silently between me and the priest, between the spectacle and the commonplace, between the boy they would never see again and the young man they would see each day until he anointed their dying breath.

That moment sticks in my mind—two brothers in Christ, clearly working at cross purposes. For years I puzzled over some variation of the same question: who was in the wrong? Here's a hint: there's no way to really know; I was privy neither to my leaders' plans nor the priest's motives. Either way, there is grace. Grace for me and my ilk—the cross-contextually clumsy. Grace for the priest, for the reflex of suspicion and territoriality. But grace doesn't excuse us from deep thought. I worry over insensitivity and arrogance. I worry that my zeal was too zealous. I worry that wanting to save the world is my unforgiveable sin. I worry, and rightly so, for what good is a mission born of love if it leaves others feeling less loved than trampled? We are not, simply by virtue of the mission, always on the side of angels. The best of intentions don't excuse the sloppiest of methods.

There is a cost, though, to our theological modesty. Fear sits on one shoulder, humility on the other, and both whisper grim warnings of pride before the fall. Lower expectations become both the standard and the mantra. We go forth, but with a secret, silent pessimism. We take up missions, but set our sights not on

demonstrations of the Spirit and of power, but on simple acts of decency—a few shoulders squeezed, a few walls patched, a few children’s faces painted—a batch of pre-framed and pocket-sized photo ops. We support existing Christian communities—a noble, necessary effort—without recognizing that there would be no Christians to support but for missionaries who stepped brazenly over cultural boundaries. We move, but glacially, imperceptibly, tip-toeing with abashed self-awareness. We—dare I say it—quench the Spirit.

What becomes of evangelistic fervor? The zeal, by itself, is not the problem. The question is, zeal for what? Sharing a love, I hope, that is larger than we imagine. A love that sacrifices everything: not only safety and comfort and fear and pride, but—perhaps hardest of all—our overbearing assurance that whatever we’re doing is best. Methods and intentions and effects, both seen and unseen, are tricky things. There comes a time when the path is obscure and we hope in nothing more than the purity of love and the hand of heaven.

In the last ten years I’ve returned to the Yucatan several times for various reasons and for longer stays. I’ve daydreamed about visiting Tabi. I imagine finding that village priest and stopping to shake his hand, to sit down, to tell my story, perhaps to apologize. But I haven’t had the courage. I don’t know what he would say. Perhaps, on that night, the young priest was an obstacle to God’s work, a blind guide. Perhaps. Though I’m sure that’s not what he intended, not what he meant when he took his vows. And perhaps I was a tool of cultural imperialism at its worst, though I’m quite certain that’s not how I phrased it in my fund-raising letter. I believe God made something good for the village out of our visit, but that fact alone doesn’t weigh heavily in the balance. I believe in a God who makes good out of so many things, some beautiful, some ugly, and some a tangled mix. There was something right in my comrades and something right in the priest. There was zeal, there was fervent passion in both, really the same passion for the church directed against itself, like two facing mirrors poking endless hallways in the world—each seeing the illusion of forward progress. It surely could have been different. There’s something right about stopping, about listening, about taking the time to find ecumenical agreement. It’s not easy to have both, though—the passion and the circumspection. It’s not easy to run fast while watching out for every bare toe.

Patrick Dunn is a junior in the MDiv program at Princeton Theological Seminary.

APOLOGIA PRO ECCLESIA SUA

Benjamin Heidgerken

When I received my seminary email address as a newly admitted Princeton Theological Seminary student, one of the very first emails I received from the administration—one that was addressed to all PTS accounts—was titled “Vatican statement on the status of Reformed Churches.”¹ The email was my first experience of the relationship between Catholicism and the Seminary, and as a Roman Catholic I remember being initially defensive. Since that email from the Seminary was formative of my perception of ecumenism both locally and conceptually, I would first like to respond to it by defending the Roman Catholic Church’s commitment to ecumenism. I will then reflect more directly on my experience of ecumenism at Princeton Theological Seminary.

In *Lumen Gentium*, the dogmatic constitution on the Church from the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), a new way of formulating the relationship between the visible Roman Catholic Church and the invisible, mystical Body of Christ was established. Where previous formulations had always directly equated the two (“the Mystical Body of Christ … is the [Catholic] Church”²), *Lumen Gentium* stated that “the Church of Jesus Christ subsists in the Catholic Church.”³ Given the options the council was considering, this phrasing was ecumenically promising, while at the same time avoiding contradiction of the previous formulations. It acknowledged the movement of the Holy Spirit outside the visible bonds of the Catholic Church and accepted that salvation can occur through those ecclesial elements (while still properly belonging to the Catholic Church) present in non-Catholic churches and ecclesial communities.

This formula was interpreted in various ways in the post-conciliar period, and in 2007 the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) responded to what it felt were interpretations that had strayed from the intention of the Council. Though decidedly undiplomatic, this response⁴ was meant as a reminder to Catholics concerning the use of the term “church” in the documents of Vatican II. For Catholics, a valid episcopate and Eucharistic celebration are integral to the understanding of what constitutes a formal “church.” And since those elements are not recognized by Vatican II in most Protestant communions,⁵ the CDF document

1 Email sent Tuesday, July 10, 2007.

2 Pope Leo XII, *Mystici Corporis*, §1 (emphasis added). (Citations of official Church documents are by Latin title and paragraph number here and following.)

3 *Lumen Gentium*, §8 (emphasis added).

4 The rather lengthy title was “Responses to Some Questions Regarding Certain Aspects of the Doctrine on the Church.”

5 *Unitatis Redintegratio*, §22.

made a clear differentiation between churches proper on the one hand (mainly the Eastern Orthodox national churches) and ecclesial communities on the other (the churches of the Reformation).

This is where the above-mentioned PTS email entered the conversation. In response to the CDF document, the email included a letter from the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) addressed to Walter Kasper (the head of the ecumenism council at the Vatican). This letter stated that the CDF document was an ecumenical step backward because of its “exclusive claim that identifies the Roman Catholic Church as the one church of Jesus Christ.” That is, the WARC feared that the Catholic Church had “regressed” back into thinking itself identical with the Mystical Body of Christ. Despite whatever evidence there may be for this opinion, I would argue on the contrary that the CDF document of 2007 made no substantial change to the Catholic position from Vatican II. *Unitatis Redintegratio* (*UR*), Vatican II’s document on ecumenism, already used the terms “ecclesial community” and “church” in the way the CDF document prescribes. §22 of *UR* includes in the properties of “ecclesial communities” (and *not* “churches”) a lack of valid orders and Eucharistic celebration. Thus, it can be deduced that any Christian body lacking these elements is not a proper “church,” even within the documents of Vatican II. This fact should not be offensive to Protestants, because most Protestants do not want the episcopacy in the Catholic sense, and thereby do not *want* to be “church” in the way Catholic documents define it.⁶ I find the WARC response to be insufficient in that regard, because what it wants is for the Vatican to change its definition of “church,” but what it asks for is totally different, namely that the Vatican should acknowledge them as “church” in the current Catholic sense.

The skepticism and mistrust of the WARC statement was, I believe, just one way of stating a fundamental misgiving that Protestants often have regarding Catholic ecumenism: “Is real dialogue possible for a church and with a church which claims to have the absolute truth in an infallible way?”⁷ On this question there is bound to be disagreement, but I, with Cardinal Kasper, think there is ground for a positive answer. While Rome cannot accept the common implications of the Reformation concept of *ecclesia semper reformanda*, *Lumen Gentium* does affirm the Catholic Church as “*ecclesia semper purificanda*,”⁸ which in turn corresponds to the idea of doctrinal development put forward by John Henry Newman. Christ’s inner truth is consistent and unchanging, and thus the Catholic Church—whom Christ promises will be led into all truth (John 16:13)—does not and cannot contradict itself. But the Church can approach the truth in new ways

⁶ For Cardinal Kasper’s agreement with this assessment, see Walter Kasper, “Communio: The Guiding Concept,” in *That They May All Be One* (New York: Burns and Oates, 2004), 66.

⁷ Walter Kasper, “The Nature and Purpose of Ecumenical Dialogue” in *That They May All Be One* (New York: Burns and Oates, 2004), 34.

⁸ *Lumen Gentium*, §8. “The Church … [is] always in need of being purified.”

in new ages,⁹ so that real development and progress in truth can be made. The mission of the Catholic Church exists in this liminal space between its exclusive truth claims and its inclusive call to purification. Both aspects are necessary parts of this mission; its purification does not call into question its uniqueness, and its uniqueness does not call into question its purification. While the Protestant traditions should not expect to disabuse the Catholic Church of these claims of uniqueness, the ecumenical task survives in a mutually-held commitment to the purification of the Church of Christ. Thus, Protestant traditions can and should hope to contribute something positive and necessary to the mission of the Catholic Church. And in this way I believe true ecumenical dialogue to be possible for and with the Catholic Church. Ecumenism, understood as a communal seeking after truth, plays a vital role in the Church's ongoing purification, a purification that cannot be undermined by a poorly timed and undiplomatic document from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

This defense of modern Catholic ecumenism aside, I feel I must turn to a more critical and perhaps controversial question concerning Princeton Theological Seminary's own commitment to ecumenism. On the one hand, PTS is a Presbyterian seminary with the primary goal of training ministers for service to the church, particularly the Presbyterian Church, and to the world. It will therefore continue to attract and recruit a preponderance of Presbyterian and Protestant students. This is a legitimate and central part of PTS's mission. On the other hand, PTS purports to be an institution that "embraces in its life and work ... the breadth of communions represented in the worldwide church."¹⁰ Ostensibly, however, I would argue that PTS only embraces the breadth of *Protestant* communions in the church. While Catholics and Orthodox students undoubtedly will and should remain a minority, the fact that most recent M.Div. classes have not included a single practicing Roman Catholic is *not*, I believe, in line with the school's mission. The question that I do not believe the Seminary to have answered adequately is whether a good Protestant seminary must necessarily view Catholicism as a religious outsider, as "Other." While Protestant seminaries historically may have defined themselves in part by their protest of Catholicism, should such an implicit standard still apply to PTS today? I believe that any ecumenical Protestant seminary that is willing to affirm such a standard will undoubtedly suffer from a parochialism that hinders its call to Christian unity and its witness to the gospel.

Ideally, in my mind, Catholicism and Orthodoxy should be treated as any other minority group at PTS; it should be the seminary's task *actively* to seek out a contingent from these groups in its admissions decisions, and to encourage their full participation in this community. To be sure, there are other minority groups on campus whose voice is not equally represented. Their increased participation in the community is integral to the mission of the school, and the administration should continue its hard work for the inclusion of these groups. But I perceive that

⁹ See, for instance, Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Truth is Symphonic: Aspects of Christian Pluralism*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987).

¹⁰ From Princeton Theological Seminary's Mission Statement.

no such effort is being made to address the under-representation of non-Protestant students. Roman Catholicism in particular is an elephant in the room whose continued neglect comes precisely from its relative majority status everywhere else. I perceive – and have reason to believe¹¹ – that discrimination against Catholic applicants is seen as acceptable by many individuals at PTS, including some in the administration.

Against such an attitude, I would propose that training Catholic and Orthodox students should be an intrinsic part of PTS's mission, both in view of a sufficiently robust understanding of ministry and in view of the demographics of the worldwide church into which PTS seminarians are preparing to enter. First, to persist in thinking that an ecumenical Protestant seminary can in good conscience largely ignore Romans and Orthodox is to greatly limit the full range of the idea of ministry to and for the church. Even though an Orthodox or Catholic student most likely cannot come to PTS to fulfill requirements for denominational ordination, ministry is much bigger than ordination. To attract and embrace future ministers and leaders in the non-Reformation communions will in the long term create a sympathetic audience who can speak the languages of Protestantism to and within non-Reformation communities. Breaking these theological language barriers in service of truth is in many ways one of the most important keys to the success of the ecumenical movement.

Second, and more immediately, such discrimination against non-Reformation candidates does an intolerable disservice to those Protestant candidates who expect from PTS a training for leadership in the worldwide church. In these formative years, this training simply cannot succeed without lived engagement with the largest Christian communion in the world. To say that engagement with that Church can wait because it will occur in the lived ministry context is not only untrue in many cases, but it also fails to prepare ministers for these encounters in a principled way.¹² Unless PTS is willing to form its identity around protest rather than Christ, Catholic students must be part of this seminary's community.

While the above is obviously critical, I do not mean to be pessimistic. On the contrary, I care about PTS and hope that it will flourish. I have embraced this seminary and have found a great deal worthy of admiration. I find the dire prognostication of some Roman Catholics concerning the mainline to be fundamentally flawed.¹³ In part, my confidence for the future of the Protestant churches is based on the very existence of such well-respected and well-endowed institutions as PTS. And with pastors-in-training the like of which I have met here,

11 Due to the conversational and therefore semi-confidential basis for this belief, I cannot elaborate here.

12 Recently, I attended a gathering at PTS where someone in the audience (not a student) made the claim that the Roman Catholic Church proclaims a false gospel and that its members cannot be considered true Christians. The situation was resolved admirably, but the fact is that there are still ministers telling their congregations such (if I may) falsehoods.

13 See “The Death of Protestant America” by Joseph Bottum in *First Things*, August/September 2008. The title says it all.

these churches undoubtedly have a future. Fundamentally and most importantly, though, the mainline denominations will survive because the agendas of the Reformation were intrinsically valuable for the life of the Church (while perhaps, from a Catholic perspective, one-sided). Its theological legacy is and will continue to be its most valuable and most lasting contribution to Christianity. It is in this legacy, and in Christ its source, that I place my hope for PTS.

The last three years have taught me that it is part of my duty as a Roman Catholic, and hopefully someday as a Catholic scholar, to understand Protestant theology correctly and to present it accurately within my own communion. Other than my call to humility in a careful examination of conscience, right understanding of my Protestant sisters and brothers is the most important ecumenical task I can imagine. It is my hope that these two calls, humility and commitment to truth, are reciprocally felt by students at Princeton Theological Seminary and by Christians everywhere. Whether the concrete demographics of PTS come to change or not, keeping these duties close at heart is the bulwark and foundation of ecumenism and, I daresay, an intrinsic part of the great commission of the Church. I remain indebted to this institution for showing me Christ, teaching me about His Church, and welcoming me fully into its conversation and community. At this deeply personal level, I have found ecumenism at Princeton Theological Seminary to be alive and well. My final prayer for this community is the same as that of Christ, that we may all someday be one.

Benjamin Heidgerken is a senior in the MDiv program at Princeton Theological Seminary. This fall he will begin study in the Theology PhD program at the University of Dayton.

A BASTARD IN THE ROYAL FAMILY: WITHER MISSION?

John G. Flett

One is witnessing, in this year of the centennial anniversary of the World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh, Scotland, a proliferation of publications and events dealing with the question of mission and church. Such topical developments are nothing to scoff at—one should not crush the bruised reed. Yet, the need to have a centenary celebration to prompt the discussion is perhaps indicative of the actual state of the question. Mission is like a royal bastard. As the oldest heir, the result of youthful eschatological passions, there is an acknowledged claim to succession, but one actioned only should circumstances surrounding continuity become sufficiently dire. Until then, mission is hidden away, tolerated in the courts on the proviso that it does not make itself embarrassingly noticeable to visitors or interrupt the flow of commerce by posing unsolicited questions. An uncomfortable image perhaps, but only for its public articulation.

It is an ecumenical aphorism that the “church is missionary by its very nature.” Like observations can be found at Edinburgh 1910. In response to a comment that it is the church which should itself be the missionary society, W. H. T. Gairdner noted that “it is, indeed, a sign of an unnatural state of things that it should be called an ‘ideal’ at all: in the very nature of the case, it should be an essential part not of the ideal but of the actual definition of the Church.”¹ Many grandiose theological claims have followed this initial statement. Take, for example, the oft cited *Ad Gentes* 2: “The Church on earth is by its very nature missionary since, according to the plan of the Father, it has its origin in the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit.”² Such claims, however, wait wider theological integration. Mission fails to appear even as an index entry in the vast majority of theological texts—including those dealing with the Spirit and the resurrection. The popular dominance of anachronistic definitions precludes such. Mission is simply the act of sending specially called individuals to the non-West for the purposes of social development or religious proselytism.

The sterility of the Christian faith within the West and its Southern fertility may indicate sufficient circumstance for some broad-spectrum reengagement with the hidden heir. But, as an area of theological reflection the subject remains

1 W. H. T. Gairdner, *Echoes from Edinburgh, 1910: An Account and Interpretation of the World Missionary Conference* (New York, NY: Fleming H. Revell, 1910), 240-1.

2 Austin Flannery, *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, rev. ed., vol. 1 (Northport, NY: Costello, 1996), 814.

of peripheral interest within the western church – even within those churches claiming friendship with mission. The bastard is ignored. Let us examine the legitimacy of mission's pretensions to the kingly office.

ON THE INSTITUTIONAL ABSENCE OF MISSION

While the church may be missionary at an institutional level, theological faculties are unmoved by such a claim. Since the 1960s, many mission chairs have been pruned, or, better, reassigned. Some of this can be attributed to the acknowledged relationship between contemporary mission movement and colonialism. To quote David Bosch, “colonialism and mission, as a matter of course, were interdependent; the right to have colonies carried with it the duty to Christianize the colonialized.”³ The colonial stain, its injustices and consignment to a particular period of time, tarnishes mission. Mission history with its oft-noted tragic and deplorable flaws seemingly ratifies such conclusions. Balanced histories exist that undo the oft-wholesale negative judgments, but it is the ideological and politically charged ones which inform popular imagination.⁴ This history, in turn, determines mission's *theological* status. As an act of cultural bigotry, it is unwarranted by the measure of contemporary sensibilities. Jürgen Moltmann supplied an example of the resulting institutional decision-making during his tenure at Tübingen. When it came time to appoint a new chair of mission studies,

3 David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis 1991), 227.

4 See here, by way of example, the fine work by Andrew N. Porter, *Religion versus Empire?: British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004). To give a concrete illustration of the problem, however, see Nosipho Majeke's 1952 work *The Role of Missionaries in Conquest*. Majeke held that “we would have a false perspective if we accepted these grandiloquent aims at their face value and assume that there was some mysterious milk of human kindness animating the hearts of the English.” Mission proceeds instead “from a capitalist Christian civilization and unblushingly found religious sanctions for inequality, as it does to this day, and whose ministers solemnly blessed its wars of aggression.” As Hexham suggests, this work “gained credence because it was believed to be authored by a Black South African who was ‘writing back’ against colonial domination,” and was “taken very seriously because it was believed to reflect a genuinely Black viewpoint.” The problem is that “Nopisho Majeke” was a pseudonym for Dora Taylor, the English wife of an economics lecturer at the University of Cape Town. Her position represented a Marxist perspective on missions. There is even some suggestion that the work might have been influenced by the Nationalist Government. Missionary interference on behalf of the local population was proving a nuisance. The easiest way to remove mission influence from an area is not a direct attack, but to deride it in the sending countries so that local support, including funding, is pulled. This work has influenced even missiologists and continues to be employed in, for example, the influential anthropological text by Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991). See, Irving Hexham, “Violating Missionary Culture: The Tyranny of Theory and the Ethics of Historical Research,” in *Mission und Gewalt*, ed. Ulrich van der Heyden, Jürgen Becher, and Holger Stoecker (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2000), 195-96.

members of the wider Tübingen faculty objected that “mission was no longer in keeping with the times.”⁵ This chair, it was proposed, should either be renamed the chair for the study of Christian dialogue or shifted to the religious studies department.

While this question proved tumultuous at Tübingen, it is a now commonplace linguistic shift even within evangelical institutions. Mission becomes “third-world theology,” or popularly “world Christianity.” Already in 1982, David Bosch foresaw and lamented this move.⁶ In Europe, the current nomenclature is “intercultural theology.”⁷ The solitary mission chair, in other words, serves as a way of meeting the interreligious studies component, the world Christianity vision, the practical mission application, and racial diversity intent. This is not to disparage any of these motives; each is important as the theological guild comes to grips with the contemporary shape of its constituency. At issue is how three or four faculty needs consolidate into a single chair. With “theology” covered elsewhere, capacity for theological development in the field of missions becomes an ancillary requirement. Consigned to the periphery, mission theology lives there, bearing all the characteristics of fringe thinking and activist behavior for which it is then castigated.

While there are contributing “structural problems” in the field, one can attribute this languid capacity to extinguish mission studies from faculty and curricula to the general absence of the subject within the wider theological tradition.⁸ As an act, in various forms and to a greater or lesser degree, evangelistic missions have occurred throughout church history. It never emerged as a matter of theological reflection, however, until the mid-nineteenth century. Even then, the theology was more a practical outworking of “deeper” theological themes, than itself of material interest when formulating doctrines of the Trinity, the Spirit, or “the apostle” (Heb. 3:1) Jesus Christ. The theological determination of the missionary question, in other words, stems from the received shape of the standard theological corpus. One finds no overt mission focus in Aquinas, Calvin, or Schleiermacher. One must instead draw implications from or apply their insights to the missionary task. Mission is one step removed, a practical application. It is not really basic to the theological corpus. One can lose mission without compromising the core endeavor, or so it would seem.

5 Jürgen Moltmann, *God for a Secular Society: The Public Relevance of Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1999), 227.

6 David J. Bosch, “Theological Education in Missionary Perspective,” *Missionology* 10, no. 1 (1982): 13-34.

7 Walter J. Hollenweger, “Intercultural Theology,” *Theology Today* 43, no. 1 (1986): 28-35. On the proposed normalizing of this nomenclature with some reaction, see, “Mission Studies as Intercultural Theology and Its Relationship to Religious Studies,” *Mission Studies* 25, no. 1 (2008).

8 Andrew F. Walls, “Structural Problems in Missionary Studies,” in *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), 158-59.

ON THE CORRUPTION OF THE CHURCH

This is not an apology for missions—it is an apology for the church, and by extension, for theological method. Mission’s divorce from the life of the community means that, as Bishop Lesslie Newbigin suggests, “we have corrupted the word ‘Church’ (and distorted the life of the churches) by constantly using it in a non-missionary sense.”⁹ This is a large claim. It suggests that without proper account of its missionary nature, theological treatments of the church, in its sacramental, ministerial, and liturgical facets, are deeply flawed. Since few treatments of the church even broach the topic, it would follow that most fail at a most basic level. If the church is missionary by its very nature, it follows that the consequences of mission’s absence would be decisive.

Such a claim may seem preposterous except for one thing: the modern missionary movement developed outside the institutional church, even to the point of meeting entrenched resistance from that body. To quote Walls, “it suddenly became clear that there were things – and not small things, but big things, things like the evangelization of the world – which were beyond the capacities of these splendid systems of gospel truth.”¹⁰ On the face of it, this seems a rather simple observation. Are we not to be Jesus’ witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth? Is this act not contingent upon and thus reflective of the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8)? A failure to permit structures of missionary witness within the institutions of the church—the community of the Word and the Spirit—would indicate a basic problem within a theological system. One is met with great opposition, however, when venturing that Luther’s or Calvin’s theology of the word is incomplete if judged by the development of mission within those traditions bearing their names. Absurd! Even should one note with Bosch that a 1652 statement released by the Lutheran theological faculty in Wittenberg denied the missionary responsibility of the church on biblical, historical and theological grounds, this is not understood as impinging upon the core of Luther’s thinking.¹¹ Needless to say, this common defensive reaction is a result of an insufficient missionary sentiment, a static appropriation of tradition and its related promulgation through the self-confirming repetition of historic images. Undermine the coherence of that image and one denudes the integrity of its replication, leading to accusations of syncretism and unbelief—betrayal. The absence of mission has become theologically inviolate: that is, one cannot accord mission some form of central theological status without submitting the wider tradition to critical investigation.

It is sometimes the case that the absence of mission from traditional theological texts is defended on the grounds that mission is a command, that the missionary spirit has been carried by texts like the so-called “Great Commission”

9 J. E. Lesslie Newbigin, *One Body, One Gospel, One World: The Christian Mission Today* (London: International Missionary Council, 1958), 42.

10 Andrew F. Walls, “Missionary Societies and the Fortunate Subversion of the Church,” in *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), 247.

11 Bosch, “Theological Education in Missionary Perspective,” 16.

of Matthew 28. This, it is often assumed, had a permanent standing through church history.¹² The related claim is that the mere presence of this act, the resistance of the established church notwithstanding, offsets the theological absence. It may surprise some to realize that Matthew 28 was not accorded a missionary status until 1792 as a result of William Carey's *Enquiry*.¹³ Here he had to argue, against the prevailing assumption, that the missionary command was not limited to the Apostles, a position expounded by the Reformers.

As an aside, Carey's successes did not come without cost. Though recent developments toward a "missional hermeneutic" offers some hope, it remains a common expectation that a proper New Testament motivation for mission rests in identifying overt commands.¹⁴ Without a clearly delineated "thou shalt, as a congregation, engage in evangelistic mission," by each of the New Testament writers in turn, the act is itself called into question. As to texts like the "primal missionary's"¹⁵ instruction to "take up your cross" (Luke 9:23), with the warning against being ashamed of Jesus and his words (v.26), it is quite permissible to read this in a non-missionary fashion – even as it is bracketed by the sending of the 12 and then the 72.

INSTITUTIONALIZATION AND THE FEAR OF FREE SOCIETY

The central contention is simple: the paucity of attention to mission is an indication of a deficiency within the theological tradition itself, one with deleterious consequences when formulating the institutions of the church and the concomitant mission method. To continue with Newbigin, theological definitions that omit mission involve "a radical contradiction of the truth of the Church's being" and "no recovery of the true wholeness of the Church's nature is possible without a recovery of its radically missionary character."¹⁶ The past hundred years have taught us that this is not so easily achieved as drawing missions into church. The insufficiency of theological resources has promoted deficient mission theologies. Mission, finding itself confined to an ecclesiological annex, treats its illegitimacy as a virtue and fears reintegration with the wider community. The community of the church, by extension, is viewed simply as a support system for

12 See, for example, the treatment by Paul M. Collins, "Ecclesiology and World Mission/*Missio Dei*," in *The Routledge Companion to the Christian Church*, ed. Gerard Mannion and Lewis Seymour Mudge (London: Routledge, 2008), 624.

13 William Carey, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians, to use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens, in which the Religious State of the Different Nations of the World, the Success of Former Undertakings, and the Practicability of Further Undertakings, are Considered* (Leicester: Ann Ireland, 1792).

14 See, Kent L. Yinger, "Paul and Evangelism: A Missiological Challenge from New Testament Specialists," *Missionology* 37, no. 3 (2009): 385-97.

15 Martin Hengel, "The Origins of the Christian Mission," in *Between Jesus and Paul: Studies in the Earliest History of Christianity* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1983), 63.

16 J. E. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household of God: Lectures on the Nature of the Church* (London: SCM, 1953), 147.

its agenda. Mission theorists themselves, in other words, accept and propound as normative many of the above-mentioned foibles.

Our “life in Christ,” Newbigin maintains, “is not merely the instrument of the apostolic mission,” it is equally the “eschatological end and purpose of reconciliation.”¹⁷ Instrumental approaches to the community of the church are one clear result of an inadequate mission theology. But can mission be understood as the eschatological end and purpose of creation? It is on this constructive question that matters run aground. Every tradition falls prey to the dichotomy of church and mission for this single reason: mission, it is assumed, is a temporary act undertaken in relation to the contingency of sin and subject to terminus in the final judgment. The church, the community of worship, by comparison, waits in hope for its final redemption, for the fulfillment of the Lord’s Supper in the wedding feast of the Lamb. This position is held as much by missiologists as it is by dogmaticians. To cite one dominant example:

Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn’t. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over, and the countless missions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever.¹⁸

Coming from the pen of John Piper, this position obtains the full force of an evangelical imprimatur. These origins indicate its importance, for it constitutes the rationale in a community that considers mission basic to its character.

Nor should one interpret the popularist tone of Piper’s position as lacking in theological sophistication. One might quote Moltmann in confirmation. While the three marks of one, holy, and catholic, will “continue in eternity, and are also the characteristics of the church when it is glorified in the kingdom, the apostolic mission will come to an end when it is fulfilled.”¹⁹ More specifically, oneness, holiness and catholicity “are designations of the kingdom and are transferred to the people of the kingdom,” for they “describe the one, all-embracing and holy kingdom of God.”²⁰ Apostolicity, by contrast, though it is valorized as the mark of the church’s “messianic mission in the name of Christ for the coming kingdom,” remains a “provisional” act.²¹ It is “not an eschatological term, but a term related to the *eschaton*, because it is not a characteristic of the *eschaton* itself.”²² The cleft here between mission and church is one of time and eternity. The marks one, holy and catholic, are eternal characteristics of redeemed humanity. Apostolicity is temporal, and its missionary charge consists of introducing people to this

17 Newbigin, *Household of God*, 148.

18 John Piper, *Let the Nations be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 17.

19 Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1993), 357.

20 Ibid., 357, 358.

21 Ibid., 357.

22 Ibid., 357.

non-missionary reality of the new creation. The bastard, being part of princely bachelorhood, is not welcome at the wedding feast of the king. It is perhaps indicative of the gravity of the problem that the “theologian of hope” should fail at this point.

Piper’s pithy summary underlies the reception of mission within the theological guild. This logic reinforces sacramental views of the church to the neglect of mission as much as it promotes functionalist ecclesiologies. It is at the point of what this means in relation to the evangelistic act that the parties diverge. If mission is simply a temporal contingency and not itself part of the new creation, then a real problem develops in motivating Christians to engage in mission. The actual nature of their faith lies elsewhere, with the result that worship, the beating heart of the Christian community, is defined in a non-missionary fashion. The dominant method for missionary motivation places mission outside the church with the result that we seek biblical admonitions in confirmation of this externality. Piper is clear: mission is not ultimate because it pertains to the human. Mission occurs because of the world’s need. The unbalanced position of superiority it creates is historically demonstrable. Space develops for missionary practice by divorcing it from the life of the congregation: a practical task undertaken by elites with special callings. Questioning this motivation, however, amounts to a destruction of the missionary act – no other motivation appears forthcoming. There is justice in this fear. With the essence of the church otherwise defined (the ever increasing infatuation in American evangelicalism with sacramental understandings of the church is quite understandable from this perspective), making mission part of the church has meant the ending of mission.

THE CONSUMMATION OF MISSION AND THE BY-PASS OF THE CHURCH

This is the base tone: mission and church are assumed to relate as sin to holiness. Romantic attempts at rapprochement drown in this rip. Edinburgh 1910 stood at the end of that great eschatological impulse characteristic of 19th century missions. It is this impulse which nurtured the drive to unity. Eschatology, mission and unity belonged together. Yet, as unity consolidated into a set ecclesial task, for Bert Hoedemaker, it received “a definite church focus that eventually led to a certain loss of eschatological vision.”²³ A strange dichotomy emerges between the missionary eschatology of the New Testament and the nature of the church, tied to the so-called “delay of the parousia.”

To quote Robert Jenson, “God institutes the church by *not* letting Jesus’ resurrection be itself the End, by appointing ‘the delay of the Parousia’.”²⁴ This “eschatological *detour*” consolidates the eschatological missionary spirit into the church, and especially into the Eucharist.²⁵ The bastard was of value until the prince

²³ L. A. Hoedemaker, “Mission, Unity and Eschaton: A Triadic Relation,” *Reformed World* 50, no. 4 (2000): 175.

²⁴ Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology: The Works of God*, 2 vols., vol. 2 (New York, NY: Oxford University, 1999), 170.

²⁵ Jenson, *Systematic Theology: The Works of God*, 171.

settled down in his marriage and produced legitimate offspring. Recognizing this helps explain how authors can admit the missionary impetus of the early church, while positing the established church in an entirely contrary fashion.²⁶ Mission becomes a provisional and relative entity in relation to the established church.

With this dichotomy, it becomes unclear what it might mean for the church to be “missionary by nature.” That is, the term “mission” does not inform, but becomes defined by, the given practices of the church with their already rich and inviolate non-missionary liturgies. It becomes possible—indeed, normative—to define this community, following Miroslav Wolf, by focusing “mainly inside, at the inner nature of the church,” while sidelining “the outside world and the church’s mission” to one’s “peripheral vision.”²⁷ There is an important, albeit partial, truth here. The improper separation of church from mission renders a communal account of mission imperative. Mission is not simply a contingent response to sin, as though the incarnation were an act forced upon God and so one that betrays his being. A theological definition of mission must derive from the nature of the gospel itself. This does not occur; the breach between mission and church is entrenched. While one does find ecumenical affirmations of the church’s missionary nature, their effect, to continue with Hoedemaker, is not to “link the church more strongly to the legacy of the missionary movement, but rather to give theological legitimization to the ecumenical emphasis on the church.”²⁸ Mission does not define church, church consumes mission.

The evangelical reaction to this variety of positions focused on the neglect of intentional evangelistic activity. Unfortunately, the proposed solution amounted to a jettisoning of the theological developments in favor of a seeming return to 19th century motivations and strategies. The general dissatisfaction is well illustrated by an article from Donald McGavran titled, “Will Uppsala Betray the Two Billion?”²⁹ Referring to the 4th World Council of Churches assembly held in Uppsala, Sweden, in 1968, McGavran feared the forsaking of evangelistic missions for an emphasis on social justice. Though the period had witnessed a proliferation in the language of mission, “its meaning is *nowhere* that of communicating the good news of Jesus Christ to unbelieving men in order that they might believe and live.”³⁰ Many of the theological developments, such as describing God as “missionary,” were nothing but a “pious fraud,” and “during the last twenty years, a new theology has been forged which apparently intends to

26 One can refer here to Jaroslav Pelikan’s commentary on the book of Acts, which interprets the text through the lens of early church orthodoxy to the total neglect of mission. Church has replaced mission and determines the subsequent reading of scripture. Jaroslav Pelikan, *Acts*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2005).

27 Wolf, *After Our Likeness*, 7.

28 Hoedemaker, “Mission, Unity and Eschaton: A Triadic Relation,” 176.

29 Donald A. McGavran, “Will Uppsala Betray the Two Billion?,” in *The Conciliar-Evangelical Debate: The Crucial Documents, 1964-1976*, ed. Donald A. McGavran (South Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1977), 233-41.

30 McGavran, “Will Uppsala Betray the Two Billion?,” 235.

have no place for mission from the Church in one land to non-Christians in other lands.”³¹ This judgment receives clear attribution. “Scarcely has mission appeared to be the business of the whole Church, than the Church has begun to subvert the mission to her own service.”³² The problem is the church and its non-missionary character. Instead of issuing a lament, however, McGavarn understands this to be normative. “Throughout history, the mission of the Church to non-Christians in other lands has been carried forward by companies of the concerned, not by the whole Church.”³³ Mission is properly a designated function of the church, for the church community is not sufficient to the task. This approach, ironically, while it seeks to affirm the missionary task, actually denudes it by rendering it unnecessary to—i.e., beyond—the life of the church.

THE END OF WORSHIP

Piper is correct that worship is basic. The problem is, the dichotomy of mission from church distorts theological definitions of worship and the accompanying liturgies. Mission, its motivation, method and end, emerges as the culmination of a whole theological system. Bosch illustrates this point by examining the mission methods that result from differing understandings of the nature of salvation.³⁴ Because mission is properly a central part of the theological system, its absence unbalances the whole, producing certain ecclesiological inflations by way of compensation.

For example, Piper observes that “what we find in the New Testament is an utterly stunning degree of indifference to worship as an outward form and an utterly radical intensification of worship as an inward experience of the heart.”³⁵ There is a vital point here. As there is no normative form of Christian culture, so every culture can speak the name of the Lord in its own language. This is basic to the missionary character of the gospel. The misstep Piper makes is with the binary correlation of outward and inward. Affirming the incarnation does not lead to the abrogation of form.³⁶ God’s universality is in and through particularity, through election. Externality is not something with which the church is “laden.”³⁷ Christian faith demands cultural conversion and expression. This is the very power of the gospel.

Inward piety is *never* without a whole range of linguistic, ritualistic, communal, hermeneutical structures that underlie its very possibility. To claim such is to leave that external form unexamined and tacitly propounded as

31 Ibid., 238.

32 Ibid., 240.

33 Ibid., 240.

34 David J. Bosch, “Salvation: A Missiological Perspective,” *Ex Auditu* 5 (1989): 139-57.

35 Piper, *Let the Nations be Glad!*, 215-15.

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

37 Piper, *Let the Nations be Glad!*, 215.

normative. As readily indicated by mission history, “inward worship” expects a great deal of external form. Piper’s equation of this principle with the “Reformed and Puritan impulse” serves as one illustration. For a second, refer to the number of evangelical missionaries who are active in seeking to convert Russian Orthodox or Polish Catholic, or who even use cash incentives to get congregations to shift denominational affiliation, as is occurring in Myanmar and India. There is, to be sure, a great deal of nominalism that needs to be addressed (as there is within “believer’s church” evangelicalism), but there are also forms of spirituality that are not accepted as such due to their not appearing sufficiently “inward.” Evangelicalism is notoriously judgmental on this score.

Barth characterizes this definition of worship and the Christian end it promotes as a “deeply suspect pious egocentricity.”³⁸ Designating something as “worship” is akin to securing diplomatic status; one is governed by the rules of home, not by those of the local context. This is what makes mission so problematic. It exposes worship’s misdeeds. In this case, “the tendency inwards, i.e., to the inwardness of the individual Christian, has always in fact been paradoxically opposed by a more or less explicit and powerful urge for expansion.”³⁹ One can illustrate the logic with a section title from Piper: “making worship radically inward so that it permeates all of life outwardly.”⁴⁰ The motivation for missionary expansion flows from this self-preoccupation. Worship gives definite form to mission method. As Barth suggests, “the pious egocentricity of the individual must always broaden out into at least a kind of collective egocentricity.”⁴¹ The church is replicated as a clone; mission holds a mirror to the face of the sending community. If mission method is adjudged as self-centered—propaganda, to employ the less personal nomenclature—this is because the local church, shaped by its worship, is this way. Simply removing the mirror through the neglect of mission funding or cross-cultural sending does not alter this visage. Of course, for some, the location of mission within the command of God excuses every accusation on the basis of faithfulness, obedience, and divine sovereignty. While suffused with heartfelt piety, Newbigin describes such churches as “countersigns” to the kingdom of God.⁴²

38 Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, vol. IV/3.2, Church Dogmatics (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1962), 568. Hereafter, references to the *Church Dogmatics* will take the form: Barth, *CD* IV/3.2, 568.

39 Barth, *CD* IV/3.2, 569.

40 Piper, *Let the Nations be Glad!*, 221.

41 Barth, *CD* IV/3.2, 570.

42 The church which “welcomes a brutal tyranny because it allows free entry for missionaries rather than a more humane regime that puts difficulties in their way, becomes a sign against the gospel of the kingdom. We have, surely, the authority of the Lord himself for saying that church growth that does not bear fruit is only providing fuel for hell (Jn. 15:1-6).” J.E. Lesslie Newbigin, “Cross-Currents in Ecumenical and Evangelical Understandings of Mission,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 6, no. 4 (1982): 148.

To affirm that the church is missionary by its nature is to open its central rituals to critical evaluation. The perennial danger exists that established liturgical practice will not integrate missionary insight, but compensate for its lack through a reification of liturgical language.⁴³ John Howard Yoder offers a more satisfactory approach in his list of five apostolic practices, which “do not fall within what ordinarily is called ‘worship’, even less ‘liturgy’.”⁴⁴ Each of them, however, “concerns both the internal activities of the gathered Christian congregation and the ways the church interfaces with the world.”⁴⁵ This is a beginning. One might also indicate here Barth’s understanding of baptism as making the individual “personally responsible for the execution of the missionary command which constitutes the community.”⁴⁶ Much awaits development, yet the central point is clear: mission effects the whole and its integration will mean a critical interaction with the whole.

MISSION AS LIVING IN THE RESURRECTION

N.T. Wright makes the claim that “the mission of the church is nothing more or less than the outworking, in the power of the Spirit, of Jesus’ bodily resurrection and thus the anticipation of the time when God will fill the earth with his glory....”⁴⁷ Life in the resurrection, and so in the new creation, is missionary. The surprising element of this quote is not its material position, which seems exegetically obvious. Rather, it is its capacity within the theological community to speak of the resurrection of the dead and the outpouring of the Spirit without reference to the concomitant form of missionary response.

As an anecdotal example of how we forgive the early church its missionary indiscretions, I have a practice of asking students after Resurrection Sunday as to the general content of the sermon they heard or even preached: did it tend toward the benefits which accrue to the believer, or toward the sending of the church to the world in witness? From a survey of the biblical texts, one may certainly indicate Jesus’ post-resurrection fortification of his disciples, but even here the peace of Christ, the sending of the Spirit, the reality of the resurrection, empowers the outpouring of witness, the excited utterance, the uncontainable joy, the unrestrictable missionary movement into the whole world. If one were

⁴³ There are more sophisticated (Bernd Wannenwetsch, *Political Worship: Ethics for Christian Citizens* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).) and less sophisticated (William T. Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2002).) versions of this approach.

⁴⁴ John Howard Yoder, “Sacrament as Social Process: Christ the Transformer of Culture,” in *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical*, ed. Michael Cartwright (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 364. This essay was expanded into the short book, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community before the Watching World* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1993).

⁴⁵ Yoder, “Sacrament as Social Process,” 361.

⁴⁶ Barth, *CD IV/4*, 200.

⁴⁷ N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 264-65.

to follow the biblical record, in other words, one might expect at least a balanced if not dominant proportion of sermons dealing with missionary witness. In actuality, of the hundreds of students to whom this question has been addressed, those who indicate hearing a missionary sermon number in the teens. Nor should this surprise—to our shame, it is a faithful manifestation of the burden of the theological endeavor. These are good students who have learned their lessons well.

Neither can such an observation be simply dismissed as the impolitic ravings of a malcontent missiologist. To quote Karl Barth,

At this point we note a weakness in even the best of our Easter hymns. It is perhaps connected theologically with the remarkably late discovery of the prophetic form of the work of Jesus Christ and consequently of the Christian duty of mission. As we have seen, these hymns can sometimes bring out the scope of the Easter event for the whole world. But they do this only occasionally, and they do not show what it necessarily implies for those who see this universal scope, namely, the imperative of Mt 28:19f. Even in their earliest forms, and more particularly in the 17th and 18th centuries, they tend to gravitate in the direction of the personal awakening, comforting, orientation and hope made possible and effected for Christians by the resurrection. In other words, they present a first-born right which is not also as such a first-born duty and therefore the duty of mission.⁴⁸

The liturgical tradition itself fails to note the missionary nature of the resurrection. It reshapes a story of self-sacrifice into one of self-satisfaction. Barth continues that it is necessary for Easter preaching to go beyond this received tradition. To do so, however, will mean “the introduction of a disturbing note. For reference would have to be made not merely to the necessity but to the sole possibility of the outgoing of Christians to the world in subordination of all the action required of them to the Word already spoken to the world by Jesus Christ Himself. And this would be very surprising to many good Christians. But it is quite imperative if the Easter event is to be taken as seriously as it deserves irrespective of the questions thereby raised.”⁴⁹ Faithfulness to the resurrection will mean the preaching of a missionary vision.

Church and mission are as related as the resurrection is to the kingdom. There is, to be sure, provisionality in the forms of missionary witness. We live now in hope, awaiting the final fulfillment of God’s promises. But we wait in hope because, in the resurrection, that hope is already a reality. The Spirit is the “deposit guaranteeing our inheritance” (Eph 1: 14). The Spirit impels the church to witness because this is properly the act of God: the Son witnesses to the Father, the Father witnesses to the Son, and the Spirit witnesses to the Father and the Son. Witness describes the nature of God’s own self-knowledge. Worship before the

48 Barth, *CD* IV/3.1, 305.

49 Barth, *CD* IV/3.1, 305.

throne in the book of Revelation consists of witnessing to the deeds of the Lamb that was slain. This act of God's own life will not vanish in the new heaven and the new earth.

The church is the community of the resurrection and the first-fruit of the kingdom. As living in the resurrection is living in missionary movement, mission is properly concerned with community formation: the community of Jew and Gentile. One anachronistic assumption that requires urgent addressing is the limitation of mission to entrepreneurial encounter and thus to pre-community or first-generation faith. Stanley Skreslet, summarizing contemporary missiological wisdom, notes that mission history is often presented as "missionary initiative followed by indigenous response."⁵⁰ The missionary is the main agent, and what characterizes that agency, and so defines mission, is the initial transference between possession and need. Such a position no longer holds. No such 'first contact' encounter survives "unless indigenous enterprise asserts itself as more than just a reaction to what other, more fully self-aware subjects are doing."⁵¹ Missionary agency is properly understood as the appropriation of the faith into the local context, so that the history of Israel and the story Jesus is claimed as one's own. For this reason, Walls identifies Origen as the "father of mission studies." Precisely because he was born into the Christian faith, he employs his Greek culture to appropriate his Christian inheritance and, in so doing, "is a seminal figure in the story of Christian critical interaction with culture."⁵² Appropriation and the confession this engenders is a generational task, and it is not "ethical" in nature but missionary. Though truncated, hopefully the central contention is evident. Mission is the living confession of the kingdom and the glory in every time and every place. It belongs to the actual nature of Christian community, and drives, or should do so, the task of constructive theology.

JOY

The above claims are preposterous in their magnitude. It is much easier to dismiss them as a fringe fanaticism that takes some small truth and distorts it through hyperbole for polemic effect. Such is, of course, often the wider theological attitude to missiological claims. Much core theological work needs to be done, including much unthinking. Mission does not exist because of worship's absence. Mission exists because God is. Mission exists because of the Father's love for his creation. Mission exists because Jesus was sent by the Father. He lived, died, was buried and rose again in the power of the Spirit. Mission exists because the Spirit draws into the body of Christ and into the love of the Father. This is the primal mission, God's own life. The human response is one of amazement, the

50 Stanley H. Skreslet, "Thinking Missiologically About the History of Mission," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 31, no. 2 (2007): 60.

51 Skreslet, "Thinking Missiologically About the History of Mission," 60.

52 Andrew F. Walls, "In Quest of the Father of Mission Studies," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 23, no. 3 (1999): 102.

scrambling after the pearl of great price. If you seek a biblical warrant for mission, look to the response of joy. The time given to the church, to quote Barth, is “for its own supreme joy, which is not, however, its joy in itself, but can only be its joy in this ongoing calling of the world, and therefore in the progress of the mission of its Lord and hence of its own mission to the world, namely, joy in the fact that it may be in and to the world a likeness of the kingdom of God which has come but is still to come, and therefore that in this sense it may exist for the world.”⁵³ The church is missionary by its very nature because it is called to be a sign of the kingdom, not the kingdom itself, but certainly not contrary to the kingdom. The sending of the Spirit, witness, new creation, resurrection, community formation, joy, that is, “mission” cannot remain content with its exile as a bastard heir. Mission is in the blood. It is the eldest child of the King. To quote *Ad Gentes* 9, “missionary activity is nothing else, and nothing less, than the manifestation of God’s plan, its epiphany and realization in the world and in history.” It is past time that mission is welcomed back into the kingdom to take its proper place in the royal court (Eph. 5:14). Long live the King.

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53 Barth, *CD* IV/3.2, 795.

Is God MISSIONARY?

AUGUSTINE AND THE DIVINE MISSIONS

Peter Kline

INTRODUCTION

Why did mission¹ never become a major theological topic in the tradition? Most within the church nowadays will acknowledge that Christianity is a missionary faith, yet such an affirmation is usually accompanied by little to no theological reflection.² This contemporary dearth of reflection of is understandable. Whereas core doctrines such as Trinity and christology and core practices such as baptism and eucharist are funded by deep traditions of argument and reflection, mission by contrast is bankrupt. There are simply no extended traditions of theological reflection on the act of mission.³ But why? If Christianity is a missionary faith why hasn't reflection on mission been at the heart of the theological task?

1 The working definition of mission I assume throughout this article can be summarized as follows: mission is that public sending of the church into the world that is grounded in and corresponds to the sending of Jesus Christ into the world. This sending consists of embodied action and proclamation on behalf of the world that are a sign and anticipation of the coming kingdom of God.

2 This can be seen in contemporary theologians who readily acknowledge the missionary vocation of the church but then manage to write entire systems of theology in which mission plays little to no determinative role. See, for instance, Robert Jenson's two-volume *Systematic Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997-1999). For a particularly egregious inattention to mission in a theological context, see Jaroslav Pelikan, *Acts*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2005). Pelikan manages to get through an entire theological commentary on Acts without once addressing the topic of mission.

3 To be sure, the church has always engaged in missionary activity of one form or another. And of course those engaged in such activity had some theological understanding of what they were doing. But never has missionary activity (see the definition in footnote 1) shaped how the church has thought about its fundamental beliefs and practices—e.g. Trinity, christology, time, eternity, eucharist, baptism, etc. Mission has never been a material factor in giving shape to these basic doctrines. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries have seen some effort in this direction, but it remains to be seen whether anything like a sustained tradition will emerge out of such effort. For an analysis of the *Missio Dei* movement along these lines, see John G. Flett, *The Witness of God: The Trinity, Missio Dei, Karl Barth, and the Nature of Christian Community* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2010).

Wilbert Shenk's observation that, "Christendom...may be characterized as *church without mission*,"⁴ is apropos here. Shenk's claim is that the coupling of the church with social and political influence and power created a deep mission-forgetfulness within the church. With western civilization effectively "Christianized," it was assumed that mission belonged to a former period when the church had yet to find a secure footing within the world. Accordingly, "church" became synonymous with an "institution of salvation" whose main task was to see to the salvation and spiritual well-being of its individual members.⁵ Mission served as the prelude to the substance of Christian life and ministry, and so received no sustained theological attention.

Some would want to nuance Shenk's claim, and rightly so.⁶ But the heart of the claim contains significant truth. One simply has to look at the treatments of ecclesiology in western theological texts and confessions to see the signs of a deep mission-forgetfulness. However much missionary activity was present within Christendom, mission was not regarded as a basic act of the church that merited theological scrutiny. Even the Reformers with their emphasis on proclamation and recovery of the kerygma did not regard mission as a theological topic. They simply repeated the assumption of the tradition that texts like Matthew 28:19 were limited to the Apostles and therefore did not apply to the church as such.

John Flett has argued that the source of the tradition's mission-forgetfulness lies primarily in the way in which divine fellowship with creation has been conceived.⁷ The established nature of the church under the arrangements of Christendom allowed a doctrine of God to develop in which divine movement into the world holds no ontological significance for God. Just as the church is established in the world, so God is established in eternity. Just as the church reaches out to the world only in order to bring the world into the already established internal life of the church, so God reaches out to the world only in order to bring the world into an already established eternity. The church's established social situation found re-enforcement in a doctrine of God where the fullness of divine life was located outside of God's vulnerable, external movement. This allowed

4 Wilbert R. Shenk, *Write the Vision: The Church Renewed*, 1st U.S. ed., Christian Mission and Modern Culture (Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1995), 35.

5 See also, David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, American Society of Missiology Series; No. 16 (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991), 214-38.

6 See Oliver O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1996). He claims that "it was the missionary imperative that compelled the church to take the conversion of the empire seriously and to seize the opportunities it offered" (212). Also: "It is not misleading to see the successive phases through which [the Christendom idea] passed as a series of attempts to reassert the missionary *vis-à-vis* by establishing further differentiations within Christian society" (219). It also must be acknowledged that there were significant missionary movements within western Christendom, e.g. St. Patrick in Ireland, the Iro-Scottish Mission, and the Slavic Mission.

7 See chapter 1 in Flett, *The Witness of God*.

the church's vulnerable, external movement to become a second-tier activity, performed only for the sake of the church's more primary internal life.

"The problem," writes Flett, "is finally one of an undue breach between who God is in himself and who he is in his economy."⁸ With the economy of salvation merely a prelude to eternity, the church's act of mission can likewise only be a prelude or postlude to true fellowship with God. Stephen Holmes has also identified the question of mission as fundamentally a question of God. The affirmation, "God *has a mission*, but *is not missionary*,"⁹ is the assumption of most of the tradition, according to him, and has led to the tradition's mission-forgetfulness. Holmes thinks it possible on the basis of Scripture, however, to develop an account of God's being in which "mission is one of the perfections as God, as adequate a description of who he is as love, omnipotence or eternity."¹⁰ God, accordingly, can be acknowledged as missionary from all eternity, with the implication that the church that worships such a God is irreducibly missionary. Indeed, "the gracious mission of our missionary God will never come to an end."¹¹

The purpose of this article is to read Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity using mission as a critical standard. I write out of the conviction that one of the most urgent theological tasks in our current situation in the West is the articulation and enactment of the church's missionary vocation (see footnote 1). The demise of Christendom has meant the demise of those social structures in which the western church once found its place in the world. Faced with such vulnerability, the western church has at least three options: it can 1) succumb to this vulnerability and seek security by accepting the religious space carved out for it by modern secular societies 2) resist this vulnerability by fashioning "industrial-strength ecclesiologies"¹² in which the church can survive any external situation because it exists as its own polis with its own language, its own economy, its own aesthetics, its own ontology, its own...or 3) accept this vulnerability as the normal existence of a missionary church called to be "aliens and exiles" (1 Peter 2:11) wherever it finds itself. I write in favor of the third option.

But what does Augustine have to do with any of this? As Flett and Holmes have shown, the lack of attention to mission in the theological tradition is rooted in a particular construal of the doctrine of God that results in a particular account of the church's existence in the world.¹³ Augustine's doctrine of God is foundational in the western tradition, and his account of the Christian life that is

8 Ibid.

9 Stephen Holmes, "Trinitarian Missiology: Towards a Theology of God as Missionary," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 8, no. 1 (2006): 72.

10 Ibid., 89.

11 Ibid., 90.

12 John Webster, *Word and Church: Essays in Christian Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001), 214.

13 As I hinted at above, the historical order of causation is probably the reverse. The church's establishment meant that it developed its doctrine of God in a situation where missionary vulnerability was not the fundamental theological context. The doctrine of God that corresponds to such non-vulnerability is non-missionary.

intimately tied to his doctrine of God is also foundational. Moreover, Augustine's doctrine of God is the *locus classicus* for discussion of the relation between the divine missions and divine perfection. With Augustine, the language of mission finds its way into the doctrine of God. There was enormous potential here, and in what follows I will attempt to point some of this out and develop it a bit. But the tradition was never able to capitalize on this potential and develop a missionary account of God's being. Augustine's handling of the language of mission surely has something to do with this.

The interest in Augustine is not simply historical, however. Recent scholarship on Augustine has offered a remarkably fresh reading of his trinitarian theology. Many of the standard accounts and criticisms of Augustine have been shown to be simply false. Coupled with this recent historical scholarship is a push to retrieve Augustine's trinitarian vision as a vital resource for contemporary theology. Augustine is now being read not as a western theologian situated over against eastern theologians but as an important representative of a more global "pro-Nicene theological culture" that spans the east/west divide. Contemporary theology, so goes the exhortation, if it wants to be vital and in service of the one church of the creeds, must learn again the fundamental habits of mind and heart that constituted pro-Nicene theological culture.¹⁴ Chief among these habits is the ordering of all theological reflection and language to the service of Christian growth in contemplation. Without such habits, the environment that sustained pro-Nicene theology will be lacking, and the viability of a contemporary pro-Nicene theology will be doubtful.

Viewed from the perspective of mission, however, such an exhortation has a number of problems. Chief among them is the implication that theological faithfulness requires the cultivation and handing on of a culture in which contemplation is regarded as the goal and high-point of Christian existence. In such a culture, the act of missionary proclamation and witness can only be a type of second-tier piety. Such a relegation of the missionary act is highly problematic. Not only does the church's missionary obligation become an afterthought, but such after-thinking means that the goal of any missionary activity becomes the maintenance and replication of the church's already established internal life. Mission as replication, however, easily becomes mission as propaganda, as history has shown.¹⁵

What is needed in our current situation, I think, is an account of the Christian life in which the church's movement to the world is the basic act of the church that corresponds to its grounding in Jesus Christ. In such movement, the church does not *bring* Jesus to the world, replicating its already achieved grasp of him; the church *seeks* Jesus in the world, receiving him ever-anew in the faces of "the

¹⁴ See the final chapter titled "In Spite of Hegel, Fire, and Sword," in Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

¹⁵ See John G. Flett, "Communion as propaganda: Reinhard Hüter and the missionary witness of the 'Church as Public,'" *Scottish Journal of Theology* 62, no. 4 (2009): 457-476.

least of these.” Jesus has *given* himself for the world; the church that worships Jesus as Lord can only in turn be *given over* to the world, living its life as an embodied prayer for the coming of God’s kingdom, with and for the forgotten, the broken, and the lost. The church will be situated, as Bonhoeffer recognized, on the “underside” of history. The church’s mission will seek to embody God’s kingdom not by playing the world’s power games in a bid for establishment but by losing its grip on every principality and power, turning instead with open hands to the broken and bleeding world. Such an account of the Christian life is what I bring to my reading of Augustine.¹⁶

This article, then, is fundamentally about what it might mean to appropriate faithfully the legacy of Augustine with regard to the connection between the doctrine of God and the Christian life. Recent defenders of Augustine and advocates of “pro-Nicene culture” want us to learn from Augustine how the doctrine of God ought to orient us toward growth in contemplation as the heart of the Christian life. By contrast, Flett and Holmes both view Augustine’s doctrine of God as in some sense a hindrance to an adequate account of mission as the heart of the Christian life.¹⁷ I find myself somewhere in between these two perspectives. I am sympathetic with Flett and Holmes in that I view the act of mission as the heart of the Christian life. As I will argue ahead, they are right to point to weaknesses in Augustine’s doctrine of God that prevent mission from assuming basic importance. However, I see more resources in Augustine than they do for developing a missionary account of God’s being. Augustine’s account of the eternally humble Love that constitutes God’s triune being and is repeated in the economy of salvation can easily fund a missionary theology. Here I can stand with Augustine’s pro-Nicene defenders and rely on their scholarship that has demonstrated the irreducibly trinitarian character of his thought and the close connections he draws between the shape of God’s outgoing life and the shape of the Christian life. But whereas advocates of pro-Nicene culture want to claim Augustine’s trinitarian theology for the cause of contemplation, I want to claim it for the cause of mission, even if I have to read Augustine somewhat against himself to do so.

The basic theological question I want to raise is this: what is the proper shape of the Christian life that the divine missions open up for us? What do our lives look like inside the Trinity? Are we moving ever inward and ever upward, preparing ourselves for eternity? Or are we always being thrown outward to give ourselves to others in loving witness to the Gospel? I want to show that, while Augustine does view inward contemplation as the high-point of Christian existence and ought to be criticized for this, his doctrine of God does not *necessarily* lead there. One *could* enlist Augustine in support of an account of the Christian life in

16 For this account of mission I am dependent on conversation with Nathan Kerr. See his *Christ, History, and Apocalyptic: The Politics of Christian Mission* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2009).

17 See chapter 1 in Flett, *The Witness of God*, and 76-82 in Holmes, “Trinitarian Missiology.”

which missionary love for the world constitutes the nature of eternal fellowship with God.

The remaining course of this article will be as follows: I will 1) provide an overview of the recent scholarship offering a new reading of Augustine's trinitarian theology 2) look directly at Augustine's treatment of divine missions and its place within the overall argument of *De Trinitate* 3) reflect on Augustine's theology from the perspective of mission and 4) offer a brief conclusion about pro-Nicene theological culture.

AUGUSTINE'S CRITICS AND DEFENDERS

In order to set in relief the pro-Nicene reading of Augustine's trinitarian theology, it will be useful first to mention a few of the standard criticisms of it that have been typical over the past fifty years or so. There are many figures I could draw on here, but I will stick to a fairly vocal one who has been criticizing Augustine for several decades now, namely, Robert W. Jenson.¹⁸

Jenson describes Augustine's trinitarian theology as a "disaster."¹⁹ The reason is that he sees it determined by a rejection of the fundamental insights that made Nicene trinitarian theology possible in the first place. "Augustine knowingly rejects the central Athanasian and Cappadocian insight that the three are God precisely by the relations between them. He accurately describes Nicene teaching: 'If it is as they say, then neither is the Father God without the Son nor the Son without the Father, only both mutually are God.' This, he says, is 'absurd.'"²⁰ The problem with Augustine, for Jenson, is that he does not see that Nicene theology requires the affirmation of "eventful differentiation in God."²¹ Augustine cannot stomach the thought that each of the three persons is God only from and for the others, that deity is actual *as relation*. Each person, for Augustine, must be identical with the divine substance apart from the relations with the other persons. According to Jenson, the result is an interpretation of the axiom *opera ad extra sunt indivisa* that effectively banishes the doctrine of the Trinity from any contact with the gospel narrative. The *ad extra* acts of God, which in the gospel narrative are constituted by the interplay of the three persons, do not enact God's actual triunity because "the possibility of a *mutually* single act cannot occur to [Augustine]."²² The gospel narrative, then, cannot but be a mere shadow of the divine life. God's triune life hovers somewhere above or behind the events of the gospel, and this, for Jenson, is intolerable. The revelation of a God who is not identified with his acts of revelation can only set believers off on a religious

¹⁸ Other Augustine denouncers include W. Pannenberg, C. Lacugna, C. Plantinga, V. Lossky, J. Zizioulas, and C. Gunton.

¹⁹ Jenson, *Systematic Theology* 1, 112.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 111.

²² Ibid., 111.

quest for what lies behind the revelation. And the result of such a quest can only be idolatry.²³

The root of the Augustinian disaster, for Jenson, “is the old dissonance between the metaphysical principles of the Greeks and the storytelling of the gospel. Augustine believes about God a story of temporal events yet cannot acknowledge any temporal contamination of God himself.”²⁴ This allergy to any temporal contamination of God is caused by his “unquestioning commitment to the axiom of his antecedent Platonic theology, that God is metaphysically ‘simple,’ that *no* sort of self-differentiation can really be true of him.”²⁵ For Jenson, the doctrine of divine simplicity functions in Augustine only to distance God from the events of the gospel. The gospel is clearly a temporal occurrence; just so, Augustine’s God can have little to do with it, according to Jenson.

Three fairly standard points of critique emerge here in Jenson’s treatment of Augustine. First, Augustine’s theology is shaped at its most basic level by some form of neo-platonism. His doctrine of the Trinity is a sophisticated attempt at combining what are basically two non-compatible intellectual styles: thinking reality as history with the Bible and thinking reality as the image of unchanging eternity with neo-platonism. The disaster (and brilliance) of Augustine’s theology is the aftermath of this collision. Second, Augustine’s commitment to simplicity means that he is forced to prioritize God’s simple essence over the plurality of triune persons. Third, Augustine’s doctrine of the Trinity ought to be corrected with the superior ontology of the Cappadocians. The Cappadocians offer a fundamentally different orientation to the doctrine of the Trinity, one that allows the three divine persons and their relations in God to assume basic importance.

Recent scholarship has challenged all three of these points. Regarding the first point, Michel Barnes and Lewis Ayres have shown that the intellectual context for the development of Augustine’s trinitarian theology is not primarily neo-platonism.²⁶ The narrative that has Augustine a full-fledged neo-platonist before his conversion to Christianity is simply false. Rather, Augustine’s intellectual context and sources are the ecclesial theology and philosophy of the Latin pro-Nicene tradition that was mediated to him through the likes of Ambrose. Augustine had no system of philosophy up and running that he then brought to the theological task; his use of neo-platonic categories and patterns of argument is much more *ad hoc* and piecemeal. Augustine does not begin with neo-platonic philosophy and work his way to the Trinity. He begins with what he regards as fundamental church teaching about the Trinity and then uses aspects of neo-platonic philosophy to

23 Ibid., 59-60.

24 Ibid., 112.

25 Ibid., 111.

26 See Michel Barnes, “Rereading Augustine’s Theology of the Trinity,” in Daniel Kendall Stephen T. Davis, and Gerald O’Collins, ed., *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 145-76. See also, Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy*, 365-83.

enquire into the coherence of the church's teaching at certain points.²⁷ Those who want to locate Augustine primarily within neo-platonism have simply assumed too much and proved too little about his intellectual context. Barnes writes that such an assumed neo-platonic location "fails to reflect the doctrinal content of the texts it is supposed to explain."²⁸

Regarding the second point, a growing number of scholars are challenging the claim that the "starting point" for Augustine's theology is the one divine essence as opposed to the three divine persons.²⁹ In his remarkable book on *De Trinitate*, Luigi Gioia argues that if we are going to identify a starting point in Augustine's trinitarian theology then it ought to be "the primacy of love."³⁰ Augustine's starting point for exploration of the mystery of God's being is not an abstract notion of God's oneness or threeness. His starting point is the reality of the love of God that has embraced him through Christ and the Spirit, as well as the reality of his own love for God that such divine embrace has sparked in him. God can be "seen" only with and as love.³¹ *De Trinitate* can and ought to be read as an extended answer to the question Augustine posed to himself in his *Confessions*: "What do I love when I love my God?"³² The answer is that he loves love itself, for God is love. And because this love that is God is irreducibly personal and encountered only as through the Spirit one is given eyes and ears to see and hear the incarnate Christ, it is irreducibly trinitarian. "The revelation of the Trinity does not mean revelation of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, but revelation of the invisible Father, in the Son who has made himself visible in the flesh through the charity poured in our hearts by the Holy Spirit."³³

Regarding the third point, scholarship has been closing the supposed gap between Augustine and the Cappadocians. This has been done by highlighting

27 See Lewis Ayres, "'Remember That You Are Catholic' (Serm. 52.2): Augustine on the Unity of the Triune God," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 8, no. 1 (2000). Ayres focuses here on Augustine's use of the doctrine of simplicity. He shows that, in Augustine's hands, simplicity-talk is a way of making sense of God's *tri*-unity, that is, a unity that exists irreducibly among the three persons.

28 Barnes, "Rereading Augustine's Theology of the Trinity," 153.

29 See Lewis Ayres, "The Fundamental Grammar of Augustine's Trinitarian Theology," in Robert Dodaro Gerald Bonner, and George Lawless, ed., *Augustine and His Critics: Essays in Honour of Gerald Bonner* (London: Routledge, 2000).

30 Luigi Gioia, *The Theological Epistemology of Augustine's De Trinitate*, Oxford Theological Monographs (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 298.

31 "You do see the Trinity if you see charity." Augustine, *De Trinitate*, VIII.12. English quotations are from *The Trinity, the Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, trans. Edmund Hill (Brooklyn, N.Y.: New City Press, 1990).

32 Augustine, *The Confessions* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 2001), X.6.

33 Gioia, *The Theological Epistemology of Augustine's De Trinitate*, 165. For an example of this trinitarian use of prepositions by Augustine himself, see *De Trinitate* I.12, where he comments on the scripture, "Since from him and through him and in him are all things, to him be glory for ever and ever" (Romans 11:36). Augustine writes, "[Paul] means Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, attributing a phrase apiece to each person—from him, from the Father; through him—through the Son; in him—in the Holy Spirit."

the irreducibly trinitarian method and logic of Augustine's theology as well as demonstrating that Cappadocian theology is more similar to Augustine's than is usually recognized.³⁴ Both Augustine and the Cappadocians are representatives of "pro-Nicene theology" and as such they share fundamental habits of theological argument, scriptural reasoning, and spiritual and pastoral vitality.³⁵ There are differences, to be sure, but such differences are enclosed within a much broader and substantial area of agreement and shared concern. Inquiring after the "starting point" of fourth-century theologies does not take us to the heart of either Augustinian or Cappadocian theology.

AUGUSTINE'S TREATMENT OF THE DIVINE MISSIONS

Bearing this background in mind, I now want to give attention directly to Augustine, specifically to his treatment of the divine missions in *De Trinitate*. I am giving attention to *De Trinitate* here not simply because it contains Augustine's most sustained and developed treatment of the divine missions but also because I want to show the way in which his treatment of the divine missions functions within the overall argument of *De Trinitate*. One of the influential aspects of Olivier Du Roy's now infamous study of Augustine³⁶ is its conclusion that "from very early on and until the end of Augustine's life, knowledge, including knowledge of God the Trinity, remained fundamentally independent from his faith."³⁷ If one accepts this conclusion, however, then one cannot help but read *De Trinitate* as fundamentally incoherent.³⁸ Books VIII-XV appear to be pursuing a completely different subject matter than books I-VII. For example, Robert Jenson writes, "Having undone the narrative meaning of trinitarian language in the first seven books of *De Trinitate*, Augustine then desperately tries in the remainder to restore some meaning to trinitarian language by analogies from the created soul... The analogies are profound in themselves, but alleviate the trinitarian disaster not at all, as Augustine himself probably realized."³⁹ Recent readings of *De Trinitate* have challenged Du Roy's split between knowledge and faith in Augustine, and this has important consequences for how any one part of *De Trinitate* ought to be read. Scholars are now recognizing a fundamental coherence to *De Trinitate*,

³⁴ See, for instance, Sarah Coakley, ed., *Re-Thinking Gregory of Nyssa*, Directions in Modern Theology (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003).

³⁵ For a list of shared intellectual and spiritual habits among pro-Nicenes, see Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy*, chapters 11-13. He argues that all pro-Nicenes share convictions and patterns of argument about divine simplicity, divinity unity, inseparable operations, the character of human knowledge of God, the use of analogies, and reticence about too strictly defining what a divine person is.

³⁶ Olivier Du Roy, *L'intelligence De La Foi En La Trinité Selon Saint Augustin: Genèse De Sa Théologie Trinitaire Jusqu'en 391* (Paris: Études augustinianes, 1966).

³⁷ Gioia, *The Theological Epistemology of Augustine's De Trinitate*, 6.

³⁸ For example, in *The Triune Identity: God According the Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), Jenson accepts Du Roy's conclusion about Augustine and uses it to argue for the incoherence of *De Trinitate*. See 127-131.

³⁹ Jenson, *Systematic Theology* 1, 112.

acknowledging that, however sprawling the argument might be, there is in fact a unified vision in the book. Augustine's treatment of the divine missions, therefore, needs to be set in the context of his trinitarian and spiritual vision as a whole.

One reading of *De Trinitate* that argues for its fundamental coherence is offered by Rowan Williams.⁴⁰ He writes, "More than simply a meditation on a particular doctrine," *De Trinitate* is "an integral theological anthropology, a structure in which diverse doctrinal themes are woven together in an account of how human acting, desiring and thinking come to participate in the action of God."⁴¹ In a similar vein, Ellen Charry writes that the purpose of *De Trinitate* is "to explain the missions of the Son and Holy Spirit in the context of the unity of God as a course of therapy for a happy life in God."⁴² What both Williams and Charry are gesturing towards here is that *De Trinitate*, while certainly concerned with what we would call the more technical points of theology, is fundamentally a kind of phenomenology of the soul's entrance into the loving essence of God. The psychological explorations in books VIII-XV are not primarily a search for models whereby one can understand the *doctrine* of the Trinity. Rather, Augustine is searching for a way to express and recommend the soul's actual *life* in the Trinity. The trinity of memory, understanding, and will is the image of God in us not because it abstractly models the triune essence. We bear the image of God because our concrete, lived relation to God is one in which we know or "see" God only as we are graciously swept up into the three-fold movement of loving God—remembering, understanding, and willing the Father in the Son by the Spirit. Only because we are creatures suited and called to love God, neighbor, and self do we have the capacity to image God, and only when we do in fact love God, neighbor, and self do we in fact image God. Augustine's treatment of the divine missions, then, takes us to the very heart of *De Trinitate*. For the goal of the divine missions is that human knowledge (read: love) of God's triune essence whereby we ourselves are purified for a life of love.

The immediate polemical context of Augustine's treatment of the divine missions in *De Trinitate* is the question of whether the sending of the Son and Spirit from the Father means their inferiority to the Father. Whereas in the East, Arianism was characterized by arguments relating to the origin of the Son—"There was when he was not!"—in the West, Augustine was facing a tradition that more often used arguments relating to authority.⁴³ Because the Father has authority to send the Son, the Father must be greater than the Son. Books II-IV of *De Trinitate* are spent refuting this argument, and the main resource Augustine

⁴⁰ Rowan Williams, "De Trinitate in Allan Fitzgerald," ed., *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 1999), 845-51. For another approach to *De Trinitate* that argues from and for its coherence, see Ellen T. Charry, *By the Renewing of Your Minds: The Pastoral Function of Christian Doctrine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 120-54.

⁴¹ Williams, "De Trinitate," 846. Quoted in Gioia, *The Theological Epistemology of Augustine's De Trinitate*, 17.

⁴² Charry, *By the Renewing of Your Minds*, 120.

⁴³ See Holmes, "Trinitarian Missiology," 77.

uses for this task is the church's teaching about the inseparable actions of the three divine persons—every act of the Trinity is inseparably the act of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Son is not less than the Father even though he is sent because the Son participates in his own sending. "In what manner did God send his Son?... Well, whichever way it was done, it was certainly done by word. But God's Word is his Son. So when the Father sent him by word, what happened was that he was sent by the Father and his Word. Hence it is by the Father and the Son that the Son was sent, because the Son is the Father's Word."⁴⁴ The Son is not *only* sent, which would make him inferior (Augustine here concedes his opponents point), he is also the sender, which means that he is equal to the Father even as he is sent by him. It is appropriate, however, to distinguish the Son from the Father as the one who was sent because the Son became visible while the Father remained invisible. To repeat the point, though, the Son's visibility does not mean that he ceases to be invisible like the Father (which would mean inferiority), it means rather that the Son *in addition to* his divine invisibility has assumed a human visibility so that human beings might have an object of faith that can lead them to knowledge of the Son's invisible unity with the Father in the Spirit.

A question may be raised here. What is the nature of the inseparability that characterizes the external acts of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for Augustine? Is it the case that God's external acts "bear no mark of the triunity of his nature, because the relationships that determine that triunity do not shape divine action in any way"?⁴⁵ This is the standard reading of Augustine and the source of complaints that Augustine has a modalist tendency in his thought. I think there is reason to question it, though. The issue is whether the economic acts of God also have a triune shape, such that Augustine could say that an external act of God comes *from* the Father *through* the Son *by* the Spirit (the change in prepositions is the key)⁴⁶, or if it is the case for him that only God's "internal" or "immanent" acts upon himself have a triune shape. Many readers point to Augustine's treatment of the Old Testament missions or theophanies in books II-III as proof that he reads the economy in a non-trinitarian way. Augustine there denies that we can definitively assign the acts of God in the Old Testament to any one of the triune persons. God's triunity is not on display there. We can just as well assume that it was the Spirit talking to Moses through the burning bush as we can that it was the Father or the Son. However, the point of Augustine saying this is not to lay down a general principle about the impossibility of recognizing God's triunity through his external acts.⁴⁷ The point is that God's triunity is not recognized through *these*

44 *De Trinitate*, II.9

45 Holmes, "Trinitarian Missiology," 80.

46 See footnote 33.

47 Jenson reads Augustine this way. He writes, "Thus [Augustine] supposes, for example, that the Son's appearances in Israel could as well be called appearances of the Father or Spirit, or that when the voice speaks to Jesus at his baptism...the speaker is indifferently specifiable as the Father or the Son or the whole Trinity." *Systematic Theology* 1, 111. In reality, Augustine does *not* make the claim about Jesus' baptism that Jenson attributes to him. Jenson also goes on to claim that Augustine is the source of Peter Lom-

acts. But when we turn to the New Testament there *are* external acts of God in which the triunity of his nature is on display for the eyes of faith, namely, the sending of the Son and Spirit. As Gioia says, “Augustine is simply saying that revelation of the Trinity only occurred with the Incarnation and Pentecost.”⁴⁸ The incarnation of the Son that culminates in the outpouring of the Spirit is the all-encompassing external act of God that is an enactment of God’s triune being in time and space, “God’s own self-exposition.”⁴⁹

This is an important point because it means that Augustine’s doctrine of God does not entirely close off the possibility of God being described as “missionary,” even in eternity.⁵⁰ If God’s external acts in time actually enact God’s being as it is in eternity, then one *could* argue that because God enacts a sending in time, we must conclude that God’s being in eternity just is the act of sending. One would need to affirm here something like Karl Barth’s teaching that God’s being is in act to get this off the ground, of course. Augustine, I think, actually comes close to affirming something like this at times. His teaching on divine simplicity is that whatever God possess he also is. “Whatever appears to be predicated of [the divine being] qualitatively is to be understood as signifying substance or being.”⁵¹ So, for instance, God’s goodness is not simply a quality of God’s being, but actually *is* God’s being. But what is goodness but the actuality or possibility of acting good? Goodness, like any moral quality, involves decision, intention, and action. The conclusion, it would seem, is that a good act of God, that is, an exercise of his goodness, is not external to his being but is the very occurrence of his being. God’s being is in act. If we apply the same logic to sending, then the conclusion would be that God is missionary to the very depths of his being.

There are several ways one could work this out. One could be very Barthian about it and maintain that the sending in which God has his eternal being is concretely and without equivocation the sending of Jesus Christ. I myself am drawn in this direction, but it is not the only option. One could have a more Augustinian account of God’s immanent life where God is a sending God even apart from an external creation. All one would have to do is interpret the eternal begetting of the Son and breathing of the Spirit as occurrences of sending *in God*. It might look something like this: the Father is missionary because he eternally sends forth his Son for the sake of the Spirit; he sends forth his Son so that the Spirit will proceed as the actuality of the eternally loving movement of Son from Father. The Son is missionary because he freely accepts the sending of the Father to go forth for the sake of the Spirit; he gives himself so that the Spirit will

bard’s teaching that any of the three divine persons could have become incarnate and can now do so. *Systematic Theology* 1, 112. Again, this is *not* Augustine’s position, and in fact Augustine’s position militates against this position. Jenson seems to assume Augustine’s Old Testament hermeneutic is same as his New Testament hermeneutic. It is not.

48 Gioia, *The Theological Epistemology of Augustine’s De Trinitate*, 29.

49 Ibid., 33.

50 I am here disagreeing with Stephen Holmes’ assessment of Augustine in “Trinitarian Missiology.”

51 *De Trinitate*, XV.8.

proceed as the actuality of the eternally loving movement of Son from Father. The Spirit is missionary because he freely accepts and affirms the sending of the Son from the Father, giving himself in return to be the actuality of the eternally loving movement of Son from Father. On this account, the occurrence of sending in God is a lively movement in which God is entirely self-sufficient. God's decision to create, then, is entirely free and an act of pure grace. However, once creation emerges, this eternally missionary God can relate to creation only in a missionary fashion. God's dealings with the world can be nothing but the lively and eternal sending of the Son and Spirit to the world, because to put something external in relation to himself, God must send himself to it, there being no other action but sending that constitutes God's being. The economy of creation and redemption as the repetition of God's eternal being will then be a missionary economy, the church as the redeemed people of God will be a missionary church, and eternal life with God will be eternal participation in whatever missionary adventures God dreams up for us.

The goal of the divine missions, for Augustine, is the salvation and purification of human beings. In order to understand how this affirmation fits within the argument of *De Trinitate* as a whole, it is necessary to note the close connections Augustine draws between the divine missions, human knowledge of God, and human salvation in God. Stated as directly as possible, Augustine views revelation as reconciliation and *vice versa*. When God reveals his triune being through the sendings of Son and Spirit, such revelation is the occurrence of our salvation. Or stated in reverse, when God saves us by purifying our minds through Christ and the Spirit, such salvation is the revelation of God's triune being. "The way God saves us is the enactment of his own identity."⁵² God can save us only by re-orienting our minds and desires to their true end, namely, God. Therefore, in order to save us, God must enact his being among us as it is in itself. God must display his triune self for our enjoyment and *precisely in so doing save us*. Were revelation anything less than God himself displayed for our minds and hearts, we would have no hope that what occurred with Christ and the Spirit was actually our salvation. But it is our salvation because with knowledge of the Father through Christ in the Spirit we have been ushered into the depths of God's loving essence.

This is why Augustine understands the meaning of sending to be an epistemic event in us. The point of saying this is not to shield God from the economy but to show how it is that the economy is in fact the event of our coming to encounter God as he is in himself. "So the Word of God is sent by him whose Word he is; sent by him he is born of. The begetter sends, what is begotten is sent. And he is precisely sent to anyone when he is known and perceived by him."⁵³ Augustine continues, "And just as being born means for the Son his being from the Father, so his being sent means his being known to be from him. And just as for the Holy Spirit his being the gift of God means his proceeding from the Father, so his

52 Gioia, *The Theological Epistemology of Augustine's De Trinitate*, 35.

53 *De Trinitate*, IV.28.

being sent means his being known to proceed from him.”⁵⁴ Most readers take the import of passages such as these to be Augustine’s identification of sending with an event in us as opposed to an event in God. But the more important and central point, I think, is that Augustine is demonstrating how the economy of sending is “fitting” for God because it corresponds to who God is in himself from all eternity. It is fitting that the Son come into the world on behalf of sinners, because in eternity the Son is “from” the Father. Likewise, it is fitting that the Spirit be given as the gift of God to sinners, because in eternity the Spirit “proceeds” from the Father. The being of God in eternity is precisely what is enacted in the economy of salvation. To be sure, “the Son of God is not said to be sent in the very fact that he is born of the Father.”⁵⁵ The sending of the Son and Spirit is a free act of God that occurs as a repetition of God’s fully actualized being in eternity.⁵⁶ But this does not lessen the fact that when the sending of the Son and Spirit do occur in time and space, what is occurring there is the very being of God from all eternity.

The key to understanding what Augustine is doing here with the language of sending and its connection to the knowledge produced in us is to understand the depth of what Augustine means by knowledge. “Being sent means [the Son’s] being known to be from [the Father].”⁵⁷ If one were to gloss this phrase in an attempt to connect it to the rest of *De Trinitate*, perhaps the following would be appropriate: being sent means the Son’s coming to us in order to purify our minds and hearts so that we participate in the love that the Son shares with Father in the Spirit from all eternity. “Everything that has taken place in time [regarding the sending of the Son],” writes Augustine, “has been designed to elicit the faith we must be purified by in order to contemplate the truth.”⁵⁸ For us to know that the Son is from the Father is not simply to know a state of affairs. It is to be seized by the beauty of God’s outgoing love. It is to be purified and healed and equipped for obedient love of God, neighbor, and self. Moreover, while the sending of the Son and Spirit is certainly an event in us, it is not because of that less of an event for God. In order to produce knowledge of himself in us, there must be “humility on the part of God.”⁵⁹ God must humble himself and enact a movement toward us. Augustine can even go so far as to call this enactment of humility “God the Son obeying God the Father.”⁶⁰ And since on Augustine’s terms everything that God possesses he also is, we must (!) say that God from all eternity is humble—precisely, we might want to add, because he is triune.⁶¹

54 Ibid., IV.29.

55 Ibid., IV.28.

56 To use Kierkegaardian and Thomistic language.

57 *De Trinitate*, IV.29.

58 Ibid., IV.25.

59 Ibid., XIII.22.

60 Ibid., XIII.22.

61 In light of the discussion of the Son as the “wisdom of the Father” in books VI-VII, Augustine would undoubtedly ask, “Is then the Father humble only because he has a Son, or is he also humble in and of himself?” If we want to stick with Augustine’s way of handling these types of questions, perhaps the following could be said: humility is indeed

Again, I must note the wealth of possibilities here for a missionary construal of fellowship with the eternal God. To connect human knowledge of God with the enactment of God's eternal being in time and space is to say that human fellowship with God must correspond to the outgoing nature of God in the economy. Because we know the eternal God only as the one who reaches out to us in love, only as the one whose eternal beauty *radiates* in eternity and in time, then to continue to know God we must be involved in the ongoing and eternal *radiating* of God's love. There can be no enclosure or stifling of God; God in relation to creation is always bursting forth in missionary movement, and we with him. Moreover, the humility that God enacts in the economy must, as I just noted, belong to God from all eternity. If God *has* humility, then he *is* humility (see footnote 61). And a church that worships a humble God can never be a proud church, a church that exists simply to hoard the benefits of salvation. The church will be the church only as it moves outward in humility, seeking the lost, finding the face of its Saviour in the weak and broken and forgotten. But, of course, these possibilities in Augustine's theology *remained* possibilities and were not developed. He took a different direction with regard to human fellowship with God.

To know God though the sendings of Son and Spirit is, for Augustine, to be loved by God and so to love God in return. Augustine sums up all that is involved in loving fellowship with God with the term "contemplation" (*contemplatio*). Contemplation does not mean, for Augustine, what we moderns normally think of as an "act of the mind." For him, it is a more holistic concept bound up with the entirety of his theological anthropology. Book XII of *De Trinitate* is a sketch of this theological anthropology in the context of a narration of the Fall and the distortion of the image of God in us. For Augustine, there are two basic aspects to the human person, the "inner man" and the "outer man."⁶² The "outer man" consists of the body, imagination, and sense memory. The "inner man" is equivalent to what Augustine calls the *mens*, which can be translated as "mind" but is probably better

an attribute of the one God and not simply an attribute of the Son. The Father is humble, the Son is humble, and the Holy Spirit is humble, yet there are not three humilities, only one humility. Yet the *way* the Father is humble is different than the *way* the Son is humble which is different than the *way* the Spirit is humble, the differences being established by their relationships of origin. The Father is humble because he does not withhold his Word; he eternally speaks it so that the Spirit will proceed as Love, thus making God's life an eternal event of humble, self-giving Love. The Son is humble because he freely consents to and participates in his own being spoken by the Father; he willingly comes from the Father for the sake of the Spirit, that is, so that the Spirit will proceed as Love, thus making God's life an eternal event of humble, self-giving Love. The Spirit is humble because he accepts the Father's Word and gives himself in return to be the Love that makes God's life an eternal event of humble, self-giving Love. When God's eternal life is repeated in the economy, it plays itself out as the Father's commanding, the Son's humble obedience, and the Spirit's uniting of this commanding and obeying so that its occurrence is one of loving self-gift for the sake of sinners. All this is simply another way of indicating that God is a missionary God even in eternity.

62 For a discussion of Augustine's anthropology, see Hill, *The Trinity, the Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, 258–69.

translated as “self.” The *mens* is the location of both *sapientia* and *scientia*, or wisdom and knowledge. When the *mens* is active as *scientia*, it concerns itself with the knowledge of temporal things, namely, how to live in and navigate through the world of time and space. When the *mens* is active as *sapientia*, it concerns itself with wisdom about eternal things. Contemplation is an activity of the *mens* as *sapientia*. To contemplate is to be freed from sinful attachment to the world of temporal things and led into enjoyment of God’s eternal being. Contemplation is a type of joyful vision in which one “sees” with the “eyes of the heart,” so to speak. It is most potent in activities such as prayer and worship, yet it has effects on *scientia*, leading to a life of good works and virtue. *Sapientia* and *scientia* are not in competition in Augustine’s thought, but they do have different functions. And so Augustine can write, “Action by which we make good use of temporal things differs from contemplation of eternal things, and this is ascribed to wisdom, the former to knowledge.”⁶³ Finally, wisdom and contemplation in this life can only be partial and imperfect. Perfect contemplation will be possible only with the eschatological vision.

It is easy to misunderstand Augustine here. At times it can sound like he so privileges contemplation and wisdom over temporal knowledge and action that the latter are denigrated in his thought. To be sure, Augustine does understand the essence of sin to be an obsession with physical and temporal objects and the essence of virtue to be a freedom from temporal objects that allows us to contemplate eternal truth. At times, he does have very negative things to say about the physical and temporal realm. But the point of Augustine’s invective against the temporal and the physical is not to denigrate them as such. The point is that the temporal and the physical have come under the dominion of sin. Only as they are ruled by sin are the temporal and the physical to be rejected. Augustine separates the eternal from the temporal and the physical, then, *only to bring them back together in Christ*. The sending of the Son, for Augustine, enacts the unity of *scientia* and *sapientia* that has been severed by sin. The eternal Son assumes bodily and temporal form in order to “capture our faith and draw it to himself, and by means of it to lead us on to his truth; for he took on our mortality in such a way that he did not lose his own eternity.”⁶⁴ The point of the sending of the Son is not to rescue us from what is physical and temporal; the point is to “capture” the physical and the temporal and restore them to their proper orientation to the eternal. This is why the climax of book XIII reads, “Our knowledge therefore is Christ, and our wisdom is the same Christ. It is he who plants faith in us about temporal things, he who presents us with truth about eternal things.”⁶⁵ In the incarnation, Christ is present first of all to temporal and physical sight. He is “our knowledge,” he is knowable. That is, he is fundamentally a man who did such and such, said such and such, and then died. These temporal events, however, have captured us as objects of faith that promise to lead us to eternal *sapientia*. But

63 *De Trinitate*, XII.22.

64 *Ibid.*, IV.24.

65 *Ibid.*, XIII.24.

they must *become* objects of faith through the gift of the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead, because as temporal they cannot of themselves be for us wisdom from God. When they do become for us wisdom from God by the Spirit, however, what happens is not that faith looks *past* these physical and temporal events to that which is eternal and beyond them. Rather, faith sees *in* these physical and temporal events the presence of an eternal Love. Faith sees eternal truth *in* and not *past* the temporal and physical because Christ as God and Christ as man is *the same person*. With faith, we are given to see that eternal Love is the secret of the being of the man Jesus. We are presented with a flesh and blood man who has become for us the object by which we contemplate eternal truth. And when we see Jesus in this way, we are also given eyes to see the secret of all creation, that it too can become an object of contemplation. It is the good handiwork of an eternal Love able to lead us to praise of the Creator.

Once again, possibilities emerge. The incarnation elicits from the created order the witness and praise of God that is the secret of all creation. Creation as such has been marked with the promise of eternal fellowship with God. The church's response to the incarnation, then, can only be one of constant movement to all creation, praying and expecting that new and surprising praise of God will emerge from the most unlikely of places. Church happens precisely in the resurrection of praise from those forgotten corners of the world where death is thought to have spoken the last word.

THE *CUL-DE-SAC* OF CONTEMPLATION

At the beginning of this article, I drew attention to John Flett's claim that the reason mission has never become a central theological topic in the tradition is that the tradition has a doctrine of God in which the fullness of divine life is located outside the economy of sending. I also hinted that Augustine's treatment of the divine missions is part of the reason why the tradition was never able to develop a missionary account of God's being. What is the connection between these two claims? Is Augustine partly to blame for the tradition's inattention to mission? Does Augustine's doctrine of God locate the fullness of divine life outside the economy of sending?

The standard reading of Augustine would, I think, answer yes, at least to the last of the above questions. It would simply point to a dualistic tendency running through Augustine's thought in which God and the world, time and eternity, are incompatible opposites. The human self can relate to God, then, only by an ever-refined process of moving away from the world through contemplation. God is reached only by an ever-inward and ever-upward movement of the *mens*. Human entrance into the fullness of God's life, while perhaps occasioned by the sendings of Son and Spirit, is not a participation in those sendings; it is a participation in a perfection of God that is antecedent to those sendings and so antecedent to God's economic triune action.

The reading of Augustine I have attempted in this article enables one to answer the question perhaps in a more nuanced way. I have tried to uncover the logic of Augustine's treatment of the divine missions by arguing for its irreducibly

trinitarian character, its affirmation of the unity between revelation and soteriology, and its goal in the restoration of the fundamental compatibility of the eternal with the temporal and physical. Entrance into the fullness of God's life, for Augustine, is not a rejection of the world; it is rather a different orientation to the world. We may love the world *as a creature*, that is, *in God*. The proper relation to it is not one of obsession, greed, and lust, but neither is it one of rejection or apathy. The proper relation is one of thankfulness, generosity, and praise. The fullness of divine life, therefore, is not in opposition to the economy of salvation. On the contrary, the economy of salvation is nothing but the repetition of God's eternal triune being in our time and space. Along the way I have noted and tried to develop the missionary possibilities resident in this theology.

Nevertheless, I do believe that Augustine's treatment of the divine missions is unfortunate when viewed from the perspective of mission. One of the curious things about *De Trinitate* is that John 20:21 never comes in for comment. As has been noted before, *De Trinitate* has a very Johannine cast.⁶⁶ The gospel of John receives more attention than any other gospel, particularly those passages that deal with the sending of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Yet the one passage that includes human beings in the divine sendings is not treated at all. Why is this? One can only speculate, but perhaps the reason is that, given how he treated the sending of the Son and Spirit, Augustine simply did not know what to do with the notion of human beings being sent. What could this mean in the context of *De Trinitate*? Sending is an outward, external movement, yet the path of human beings in *De Trinitate* is an upward, inward movement. Moreover, the divine missions, for Augustine, are first and foremost a display of the divine self for the purification of human minds. What would it mean for a human being to participate in the divine self-display?⁶⁷ Of course, a human being *did* participate in the divine self-display, namely, Jesus. But what, for Augustine, is the meaning of the actions of the human Jesus with regard to the divine-self display? As Michel Barnes has shown, the purpose of Jesus' outward, visible, human actions is to induct us into the contemplation of the invisible triune life.⁶⁸ Jesus *as human* shows us how human, physical life is to be the occasion for contemplating the divine life. He teaches us to refashion our loves so that they are directed first and foremost to the invisible and eternal Trinity. Divine sending, then, is an outward, visible movement, but this outward, visible movement is in service of a yet greater inward and invisible vision. God enacts his triune life in time and space, yes, but the goal of this enactment is to set up in time and space a kind of physical portal to another world, the invisible world of the Trinity. As Gioia writes, "To the extent that what

66 See Evan Kuehn, "The Johannine Logic of Augustine's Trinity: a dogmatic sketch", *Theological Studies* 68.3 (2007): 572-594.

67 In *Tractate 121* on John 20:10-29, Augustine hints that the meaning of sending for human beings is the prophetic action of the church. This is exactly right, I think. But unfortunately Augustine goes on to identify this prophetic action with the *internal* life of the church rather than with an *external* movement into the world.

68 Michel Barnes, "The Visible Christ and the Invisible Trinity: MT. 5:8 in Augustine's Trinitarian Theology of 400," *Modern Theology* 19, no. 3 (2003): 330.

we know really is God, we ourselves are no more in this world.”⁶⁹ Gioia even connects this with the notions of human beings being sent. To know God is to be sent, “but we do not say that this sending is in this world, as Scripture does with the visible manifestation of the Son of God in Christ.”⁷⁰ So divine sending and human sending are a kind of double movement, the divine reaching outward, but only in order to bring the human inward. The ecclesiology that corresponds to this is one in which the internal, sacramental life of the church is that physical portal to the invisible world of the Trinity. The church may have motivation to move outward into the world in order to tell people the good news, just as God moved outward in Christ, but this outward movement is not what makes the church the church, just as God’s sending of the Son and Spirit is not what makes God God.

The heart of the problem, as I see it, is Augustine’s locating the goal and high-point of Christian existence in contemplation. This, in turn, is rooted in a prior problem with his doctrine of God. Augustine feels he must separate the divine missions from the divine processions.⁷¹ I will address these problems in reverse order.

The divine processions, for Augustine, the Father begetting the Son and breathing the Spirit, are “complete” or “fully actualized” apart from the divine missions. To be sure, the divine missions are a repetition or “extension” of the divine processions, but the essential content of the divine processions is an eternal Love that is not yet involved in mission. God may have a mission in time, but he is not in eternity a missionary God. The reason Augustine does this, of course, is to affirm the freedom of God. God is not dependent upon the world for his identity as God. God’s decision to send the Son and Spirit is a free decision of grace. God does not hand himself over to the world when he comes to it. God remains free even as he comes. Gioia writes, “Augustine does not identify the missions with the inner-Trinitarian identity of Son and Holy Spirit (i.e., in Rahnerian terms, the economic with the immanent Trinity) to the point that Christ’s humanity becomes revealer as such, i.e. that knowledge of God becomes something at our disposal.”⁷²

I must push back at Gioia (and Augustine) here. He assumes that if one were to identify the divine missions with the inner-Trinitarian identity of Son and Holy Spirit that revelation would become something at our disposal. Perhaps certain ways of identifying the divine missions with the divine processions would do this, but it is simply incorrect to assume that identifying them with each other necessarily leads to a reduction of revelation to something purely immanent and under human control. It is possible, I want to argue, to affirm that God from all eternity is a missionary God and precisely in this affirmation uphold the absolute freedom of God. God is the one who from all eternity sends Jesus Christ in the

69 Gioia, *The Theological Epistemology of Augustine’s De Trinitate*, 80.

70 Ibid.

71 This becomes fully explicit with Thomas Aquinas, but the basic move is there in *De Trinitate*.

72 Gioia, *The Theological Epistemology of Augustine’s De Trinitate*, 116.

Spirit for the salvation of the world. This is the act of his being.⁷³ Just so, God remains absolutely free in the economy. For a missionary God will not allow any contingent event to imprison or capture his being. God lives in missionary movement, and so no culture, no language, no theology, no human achievement can ever capture God as his grace flies to every people and nation. To use Karl Barth's image, the human attempt to capture the missionary God is like the attempt to draw a bird in flight. As soon as we begin, God has moved on, and called us to move on in missionary freedom. Whereas a non-missionary doctrine of God will find the human correspondence to the freedom of God in contemplation of the invisible Trinity, a missionary doctrine of God will find the human correspondence to the freedom of God in the freedom of the church to assume various and diverse missionary forms in order to proclaim the Gospel to every tribe, language, and people. It is this freedom that enables missionary proclamation and movement to resist being reduced to propaganda.

A non-missionary God will have a non-missionary church. The basic act of the church will not be a missionary act, and the perfection of Christian existence will be defined without sustained attention to mission. For Augustine, the perfection of Christian existence is contemplation, that act of the *mens* whereby we behold eternal truth. Such an act, for him, is distinct from temporal action, whereby we manage the affairs of life and perform works of virtue.⁷⁴ Here in Augustine we see the beginning of the medieval distinction between the *vita contemplativa* and the *vita activa* in which the former is valued over the latter as the true form of Christian existence. From the perspective of mission, such a distinction is, as Karl Barth says, "rather dubious."⁷⁵ The problem is that the New Testament knows no distinction between an active from of obedience and a contemplative one. To be sure, the New Testament commands growth in virtue, prayer, wisdom, and knowledge of God. The New Testament also speaks of "rest." But such exhortations are not instructions to become separate from the world so that one is better suited for one's life in eternity. They are exhortations to become separate from the world so that one may *engage the world* with the truth of the Gospel. The distinctiveness of the Christian community is, as Barth insists, the fact that it is a *missionary* community. The Christian community is distinctive not because in pious contemplation it resists and rejects the lures of the world, but because in active obedience to Jesus Christ it is *for* the world, corresponding to the distinctiveness of the God it worships who is *for* the world in his deepest depths. The church worships a God whose eternal being is in his activity for the world, and so "the community is as such a missionary community or it is not the Christian community."⁷⁶ Any other existence but missionary existence is for the Christian community a form of disobedience. "Contemplation," Barth writes,

⁷³ Here I am opting for the more Barthian interpretation of what it means to say that God is a missionary God.

⁷⁴ *De Trinitate*, XII.11.

⁷⁵ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957-75), III/4, 474.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 505.

“can be only a *cul-de-sac*... God...is not [an] object of contemplation. God withdraws from every kind of contemplation. For God acts.”⁷⁷

THE REDUCTIONISM OF PRO-NICENE CULTURE

To the extent that “pro-Nicene culture” views contemplation as the goal and high-point of Christian existence, it embodies a deep reductionism. The Christian life becomes less than active movement into the world for the sake of proclaiming and enacting the coming kingdom of God. It is true that figures such as Augustine and Gregory of Nyssa have rich and beautiful theologies that speak powerfully about the ways of the triune God with his creatures. There is much to learn from them, and it is only hubris that declares that we have “moved on from them.” As this article has shown, Augustine understands the doctrine of the Trinity to be about the shared life between God and his creatures in which transformative joy is given freely and without end. For him, our knowledge of God is a conformity to and participation in God’s outgoing life. This is right and good. Precisely so, life with the triune God can never be one of self-enclosed growth in activities or habits that turn our minds and hearts and bodies away from the world that God so loved. If C.S. Lewis is right that joy is incomplete until it is expressed, then life with God can never be private or enacted only within the church. Life with the triune God is the eternal overflow of joy into and for the world.

“God is worshipped not by moods but by action,” writes Kierkegaard.⁷⁸ The question that must be posed to Augustine and to those who would recommend his theological and spiritual vision is whether his account of the Christian life in God properly corresponds to how God is revealed in Jesus Christ. God is worshipped only in action because God’s own life is an act of Love, as Augustine knew well. He understood this action to be an ever upward and ever inward contemplative movement into God, and I have raised questions from the perspective of mission about the limitations of such a construction. Is contemplation really the heart of Christian discipleship? Is enjoyment of oneself in God really the goal of Christian existence? In raising these questions, I do not mean to denigrate growth in wisdom, virtue, and self-love. I am simply struggling toward an understanding of Jesus’ promise that “whoever does not take their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it” (Matthew 10:38-39). How might we understand such loss of life as the very fullness of life? I want to suggest that missionary love for the world points in the right direction. Augustine can help us here, even if despite himself. God’s own trinitarian life, for him, is a refusal of possession that is simultaneously the fullness of Love. The Father is himself only as he sends his Son for the sake

77 Ibid., 563.

78 Charles E. Moore, ed., *Provocations: Spiritual Writings of Kierkegaard* (Farmington: Plough Publishing House, 2007), 410.

of the Spirit. This movement of Son from Father for the sake of the Spirit is occasioned by the nature of God's essence as Love. The human correspondence to such Love can only be a missionary self-giving for the sake of the world. Anything less and we risk losing our lives.⁷⁹

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79 Many thanks to John Flett for his comments on an earlier draft of this article.

THE MINISTRY SECTION OF BEM: AFFIRMATIONS AND CHALLENGES

Benjamin Connor

The *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* document (BEM or the “Lima document”) was adopted by the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches in Lima, Peru, in 1982. It has been characterized by those involved in its production and dissemination as the most important ecumenical document of the last century—an ecumenical “best-seller.” After offering a brief overview of the document, this essay examines the most controversial section of the three, the ministry section.

THE FAITH AND ORDER MOVEMENT AS THE SOIL OF BEM

The BEM document germinated and was nurtured to maturity in the soil of the Faith and Order movement. Like many of the significant ecumenical movements in the twentieth century, the roots of Faith and Order can be traced to the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference, 1910. American Episcopal leader Charles Brent was one of those participants who had experienced the purposeful unity of Edinburgh but who felt that the scope of Edinburgh’s work had been severely limited by intentionally avoiding issues related to faith and polity. At a General Church Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church several months later, “there came upon him vividly, his diary records, ‘a conviction that a world conference should be convened to consider matters of faith and order.’”¹ Life and Work and the International Missionary Council, together with Faith and Order comprised the three main streams of the institutional ecumenical movement in the first half of the twentieth century.

INTRODUCTION TO THE LIMA DOCUMENT, BEM

The Lima document, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*² was conceived as part of a more comprehensive, long-range research project of Faith and Order, “Towards the Common Expression of the Apostolic Faith Today.”³ Four questions

1 William Richey Hogg, *Ecumenical Foundations: A History of the International Missionary Council and Its Nineteenth-Century Background* (New York: Harper, 1952), 134.

2 Hereafter designated “BEM.”

3 *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry, Faith and Order Paper; No. 111* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982), x.

designed to guide the reception of the text were offered along with the document, and responses were requested from the churches. The churches were asked to consider:

1. the extent to which your church can recognize in this text the faith of the Church through the ages;
2. the consequences your church can draw from this text for its relations and dialogues with other churches...;
3. the guidance your church can take from this text for its worship, educational, ethical, and spiritual life and witness; and
4. the suggestions your church can make for the ongoing work of Faith and Order as it relates the material of this text...to its long-range research project “Towards the Common Expression of the Apostolic Faith Today.”⁴

Churches were asked to respond to BEM at their “highest appropriate level of authority.” The total number of responses through 1990 was 179 churches and a total of 186 official responses. The Ecumenical Institute at the University of Utrecht through 1990 had compiled a preliminary bibliography on BEM that included more than 1000 items.⁵

The literature accompanying the BEM document to aid its reception was vast. Michael Kinnamon relates that the number of journal and newspaper articles exceeded the hundreds in 1985. In addition he lists twelve books in an appendix to his book *Why it Matters*, all sharing the same purpose of assisting the reception of and interaction with BEM.⁶ Kinnamon’s book addresses for a lay audience questions such as: “How is BEM related to other parts of the ecumenical movement?”, “What makes this document so special?”, and “What are the major points of convergence?”, among others. He characterizes BEM as an ecumenical “best-seller” and suggests that it is the most significant achievement of the modern ecumenical movement produced by the “most confessionally and culturally comprehensive theological forum in the Christian world” with “the best theological and biblical scholarship to be found on all continents.”⁷

Kinnamon explains that BEM was conceived with an eye on its reception and that the issue for BEM was “not how we can move from present diversity into diversity-denying unity, but how we can move beyond the limited unities of our present traditions and structures into a unity that encompasses more of the richness of our common Christian heritage.”⁸ The question that arises from the

4 Ibid.

5 *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry 1982-1990: Report on the Process and Responses, Faith and Order Paper; No. 149* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1990), 10.

6 Michael Kinnamon, *Why It Matters: A Popular Introduction to the Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry Text* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1985), 71-72.

7 Ibid., 9.

8 Ibid., 18.

document is how that richness is to be appropriated, preserved, and communicated in the congregations that together make up the Church.

William Lazareth, who also wrote a book aimed at aiding BEM's reception, presents BEM as an ecumenical milestone, an unprecedented, Spirit-led event. Following Lazareth, one would conclude that all that remains now is the response of the churches in the form of embodying this "common understanding of the apostolic faith."⁹ Lazareth's book is written for the church member and intended for discussion in small groups. It includes what he feels are the most pertinent sections of the document minus technical language and excess history. The paragraphs are short, the central ideas are summarized, and the book is replete with illustrations that seek to frame the relevance of the topics addressed in BEM. Finally each section concludes with questions designed to help the group "experience deeper understandings, more wholesome attitudes and more responsible patterns of action with reference to the faith and life of the Christian Church today."¹⁰

BEM AND ECCLESIOLOGY

While BEM is an ecumenical document that professedly considers contributions from the broad range of ecclesial traditions, one can discern an ecclesiological vision being promoted that will have ramifications for how ministry is understood. If one seeks to understand this ecclesiology, no higher appeal can be made than to Max Thurian, who was involved with the Faith and Order movement from 1949 and guided the steering committee in their redrafting of the document from 1977-1982. In the first volume of *Churches Respond to BEM*, the official reception literature of Faith and Order, Thurian offers the following reflection: "Whatever the character of their responses and comments may be, the Lima document is already an event unique in the annals of the church since the separations of East and West. For the first time, *all the Christian churches* have been asked for their considered opinion concerning a doctrinal document which touches their faith at the deepest level."¹¹ Though this representation of the significance of the document may be overstated, Thurian does suggest that the way in which BEM is received will depend largely on an already established ecclesiology. Then he tellingly confesses that which many of the churches had already articulated in their responses, that "the ecclesiology presupposed by the Lima document and thought of as that of the New Testament (which does not rule out institutional diversity), is definitely a 'sacramental' ecclesiology."¹²

9 William Henry Lazareth and World Council of Churches. Commission on Faith and Order., *Growing Together in Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry: A Study Guide, Faith and Order Paper; No. 114* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982), 5.

10 Ibid., 12.

11 Max Thurian and World Council of Churches. Commission on Faith and Order., *Churches Respond to BEM: Official Responses to the "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" Text, Faith and Order Paper; No. 129,132,135,137,143,144* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1986), 1. Emphasis added.

12 Ibid., 6.

While recognizing the possibility of a diversity of forms of ministry under the guidance of the Spirit, the BEM clearly puts forward a threefold concept for ministerial order—a position which Thurian defends. Thurian comments, “We must recognize, however, that under the guidance of the Holy Spirit the church has developed certain elements of this primitive variety...These ministries were to become the threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter and deacon, which would spread everywhere in the church in the second and third centuries.”¹³ Further, he suggests that it “seems well-suited to serve as an expression of the visible unity of the churches and as a means of achieving that unity.”¹⁴ He continues that this ordained ministry is properly located within the total mission of the community of the faithful and is executed in solidarity and partnership with the community and warns against a “conception of power which is hierarchical in the wrong sense.”¹⁵ Despite his warnings, many found in BEM support for the hierarchical ministerial structure that Thurian warned against.

Conrad T. Gromada, in a balanced critique of BEM, offers seven strengths of the document, including its methodology, its brevity, its open-endedness, its awareness of recent advances in theological and Biblical scholarship, its hope and optimism, its Trinitarian grounding of ministry and, finally, its true ecumenicity.¹⁶ He ends, however, with a trenchant criticism of the BEM document, noting, first, the document’s “glaring omission” of the issue of the ordination of women an omission made for the sake of convenience and receptivity. Second, and more germane to this current discussion, Gromada adds a word on the nostalgic tenor of the document or, in his words, “the penchant of the text to look backward to the old, still undivided church and the ministries which accompany it while neglecting to look forward to the new emerging church and ‘the practice, even alternative practices, of ministry in the present, in connection with the many new forms of ministry instituted by pastoral workers, ecumenical ministries and so on.’”¹⁷

Gromada has introduced what will be the heart of my critique of the ministry section of BEM as I join my voice with the international community. But before I articulate my exceptions I will offer a brief overview of responses to the ministry section of BEM from a wide variety of Christian traditions.

RESPONSES TO BEM’S MINISTRY SECTION: AFFIRMATIONS, CLARIFICATIONS, AND CRITICISM

The Faith and Order publication, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry 1982-1990: Report on the Process and Responses*, notes that many of the Reformed

13 Ibid., 22-23.

14 Ibid., 24.

15 Ibid., 25.

16 Conrad T. Gromada, *The Theology of Ministry in the “Lima Document”: A Roman Catholic Critique* (San Francisco: International Scholars Publications, 1994), 470-78.

17 Ibid., 479-80.

Churches find the handling of the relationship between the calling of the entire people of God and the role of ordained ministry in BEM's ministry section (M) unsatisfactory.¹⁸ This challenge to the ministry section was articulated most clearly when in 1992 the World Evangelical Fellowship's (WEF) Theological Commission offered their reaction to BEM. With regard to the ministry section the evangelical response opens, "In general, the first six paragraphs of the Ministry section of BEM set out a valid framework for considering the question of Christian ministry, with their focus on the sinful state of humankind, the redemptive work of Christ, and the calling of the people of God through the Spirit."¹⁹ The response continues, however, to mourn the fact that BEM fails to capitalize on and in fact subverts the foundation laid in M1-6 (*The calling of the whole people of God*) by restricting the rest of the discussion on "ministry" to the narrowly defined nature and function of the ordained clergy. The Theological Commission takes exception to the presumption of a ministerial priesthood, connected to presidency over the Eucharist, that is somehow other than or distinct from the conception of the priesthood of the whole people of God.

As might be expected, the Commission also challenges the sacramental understanding of ordination promoted in BEM (M39-50). The Commission offers its own theological reflection about ordination as "public recognition by the church of a call to exercise a spiritual gift for ministry and the commitment of the church to the support of the gifted person in the exercise of his or her ministry."²⁰ The Commission understands this definition of ordination to provide a way beyond the issue of the ordination of women that is so carefully avoided by BEM.

Further, the Commission speaking for WEF responds negatively to the practical narrowing of "ministry" to the threefold office of bishop, presbyter and deacon (M29-31). The Commission wants to stress the variety of functional terms that describe ministerial activity and "place more emphasis upon the 'variety of charisms' in 'the community which lives in the power of the Spirit'" that fail to receive recognition or find expression in BEM.²¹

From an international perspective, Andar Ismail, an ordained minister of the Indonesian Christian Church who specializes in lay education, offers a similar critique of the Lima document. His primary contention with the document, one that finds resonance in this essay, is that the promising beginning that consists of "a strong advocacy for the ministry of the whole people of God" does not seem to inform the paragraphs below it, as the "discussion quickly turns to the issue

¹⁸ *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry 1982-1990: Report on the Process and Responses*, 75.

¹⁹ Paul Schrottenboer and World Evangelical Fellowship, *An Evangelical Response to Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry* (Carlisle: Paternoster, on behalf of World Evangelical Fellowship, 1992), 14-15.

²⁰ Ibid., 16.

²¹ Ibid., 18.

of the ordained ministry.”²² He notes that the document betrays a “eucharistic conception of the church and its ministry” which inevitably results in giving priority to the supremacy of the clergy. Ismail suggests,

This heavy emphasis on the eucharistic celebration de-emphasizes the role of the laity and stresses the indispensability and the authority of the clergy instead. If the emphasis had been placed more on the witness and service of all believers in the world, this document would have been more consistent with the strong advocacy of the ministry of the laity evident in the preamble.²³

This focus on the minister as the celebrant of the Eucharist sets the stage for the identification of the ordained minister with the role of a priest. Ismail regrets that, while stressing the Spirit’s initiative in the Church’s historical acceptance of the threefold pattern for offices, BEM misses the possibilities of the Spirit’s work in the critique of these structures during the Reformation or the rediscovery of the laity in the modern ecumenical movement because it is focused on the pattern of the second and third centuries.²⁴

Disturbed by the sacramental presentation of ordination in M39-44 and fearing the impact that this perceived bifurcation of clergy and laity might have on the education of the Church, Ismail concludes that the BEM understanding of ministry and ordination casts the laity as primarily receivers and the ordained as merely “‘acknowledging’ or ‘being open’ to their gifts.”²⁵ In the end, Ismail’s primary challenge to the BEM document is that, although it begins with a strong affirmation about the ministry of the whole people of God, it concentrates unevenly on the ordained ministry and does not adequately explore the gifts of ministry given to the congregation. Therefore, according to Ismail, “The document does not develop fully the significance of the laity and what implications this notion has for the total ministry of the total church.”²⁶

Rev. Prof. Fr Samuel Rayan S.J. of India, while giving BEM a more favorable review than the WEF or Ismail, shares some of the same concerns. On the one hand, he suggests that the document avoids the delegation of the ministry of the Church to an elite ordained minority, obviating this inadequate notion of ministry by emphasizing the relationship of “interdependence and reciprocity”

²² Andar Ismail, “Laity in BEM: A Theological and Educational Critique,” *Ecclesiastical Review* 41, no. 1 (January 1989): 73. See where he developed these ideas in his doctoral dissertation, Andar Ismail, *The Tension between the Doctrine of the Laity and the Doctrine of Ordained Ministry in the Documents of the World Council of Churches and Its Implications for Lay Education* (Doctoral Dissertation. Richmond: Presbyterian School of Christian Education, 1988).

²³ Ismail, “Laity in BEM: A Theological and Educational Critique,” 74.

²⁴ Ibid., 75.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 76.

between the ordained ministers and the rest of the body.²⁷ However, immediately afterwards, Rayan registers the following complaint: “But then the text does not provide for a celebration expressive of this truth, nor does it explain why the laying on of hands is done not by all but only by ‘those appointed to do so.’”²⁸ Another Roman Catholic scholar, Francine Cardman, adds her voice to the chorus that discerns in BEM a bent in favor of the ordained ministry, noting that, even though BEM tacitly attempts to build the ordained ministry on the foundation of the ministry of the whole people of God, the unbalanced emphasis on the ordained undermines the effort.²⁹

Of course, the primary emphasis of Cardman’s article, betrayed by the title, is BEM’s handling of the ordination of women. After indicating the diminished amount of space and forcefulness devoted to the subject from Accra, 1974 to Lima, 1982 and the document’s positive stance towards the diversity of gifts and charisms given to the community, Cardman continues, “If this insight were related more integrally to the text’s understanding of priesthood, and especially to the relation between the priesthood of all the baptized and that of the ordained minister, then perhaps it would be possible to reach some consensus on who may exercise the charism of ministry in the church.”³⁰ This issue of the ordination of women and others in which church traditions weigh heavily, expose the limitations of ecumenical documents such as BEM.

For example, in the earliest phase of Faith and Order, the Orthodox Church, with some assurances that it would not be proselytized, was brought into the movement.³¹ Orthodox Syrian V.C. Samuel feels that he can point to the independent liturgical and ecclesiastical life of the autonomous and autocephalous national and regional churches of Orthodoxy as a model of contextual ecumenicity. Many evangelicals would agree with such an assessment. However, the Orthodox will never be willing to bend on the notion of the hierarchy of ministry. Samuel writes, “Thus the community was brought into being with different organs entrusted with the responsibility of guiding it within the context of Christ’s ministry. In the course of time the community grew and the organs came to be developed into the threefold ministry, consisting of bishop, presbyter and deacon, which subsequently evolved into the church’s hierarchy.”³² The laity and the hierarchy are both recipients of the ministry, as Samuel suggests, but are “recipients of the same ministry in varying degrees.”³³

27 Samuel Rayan, “The Lima Text and Mission,” *International Review of Mission* 72, no. 286 (April 1983): 205-06.

28 Ibid., 206.

29 Francine Cardman, “BEM and the Community of Women and Men,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 21 (Winter 1984): 89.

30 Ibid., 92.

31 Ruth Rouse, Stephen Neill, and Harold Edward Fey, *A History of the Ecumenical Movement*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), 418.

32 V.C. Samuel, “The Mission Implications of Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry,” *International Review of Mission* 72, no. 286 (1983): 211.

33 Ibid.

Archbishop Gundyayev Kirill extends the Orthodox critique of BEM by reminding his readers of the principles of the Toronto Declaration and the fact that BEM has no ecclesiological status because to give such status to a document is beyond the authority of either the Faith and Order Movement or the WCC.³⁴ He then proceeds to critique BEM for not being “Orthodox” enough.

Where Archbishop Kirill finds the greatest weakness and the most powerful deterrent to the document’s reception by the churches, I find BEM’s greatest strength. The Archbishop protests that BEM does not “make a sufficiently clear distinction between the ministry of the people of God and the ordained ministry” and that it “speaks very loosely about the nature of the difference between them.”³⁵ On the contrary, I feel that the BEM makes too stark a contrast between ordered ministry and the ministry of the whole people of God. The Archbishop finds that the connection or line of succession between the earthly ministry of the apostles and the ministry of the ordained ministers is not sufficiently articulated and is too general. Of course, the Archbishop wishes to assert a particular vision of the commonality between the original Apostles and the ordained minister. He continues, “The ministry of the witness could hardly be restricted to one generation of the eyewitnesses” and concludes that “it was received by those to whom these eyewitnesses transmitted the right given to them by the Lord to be witnesses.”³⁶ I, on the other hand, cannot imagine any convergence on the issue of ministry if apostolicity is defined in the manner in which Archbishop Kirill suggests. The Archbishop finally adds, “To reflect on this succession in the ecumenical statement on Ministry would mean to make a real major advance to the genuine agreement.”³⁷ And here one can only imagine the Archbishop means agreement with his Orthodox tradition.

With regard to ministry, the Archbishop is not content to approach the issue along pragmatic lines in terms of the activities of the ordained minister. Clearly he is seeking agreement with his notion of apostolic succession as a guarantee of apostolic charisma, a continuation of the apostolic ministry that has ontological consequences and is preserved through “the continuity of ordinations performed by those who carry out this ministry, i.e. bishops.”³⁸ I find great comfort in the fact that the Archbishop finds BEM wanting in this regard.

Aside from evaluations of BEM from the vantage point of different church traditions, there are also critiques of BEM from the standpoint of other ecumenical documents. Two separate essays in one issue of *Ecumenical Review* offer an evaluation of BEM in conversation with WCC’s Commission of World Mission and Evangelism (CWME). In the first, Paul Loffler asks what CWME’s “Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation” (ME) and BEM can learn from one another. Loffler notes that aspects of “intercultural and inter-religious witness

34 Gundyayev Kirill, “The Significance and Status of BEM in the Ecumenical Movement,” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 30 (Summer 1985): 181-82.

35 Ibid., 189.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid., 190.

38 Ibid.

are almost entirely missing from BEM” as it seems to favor and underscore “the transcultural and universal dimension of the Christian faith.”³⁹ In this regard BEM seems unconcerned with the contextualization and diversity of the faith.

In the related article, Mercy Amba Oduyoye agrees with Loffler that though “BEM is not oblivious to the real world in which the church exists, an awareness of this context dominates the ‘Mission and Evangelism’ document.”⁴⁰ Oduyoye concludes,

As many of the responses to BEM have pointed out, its ministry section focuses on the ordained ministry, its authority, forms and succession. This has the danger of reinforcing an image of the church as consisting of the clergy—who are also the persons charged with being in mission. The aim is the unity of ministry, but in fact what is developed is the unity of the *ordained* ministry.⁴¹

Some of the most trenchant critiques are from those with a non-Western perspective. Along the same lines as Loffler’s critique that BEM is inattentive to transcultural concerns, Timothy Njoya of the Presbyterian Church in Nairobi, Kenya, argues that “The church’s call to incarnate itself in the community is as much part of its apostolicity, catholicity and holiness as is the call to be one.”⁴² It is clear that Njoya perceives BEM to be a non-African document, a piece of theological collaboration in which his understanding of ministry and ministerial structures as inextricably connected to the social community has been ignored. To him BEM is not incarnational but rather is something like a creed or confession that is disembodied from the present struggle and experience of Christians in Africa. BEM ignores the context that guides the theologian into relevant theologizing.

Njoya notes that for the church in Africa it is impossible to address the issue of ministry without considering the “the specific needs of people who want to assemble for prayers, hymns, sermons, sacraments and service.” He continues that the way in which the ordained ministers serve the people and “allow them to participate in the church leadership is an important part of how the community understands Christianity.”⁴³ Njoya concludes with the following warning: “The biggest danger facing the ordained ministry is that of alienation by centralization and bureaucratization rather than by culture.”⁴⁴

39 Paul Loffler, “The BEM Document from a CWME Perspective,” *The Ecumenical Review* 39, no. 3 (July 1987): 330.

40 Mercy Amba Oduyoye, “Unity and Mission: The Emerging Ecumenical Vision,” *The Ecumenical Review* 39, no. 3 (July 1987): 339.

41 Ibid., 343.

42 Timothy N. Njoya, “The Ministry as Witness,” *International Review of Mission* 72, no. 286 (April 1983): 234.

43 Ibid., 237.

44 Ibid., 238.

CRITICISMS CONTINUED

As the responses to BEM have made manifest, two of the fundamental problems with the ministry section of BEM are its Western perspective and inattentiveness to the cultural pluriformity of expressions of ministry and its overemphasis on ordained ministry that seems to diminish the value and role of congregational ministry. In searching for the right words to critique BEM's approach to ministerial order, I can do little more effective than expand on the statement of Catholic scholar Edward Schillebeeckx,

Here emerges what in my view is the greatest deficiency of the Lima Report. This report has rightly brought forward one pole of the problem, viz. the old, still undivided church. However, it takes no account of the other pole, viz. the practice, even alternative practices, of ministry in the present, in connection with the many new forms of ministry instituted by pastoral workers, ecumenical ministries and so on. Must these forms be excluded from the ministry, or *per se* introduced within the tripartite division of episcopacy, presbyterate and diaconate? In that case does not this church order which, while very old, is nevertheless the result of a historical development, become so important that it can hinder the vitality of churches in the gospel?⁴⁵

Schillebeeckx accurately and astutely captures the fact that a major limitation of BEM is that it is a piece of academic ecumenical theology that cannot account for the actual practice of ministry in its multifarious ecumenical expressions. Schillebeeckx reflects, “I doubt whether many ecumenical basic communities will recognize themselves in it. Nevertheless, the Lima Report is also a challenge for them, though on the other hand the basic communities are a challenge for the Lima Report.”⁴⁶

Though there has been interest in BEM in the churches of Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America, the Middle East and the Pacific, and this “despite the fact that BEM is shaped by a conceptual framework and language that is often strange to them,”⁴⁷ there have also been gentle rebukes emanating from those areas of the world along the lines of Schillebeeckx’s critique. The United Church of Japan might speak also for many churches of Africa, Asia, and Latin America: BEM “cannot be said to be completely relevant to our situation. In general it comes across to us as strongly influenced by the values of the so-called ‘Christian world’ of Europe and North America.”⁴⁸ BEM does not adequately consider context when putting forth suggestions about structures for ministry and appears to uncritically accept a “Golden Age” of ministerial structures.

⁴⁵ Edward Schillebeeckx, *The Church with a Human Face: A New and Expanded Theology of Ministry* (New York: Crossroad, 1985), 262.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry 1982-1990: Report on the Process and Responses*, 11.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 29.

Perhaps an accurate interpretation of the theology of ministry promulgated by BEM, one which in this author's opinion reveals one of its primary weaknesses, is summarized in a statement in M. E. Brinkman's *Progress in Unity: Fifty Years of Theology within the World Council of Churches*. In his chapter on ministry, Brinkman suggests that a "real theology of ministry attempts to indicate the way in which salvation, by divine providence, may best be handed on by people."⁴⁹ Does this approach to ministry miss the primary calling of the Christian, the baptismal basis of all Christians to serve as witnesses? Should not a "real theology of ministry" have as its focus not salvation, which is wholly the work of God, but the responsibility of witness?

I do agree that certain people are set apart for the leadership of the community. The charism that is recognized in such leaders is given by that same Spirit that gifts all others in the body to edify the church. To set apart this leader as "ordained" as opposed to others who are not "ordained," seems unnecessary. The idea that baptism is one's ordination goes back to the Church Fathers⁵⁰ and has been developed more recently by, Karl Barth, who suggested that all are ordained to the ministry of witness in baptism. Not all are called and gifted to become servant-leaders in the congregation, but all are ordained to the ministry of witness.

It is instructive and revealing that in his *Church Dogmatics* Barth never addresses ordained ministry in the section specifically designated, "The Ministry of the Community." Instead, Barth introduces the issue of ordination in the fragment "Baptism as the Foundation of the Christian Life." His approach to ordination, as well as to baptism and ministry, is consistent with his emphasis on the apostolic nature of the Church and his thoroughly developed notion of Christian identity, an identity which is founded upon election in Christ and animated through a fellowship of apostolic action. For Barth, baptism in the Church becomes an act of human response to the prior work of Christ. In response to the baptism by the Spirit, the sacramental and prior baptism by the True Minister, baptism by water involves joining a community of witness and taking up responsibility within it. In each baptism the Church crosses the frontier from light into darkness: "Baptising a man who comes to it from without, from the darkness of the world, it declares that it does not exist for itself alone, nor for particular individuals, but for all men."⁵¹ The individual baptized by the community becomes personally responsible, along with the community, "...for the execution of the missionary command which constitutes the community....The task of every Christian—not

49 M. E. Brinkman, *Progress in Unity? Fifty Years of Theology within the World Council of Churches: 1945-1995: A Study Guide*, Louvain Theological & Pastoral Monographs; 18 (Louvain [Grand Rapids, MI]: Peeters Press; Eerdmans, 1995), 122.

50 E. Glenn Hinson, *The Evangelization of the Roman Empire: Identity and Adaptability* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1981). According to Hinson, baptism was a key point of reference for initiation and discipline. "Baptism, as some of the Fathers expressed it, was the layperson's ordination," 73.

51 Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, ed. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance, vol. 4.4 Fragment, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1969), 200.

additionally but from the very outset on every step of the way assigned to him in baptism—is his task as a bearer of the gospel to the others who still stand without.”⁵²

Barth explains the baptismal basis of his understanding of ministry through the specific issue of ordination,

According to the provisions of good ecclesiastical order, and in explication of the marching orders given to individuals in detail, pastors, elders, priests, deacons, deaconesses, bishops and even the pope as *servus servorum Dei* may be solemnly (but not too solemnly) assigned to their special place and missionary activity in the framework of the mission of the community. But all those baptised as Christians are *eo ipso* consecrated, ordained and dedicated to the ministry of the Church. *They cannot be consecrated, ordained, or dedicated a second, third or fourth time without devaluation of their baptism.*⁵³

According to Barth, there is no special ordained office that sets one person apart, making her “the minister” of the congregation. As he stated unequivocally earlier, “The Church may never in any tolerable sense be identified with a rank of pastors and other ecclesiastical dignitaries, *it is enough for these that with their special gifts and tasks they should be in the Church with all other Christians.*”⁵⁴

It is clear that the concepts of ecclesiastical office, especially hierarchically conceived offices and ordination, are not in the horizon of Barth’s theology of ministry. As mentioned previously, Barth gives the concepts no place in his discussion of the ministry of the community. Then how does he broach the topic of Christian leadership? We have already noted Barth’s conviction that ordination is something that all Christians receive at baptism. For the explication of his concept of office we are led to CD 4.2, “The Holy Spirit and the Upbuilding of the Christian Community.” There Karl Barth admits that there is among the members of the congregation “a definite order in which they and their work are graded, with different levels of responsibility and achievement.”⁵⁵ Is Barth now going to introduce a new hierarchical order simply developed on different soil? Certainly not. Barth is quick to add, “...there are no superior and inferior functions and tasks, nor can there be a rigid hierarchy of those taking part but only a very flexible hierarchy corresponding to the directness with which each receives orders from the Lord Himself.”⁵⁶ This notion of flexibility is key for Barth. If he is going to

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid., 201. Emphasis mine.

54 Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, ed. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance, vol. 4.3 second half, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Ltd., 1962), 766. Emphasis mine.

55 Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, ed. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance, vol. 4.2, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1958), 631.

56 Ibid.

allow for anything that even marginally resembles offices, they will have to be of a flexibly hierarchical nature.

CONCLUSION

The Lima text is rightly reproached for making too much of the hierarchical Episcopal structure of the “ministry.” Though the argument would be made by BEM’s framers that the hierarchy suggested embraces not an ontological but merely a functional subordination, BEM has in fact presented a hierarchical spiritual caste of leaders. This is in part due to the sacramental, Eucharistic ecclesiology that underlies the document. To balance this view, I have presented Barth’s baptismal ecclesiology and his conclusion that there is one ordained, the Messiah. This baptismal foundation for ministry stresses the fact that all participate in Christ’s ministry through their identification with him in their baptism. Brinkman attempts to clarify the concept of ordination as presented in BEM by suggesting, “ordination is essentially a setting apart with prayer for the gift of the Holy Spirit, the authority of the ordained ministry is not to be understood as the possession of the ordained person, but as a gift for the continuing edification of the body in and for which the minister has been ordained.”⁵⁷ Brinkman further suggests that people who have a problem with this notion of the ordained ministry have a problem with the “‘scandal’ of particularity.”

On the contrary, I would argue that the notion of ordained ministry defended by Brinkman, and the vision of ministry set forth in BEM, has that exact problem. It overlooks the particularity of the ordination of Jesus and the universal consequences of every Christian’s baptism in him. All members of the community receive gifts of the Holy Spirit for the building up of the community. Why should any be ordained beyond that ordination which they share in common with Christ? Should spiritually gifted Christian leaders be recognized by the community and set apart for their responsibilities? Yes. Are they ordained ministers? Yes, just like everybody else.

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57 Brinkman, *Progress in Unity? Fifty Years of Theology within the World Council of Churches: 1945-1995: A Study Guide*, 125.

PAUL AS TEACHER, MOTHER, FATHER, AND CHILD: 1 THESSALONIANS 2:1-12 AS A MODEL FOR MISSION

Joel Estes

¹For you yourselves know, brothers and sisters, that our visit to you has not been in vain, ²but after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, just as you know, we had courage in our God to share with you the gospel of God in a situation of great struggle. ³For our appeal to you does not come from deception or an impure motive or by treachery, ⁴but even as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please humans but God, who tests our hearts. ⁵For we never presented ourselves with flattering speech, just as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is our witness—⁶nor seeking glory from humans, nor from you, nor others,⁷ though we were able to wield authority as Christ's apostles. But, we presented ourselves as infants among you; even as a nursing mother cherishes her own children, ⁸so, having kindly affection for you, we resolved to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our very lives, for you have become dear to us. ⁹For you remember, brothers and sisters, our labor and toil, working night and day in order not to be a burden to any of you while we preached to you the gospel of God. ¹⁰You are witnesses, as well as God, that we presented ourselves to you, the believers, devoutly, uprightly, and blamelessly. ¹¹As you know, [we treated] each one of you as a father would his own children, ¹²exhorting, encouraging, and urging you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.¹

¹ Author's own translation; specific translation decisions will be addressed throughout the paper.

1 Thessalonians 2:1-12 provides a fascinating glimpse into the early missionary practices of Paul.² If 1 Thessalonians is Paul's first letter,³ then this description bears particular significance since it is the earliest evidence we have of his pattern of missionary ministry and his own attempts to formulate his role as an apostle.⁴

In the *narratio*⁵ of 2:1-12 Paul describes how he and his companions conducted themselves among the Thessalonians, which provides a model he expects the Thessalonians to follow in their own missionary activities.⁶ The passage is divided thematically and grammatically into two major sections: 1-7a, which emphasizes the *motivation* of Paul's mission using a series of negative contrasts, and 7b-12, which focuses on his *manner* of ministry using a series of positive familial metaphors.⁷ All of this leads to the climax in verse 12 where he urges the Thessalonians to "walk in a manner worthy of God." This verse,

2 Although Silvanus and Timothy are listed as co-authors of this letter (1:1) and the letter even refers to them collectively as apostles (1:7), Paul is generally regarded as the primary writer. For the sake of simplicity, in this paper I will refer to the author as Paul and generally use singular pronouns.

3 Scholars agree that this is the earliest of Paul's letters, written around 50CE.

4 It could be argued that in this letter Paul is "developing his own concept of apostleship" (Beverly Roberts Gaventa, "Apostles as Babes and Nurses in 1 Thessalonians 2:7," in *Faith and History: Essays in Honor of Paul W. Meyer*, eds. John T. Carroll, Charles H. Cosgrove and E. Elizabeth Johnson [Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1990], 194.) and that 1 Thessalonians is an "experiment in Christian writing" (*Ibid.*, 194 citing Helmut Koester, "1 Thessalonians—Experiment in Christian Writing," in *Continuity and Discontinuity in Church History: Essays Presented to George Hunston Williams on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, eds. Forrester Church and Timothy George [Leiden: Brill, 1979], 33-44).

5 A rhetorical term that means "narrative" and is defined by Cicero in *Inv. 1.27* as "an exposition of events that have occurred or are supposed to have occurred" (cited in Karl P. Donfried, *Paul, Thessalonica, and Early Christianity* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002], footnote 173).

6 These verses are set off from the verses that precede them with the transitional γέρα (2:1), a change in subgenre from thanksgiving to narration, and a shift in focus from the activity of the Thessalonians to those of the apostles. Likewise, in 2:12 there is a discernible shift in attention back to the Thessalonians and a return to thanksgiving. This is not to say that 2:1-12 is completely divorced from the passage that precedes it, for the γέρα in 2:1 not only signals a transition but also a thematic connection. What is explicitly affirmed in 1:2-10 (esp. 1:5-7)—that the Thessalonians imitated the apostles and in turn became missionary examples of the faith—is here developed and implicitly reinforced in narrative form.

7 The structure of this passage is more complicated than this basic outline suggests. For a detailed treatment of the literary structure of this passage, which supports internally the reading of "infants" in 2:7 and clarifies issues of punctuation throughout, see J. J. Janse van Rensburg, "An Argument for Reading νήπιοι in 1 Thessalonians 2:7," *A South African Perspective on the New Testament: Essays by South African New Testament Scholars Presented to Bruce M. Metzger*, edited by J. H. Petzer and Patrick J. Hartin (Leiden: Brill, 1986): 252-259.

then, along with the imitation language that both precedes it (1:6-7) and follows it (2:14), reveals that Paul's purpose in including this *narratio* is not simply biographical or apologetic, but parenetic—his goal is not merely to inform or defend, but to exhort.⁸

The way Paul accomplishes this goal is both illuminating and surprising. In his description Paul borrows specific terms and types from his contemporary culture while simultaneously adapting them and recontextualizing them to serve his missional purpose. He utilizes a startling array of images, casting himself in the role of teacher, father, mother, and child in order to convey his motivation and manner of ministry to the Thessalonians. The model of missionary practice that emerges not only enlightens our understanding of Paul's early vision for his own ministry, but is also deeply relevant for Christian mission today.

⁸ Parenese is a Latin rhetorical term that means “exhortation.” There has been considerable debate among scholars in recent years about the proper methodology one should use to analyze 1 Thessalonians (see, for example, the essays in Karl P. Donfried and Johannes Beutler, eds., *The Thessalonians Debate* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000]). Some scholars, based on form-critical analysis, outline the book according to typical epistolary conventions. Certainly this is an appropriate approach, as the book is clearly an epistle with the customary greeting, thanksgiving, body, and closing. However, the book does not conform to traditional epistolary form as closely as one might expect. Instead of just one thanksgiving this book has three, which are scattered throughout the letter (1:2-10; 2:13-16; 3:9). This makes it difficult to discern where the body of the letter begins and ends. Additionally, the letter includes significant narrative sections that resist tidy epistolary categorization. Furthermore, Paul’s command that the letter be read to the congregation in 5:27 suggests that this letter could just as easily be considered a piece of oral rhetoric. In fact, many scholars in recent years have done just that and analyzed 1 Thessalonians along rhetorical lines, an approach that has yielded significant new insights into the structure of the book as a whole and the particular place of 2:1-12. Key repetitions throughout the book, and especially in 2:1-12, confirm its parenetic function. For example, imitation language pervades the letter (1:6, 7; 2:14; 3:12; 4:1) and Paul repeatedly appeals to the Thessalonians’ prior knowledge and practice (e.g., 1:5; 2:1, 2, 5, 9, 10, 11, 9, 10, 11; 3:3, 4; 4:1, 9, 10, 5:2, 11) in order to gently prod them toward further growth, which is “typical of parenetic style that seeks to emphasize what is already known and understood” (Charles A. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians*. The New International Greek Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990], 92; cf., 80). Also worth noting is the abundance of affirmation that permeates the letter (e.g., 1:2-3, 6-10; 2:13-14, 19-20; 3:6-9; 4:1-2, 9-10), which is both a genuine response to the good news Paul received about the Thessalonians’ faith (3:6-7) and a gentle reminder for them to continue living it out (esp. 4:1, 10). Even narrative sections that may appear to serve a merely biographical or apologetic function are, upon closer examination, controlled by parenetic concerns, as they include both implicit and explicit exhortations (e.g., 1:5-7). This is the case with the *narratio* of 2:1-12, which serves to reinforce the overall aim of the letter by exhorting the Thessalonians to imitate the apostles and “walk in a manner worthy of God” (2:12).

PAUL AS TEACHER (2:1-7A)

If Paul's desire is for the Thessalonians to continue to model their own conduct after his, it is important to note carefully the way he describes his mission. In verses 1-7a he does this primarily by emphasizing behaviors the apostles avoided (deception, impure motive, treachery, greed, etc.). The presence of so many negative contrasts in these paragraphs has led some scholars to believe that Paul is defending himself against specific accusations or opposition. The fact that verse 2 mentions persecution in Philippi would seem to support this view, as would the description of opposition Paul and his associates faced in Thessalonica in Acts 17:1-9. However, no specific charges against Paul appear in this passage and nothing in the letter hints at a situation requiring Paul to use an apologetic tone. While the circumstances of Acts 17 might lie behind this text, to assume this is speculative since the letter does not specifically mention it.⁹ Thus, in keeping with the tone of the rest of the book, it is best to treat this section as parenetic rather than apologetic.

An examination of the terms Paul uses in 1-7a only bolsters this view, since it appears that many of the expressions he uses in these verses reflect stock descriptions of an ideal moral teacher/philosopher who is distinguished from harsh and abusive charlatans. In his influential article "Gentle as a Nurse," Abraham Malherbe cites dozens of parallels between Paul's language in this passage and descriptions found in the writings of Cynic philosophers, like Dio Chrysostom and Epictetus, who wanted to distinguish themselves from frauds. Malherbe focuses especially on Dio Chrysostom, showing how "Paul's description of his Thessalonian ministry in 1 Thessalonians 2 is strikingly similar to the picture sketched by Dio, both in what is said and in the way in which it is formulated."¹⁰ His summary of the parallels between Dio and Paul in verses 1-2 illustrates well his point:

Dio says that some Cynics fear the *ύβρις* of the crowd and will not become involved in the *άγων* of life. The speech of some of them can be described as *κενός*. The true philosopher, on the contrary, faces the crowd with *παρρησία* because God gives him the courage. Paul says that although he had suffered and experienced violence (*ύβρισθέντες*) in Philippi, his sojourn in Thessalonica was not empty (*κενή*), but he spoke boldly in God (*ἐπαρρησιασάμεθα εν τῷ θεῷ*) in a great struggle (*εν πολλῷ αγώνι*) (sic.).¹¹

⁹ Readers should also bear in mind that Acts 17 was probably written a generation after Paul's initial visit to Thessalonica and composition of this letter.

¹⁰ Abraham J. Malherbe, "Gentle as a nurse: the Cynic background to 1 Thess 12:2." *Novum Testamentum* 12, no. 2 (April 1970): 216.

¹¹ Ibid., 216. Greek parallels between Dio Chrysostom and 1 Thess. 2:1-12 are also conveniently collected in G. Mussies, *Dio Chrysostom and the New Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 200-201.

Malherbe shows similar parallels throughout the passage and, while some have accused him of pushing the connections too far (an issue to which we shall return in the next section), it is hard to dispute his overall point.

Noting these parallels, however, should not distract us from observing that Paul does more than just borrow the image of the ideal teacher; he fundamentally reinterprets it. At numerous points in this passage Paul attributes the success of his ministry to God. He has been “approved by God” (2:4), the message he preaches is “the gospel of God” (2:2, 8, 9), his courage is found “in God” (2:2), and his primary motivation is to please God (2:4) so that the Thessalonians could walk in a manner “worthy of God” (2:12). Indeed, God is stamped all over this passage. This is a far cry from Dio Chrysostom’s casual remark that he has been chosen “by the will of some deity.”¹² Paul’s commitment to God gives him liberty simultaneously to appropriate and significantly alter the image of the moral teacher as he defines what it means to be a Christian apostle.

PAUL AS CHILD, MOTHER, AND FATHER (2:7B-12)

If verses 1-7a focus on Paul’s *motivation* for mission and emphasize the negative (how the apostles did *not* present themselves), verses 7b-12 describe Paul’s *manner* of mission and emphasize the positive (how the apostles *did* present themselves).¹³ Where the previous section borrows imagery from moral philosophy to characterize Paul’s mission, this section turns to social metaphors of the family.

Whether there are two images or three in these verses depends on our interpretation of a sticky textual variant in verse 7. Here the Nestle-Aland Greek text reads ἀλλὰ ἐγενήθμεν νήπιοι ἐν μέσῳ ὥμῶν (lit. “but we became children in your midst”). Yet, many modern translations render this phrase “but we were gentle among you” (e.g., NRSV) and link it to the following verse that compares the ministry of the apostles to the care of a nursing mother for her children. The key issue is whether the word νήπιοι represents the original text or whether it has been modified from ἡπιοι, which means “gentle.” Scholars are divided on this issue, which is not surprising since there is good evidence for both readings. Those who prefer ἡπιοι (“gentle”) argue that it better fits the context, since comparing the apostles to infants in one breath (7a) and nursing mothers in the next (7b) would involve a jarring shift in metaphors. This reading also seems to fit the preceding context nicely as it would provide a tidy contrast to the previous verses that emphasize how the apostles could have treated the congregation harshly. Some scholars also highlight that where Paul uses νήπιοι elsewhere in his letters it is always of his converts, never of himself, and usually

12 Discourse 32.12. Cited in Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*. Interpretation (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 25.

13 The repetition of the word ἐγενήθμεν in 2:5 and 2:7 (preceded by ἀλλὰ) clearly delineates the central contrast in the text. This word also appears in 2:8 (though here it is used of the Thessalonians rather than the apostles) and again in 2:10.

in a derogatory sense (e.g., Rom. 2:20; 1 Cor. 3:1; 13:11; Gal. 4:1, 3; Eph. 4:14).¹⁴ Additionally, some point out that the initial v could have been added by a scribe by accidentally doubling the final v of the word that precedes it. This is even more plausible considering the original Greek was written in all capital letters and without punctuation.¹⁵

On the other hand, it could be argued that the reverse is just as likely. In this view, the initial letter was dropped from (“infants”) producing the variant form.¹⁶ Support for this position comes from the fact that νήπιοι is attested in many of the earliest and best manuscripts available.¹⁷ Moreover, the fact that νήπιοι complicates the reading rather than simplifying it can actually be construed as an argument in its favor, since a scribe would be more liable to alter a text to smooth it out than to obscure it.¹⁸ While this reading does result in a mixed metaphor, this is not altogether unusual for Paul (another example often cited is Gal. 4:19).¹⁹ The fact that Paul likens himself to a father (2:11) and even an orphan (2:17) within the same chapter (not to mention the ubiquitous language of “brothers and sisters” throughout the book)²⁰ indicates that he does not confine himself rigidly to any one image, but uses a range of metaphors to depict his style of ministry. The argument that Paul normally uses νήπιοι negatively and only of his converts (rather than himself) is not as strong as it might seem, since he utilizes the verbal form of the word positively elsewhere (c.f., νηπιάζετε in 1 Cor. 14:20) and his use of the noun is far from uniform and not always obviously negative.²¹ Additionally, Paul’s usage of this term in his later writings should not necessarily be read back onto this passage to constrain his usage here.²²

On the whole, the evidence seems to favor the reading attested in the oldest manuscripts: νήπιοι (“infants”). Neither decision dramatically affects the basic

14 Ernest Best, *A Commentary on the First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*. Harper’s New Testament Commentaries (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 101.

15 ΕΓΕΝΗΘΗΜΕΝΗΠΙΟΙ could easily have been copied as ΕΓΕΝΗΘΗΜΕΝΗΠΙΟΙ, a common textual error called dittography.

16 ΕΓΕΝΗΘΗΜΕΝΗΠΙΟΙ could have been mistakenly copied ΕΓΕΝΗΘΗΜΕΝΗΠΙΟΙ, a scribal mistake called haplography.

17 See the critical apparatus of the Nestle-Aland Greek text.

18 For this reason, a general rule of textual criticism is to prefer a more difficult reading.

19 See, for example: Gaventa, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 27 and Victor Paul Furnish, *1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians*. Abingdon New Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007), 58.

20 Lit. “brothers” in Greek (ἀδελφοί); this expression appears 17 times in the book, contributing to its warm tone.

21 See the helpful discussion and additional examples in Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *Our Mother Saint Paul* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 19.

22 It is quite possible that in the course of his ministry Paul’s use of this image changed, developed, or was intentionally adapted to suit the particular needs of the communities he was nurturing. For a helpful examination of the range of ways Paul used the image of a child in Reidar Aasgaard, “Like a Child: Paul’s Rhetorical Uses of Childhood” in *The Child in the Bible*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 249-277.

thrust of the passage. However, if νήπιοι is original, the additional metaphor of the apostles as “infants” only serves to enrich Paul’s message by introducing a deeper layer of meaning to his depiction of ministry. Indeed, for Paul to compare himself to a child would have been remarkably counter-cultural, implying vulnerability, dependence, and even weakness.²³

Paul follows quickly with another metaphor, this time of a nursing mother caring for her own children (ώς ἐὰν τροφὸς θάλπῃ τὰ ἔωντῆς τέκνα). In using this image Paul could be drawing either from the *topos* of the moral philosopher (as he did in verses 1-7a) or from the common social figure of a nurse.²⁴ While Abraham Malherbe advocates the former, Beverly Roberts Gaventa argues that here Malherbe pushes the parallels with Greek rhetoricians too far.²⁵ While Gaventa concedes that the image of a nursing mother does appear in the literature of Cynic philosophers, she demonstrates convincingly that Paul’s portrayal of himself as a nurse in this passage is more discontinuous with their usage than continuous. Instead, she emphasizes the social background of this metaphor, which “would conjure up in the minds of [Paul’s] audience an important and beloved figure” who is “identified not only with the nurture of infants but also with the continued affection for her charges well into adulthood.”²⁶ However, the fact that Paul speaks of the care of a nurse for her *own* children (τὰ ἔωντῆς τέκνα) may indicate that he is comparing himself with a biological mother rather than a hired wet-nurse, or that he is conflating these two figures. The parallel expression in verse 11b, where Paul speaks of the care of a father “for his own children” (τέκνα ἔωντοῦ), seems to support this reading, as does the fact that the image of a biological mother fits nicely with the two metaphors of child and father that immediately precede it and follow. Regardless, the point is that Paul “mothers” the Thessalonians and the addition of ἔωντῆς only accentuates the intimacy of the metaphor and illustrates the depth of Paul’s loving care.

In verse 11, Paul switches the metaphor one more time to that of a father. Victor Furnish explains that “in Roman imperial times the *paterfamilias* had,

23 Although some scholars think Paul may be rhetorically leveraging this metaphor to actually strengthen his control over congregations (essentially, by manipulating them), Reider Aasgaard argues convincingly that Paul’s aim is, rather, to make himself “vulnerable and left to the mercy of his addressees” (*Ibid.*, 276). He contends that “the sensitivity and openness—and maybe even the countercultural nature—of his use of these metaphors should be taken more seriously than has been customary” (*Ibid.*, 277).

24 Gaventa, *Our Mother Saint Paul*, 22.

25 *Ibid.*, 22-23. Gaventa offers three reasons why Paul’s nurse imagery in 1 Thess. 2:7 is not meant to illustrate the ideal philosopher: (1) Speakers use the nurse as an example to illustrate a point rather than as a metaphor to describe themselves, (2) Nurse imagery does not appear in Dio Chrysostom’s sustained descriptions of various types of Philosophers and only figures tangentially elsewhere, (3) The texts Malherbe cites in Dio use the word τίτθη or “wet-nurse” rather than the word τροφὸς or “nurse” that appears in 2:7, and the two terms do not seem to be interchangeable. She concludes, “While Malherbe has identified a *topos* which contrasts the ideal philosopher to the charlatan, it is far from clear that the behavior of the nurse has a fixed place in that *topos*” (*Ibid.*, 23).

26 Gaventa, *Our Mother*, 23; 24-25.

at least in theory, nearly absolute power over the entire household.”²⁷ Paul uses the term very differently. While this image certainly evokes authority, in light of the other metaphors immediately preceding it, Paul offers a significantly gentler version of it. For Paul, authority is not exercised in harsh domination, but is expressed in love, service, and sacrifice (2:8-10). Paul explicitly says in verse 7 that the apostles could have wielded authority (*δυνάμενοι ἐν βάπτισται εἶναι*) over the church in a heavy-handed way.²⁸ Instead, they extended their authority in “kindly affection” (v. 8) and worked “day and night” so as not to be a burden to them (v. 9). The apostles resolved not only to share with them the gospel, but indeed their “very lives” (v. 8). The metaphor of the father, then, evokes an image of authority that both reflects and redefines its normal cultural associations.²⁹ Paul’s role as a father is not primarily an *authority over* the Thessalonians, but a serious and attentive pastoral devotion to the individual needs of his spiritual children.³⁰ Here again, Paul reinterprets a familiar metaphor, freeing it from its potentially negative cultural connotations and transforming it into an image that resonates with the Christian spirit of his mission.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CHRISTIAN MISSION

It is clear that Paul’s missionary methods are not ancillary but central to this passage. The text itself demands that Paul’s style of ministry be examined and even emulated (2:12; cf. 1:6-10; 2:14). Over and over in this pericope Paul and his associates draw attention not only to the content of their message but even more to the motivation and manner of their delivery. The entire passage is constructed as a series of contrasts between the style of ministry represented by

27 Furnish, *1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians*, 61. However, as recent studies have shown, “the picture of the tyrannical *paterfamilias* meting out death and discipline to wife, children, and grandchildren does not seem to be reflected in accounts of the family as it was” (Suzanne Dixon, *The Roman Family* [Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992], 160). Thus, Paul’s use of the term stands in discontinuity with *theoretical* portrayals of the *paterfamilias* even if it is more continuous with actual practices in the Roman family (*Ibid.*, 117-18).

28 The Greek word *τὸ βάρος* literally means “weight” or “burden” but is used figuratively in the NT in the sense of “wield authority” or “impose a burden.” The modern idiom “heavy-handed” tries to capture both of these nuances. A comparable modern colloquialism might be “throw one’s weight around” (BDAG, 167). The extent to which this phrase refers to a financial burden the apostles could have laid on the Thessalonians versus honor the apostles might have insisted upon receiving is not entirely clear (for example, the former sense is favored in Donfried, “The Epistolary and Rhetorical Context of 1 Thessalonians 2:12,” in *The Thessalonians Debate*, 51-52 and the latter is favored in Best, *A Commentary on the First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 100-101).

29 Cf., Trevor J. Burke, *Family Matters: A Socio-Historical Study of Kinship Metaphors in 1 Thessalonians* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2003), 160.

30 Furnish, *1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians*, 61-62. Paul’s pastoral concern for each individual is expressed in the phrase *ώς ἔνα ἔκαστον ὑμῶν ώς πατήρ* (“we treated each one of you as a father...”) Notice, again, the intimacy of the expression *τέκνα ἔαυτοῦ* (“his own children”), which parallels the construction in 7b.

Paul and his comrades versus the style of ministry practiced by other preachers/orators familiar to the Thessalonians. The image Paul presents of his ministry both borrows from and recasts the image of the ideal Cynic teacher, Christianizing it in the process. It is also described with a mosaic of familial metaphors that not only communicate loving care and pastoral authority, but also paradoxically weakness and vulnerability. The entire passage climaxes with an exhortation that the Thessalonians themselves model their lives after Paul so that they, too, can be faithful witnesses to others. Clearly, how Christians present the gospel (and indeed themselves as they do so) is important to Paul.

By extension, it should also be important to us.³¹ Indeed, the question of how to present the gospel has received increasing attention in recent years as the realities of postmodernism and pluralism have forced Christians to rethink previously unexamined missionary practices. Into this conversation, 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12 has some important things to say.

This passage exhorts us to imitate a model of missions comprised of at least four core characteristics. Above all, it is incarnational.³² In his own words, Paul cared so deeply for the Thessalonians that he “resolved to share . . . not only the gospel but also his very life” (2:8). Too often, Christians forget that the lives they live are an essential part of the message they proclaim. Christians have sometimes failed to follow Paul’s example by lovingly walking, living, and working with those to whom they present the gospel. In 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12, Paul reminds us that the gospel is not a commodity to be sold, but a life to be shared. Ernest Best puts it well, “The true missionary is not someone specialized in the delivery of the message but someone whose whole being, completely committed to a message which demands all, is communicated to his hearers; it is because of this total involvement that Paul could write earlier of their imitation of himself (1:6; cf. 2 Cor. 7:3; 12:15).”³³

Second, it is contextual. This is demanded by the incarnation, for, as missiologist David Bosch explains, “since the Christian faith is inherently *incarnational*, in the sense of God taking concrete form in a specific social context, the Christian mission—if it wishes to be incarnational—also has to be specific and contextual.”³⁴ Paul’s commitment to contextualization surfaces in both what he does and how he describes it. That he uses so many common images and even draws upon secular writers to describe his mission illustrates how the

³¹ If this passage is parnetic, as I have suggested, there is likely a high degree of transfer between the original audience and us. In other words, it is not only valid to consider how we might imitate Paul’s ministry model, but is in fact essential.

³² Darrell Guder traces the usage of this term in Missional Theology in his article “Incarnation and the Church’s Evangelistic Mission,” *International Review of Mission* 83, no. 330 (July 1994): 417-428.

³³ Best, *A Commentary on the First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 102-103.

³⁴ David J. Bosch, “Reflections on Biblical Models of Mission,” in *Landmark Essays in Mission and World Christianity*, eds. Robert L. Gallagher and Paul Hertig (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2009), 14.

gospel validates culture; that he fundamentally redefines these images illustrates how the gospel both transcends and transforms it.³⁵ Avoiding the opposite pitfalls of accommodation and quarantine, Paul presents the gospel in a way that is both thoroughly contextualized and distinctly Christian.³⁶

Third, it is humble. Missionaries who follow the model of 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12 understand that the gospel is *God's message*, not their own (2:2, 8, 9).³⁷ Their desire is to please God, not to garner praise for themselves (2:4). God is the source of their courage (2:2) and God's character is the standard for their conduct (2:10, 12). Because the success of mission is ultimately dependent on God, authority is expressed in humility, strength in weakness, and leadership in service.³⁸

Fourth, it is transformational. The goal of mission is not simply to create converts, but to reproduce witnessing disciples. This is why imitation plays such a central role in Paul's vision for mission. Paul is not content to start a new church; he intends to train others to "walk in a manner worthy of God," so that they can spread the gospel to others (2:12; cf. 1:6-8). Focusing on perpetual transformation for witness is what Darrell Guder means when he speaks of the "continuing conversion of the church."³⁹ This kind of ongoing conversion is what Paul models for us, urges us to imitate, and desires for us to extend through lives that bear continual witness to the transforming power of God.

³⁵ Andrews Walls refers to the way the gospel accommodates/validates culture as well as combats/transforms it the "indigenizing principle" and the "pilgrim principle" in his essay "The Gospel as Prisoner and Liberator of Culture," in *Landmark Essays in Mission and World Christianity*, eds. Robert L. Gallagher and Paul Hertig (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2009), 133-145.

³⁶ These terms are used by missiologist Lamin Sanneh, who writes, "Quarantine and accommodation between them threaten religious integrity: quarantine by shutting out the world and accommodation by surrendering to it. Reform, on the other hand, points to God's action where the message intersects with the world of culture, and mission becomes a pathway to the future." *Translating the Message (Second Ed.)* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2009), 53.

³⁷ The Greek phrase, τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ θεοῦ, that appears 3 times in this passage (2:2, 8, 9), could be an objective genitive (the gospel *about* God) or subjective genitive (the gospel *from* God), or perhaps even carry nuances of both (plenary genitive). In the context of this passage, the subjective sense seems to carry the most weight.

³⁸ The notion of mission in weakness is developed helpfully in David J. Bosch, "Reflections on Biblical Models of Mission," in *Landmark Essays in Mission and World Christianity*, eds. Robert L. Gallagher and Paul Hertig (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2009), 9-10.

³⁹ Darrell L. Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).

Christians are prone to forget that the New Testament is first and foremost a missionary document.⁴⁰ This is certainly the case with Paul's letters,⁴¹ and, as Bosch insists, "There can be no doubt that Paul expects his readers to emulate him."⁴² Sadly, Christians have not always been faithful to the model of ministry Paul describes in 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12. The gospel has been distorted in a myriad of ways by exploitation, accommodation, self-reliance, reductionism, and commodification. Paul calls us to something altogether different⁴³: to a mission permeated with humility and compassion that trains witnessing disciples with the wisdom of a godly teacher, the nurture of a loving parent, and the vulnerability of a child.

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40 David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 15-16; 54.

41 David J. Bosch emphasizes that, "Paul's theology and his mission do not simply relate to each other as "theory" and "practice" in the sense that his mission flows from his theology, but in the sense that his theology is a missionary theology" (*Ibid.*, 124 citing Arland J. Hultgren, *Paul's Gospel and Mission* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985], 145).

42 *Ibid.*, 171.

43 Though not altogether new, Paul's ministry is, after all, the logical extension of Jesus' own ministry, which is the superlative example of mission that is incarnational, contextual, humble, and transformational. 1 Thess. 2:1-12, thus, calls into question the modern tendency to dichotomize the ministry models of Jesus and Paul (c.f., Guder, Darrell L. "Incarnation and the Church's Evangelistic Mission." *International Review of Mission* 83, no. 330 (July 1994): 424).

CONVERTING THE WEST: EXAMINING LESSLIE NEWBIGIN'S MODEL FOR MISSION TO THE WEST

Jeff DeSurra

At the end of the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, John Mott triumphantly proclaimed, “the end of the Conference is the beginning of the Conquest.”¹ One hundred years later, his prophetic proclamation in many ways has come true, but not as the western church expected. The members of the Edinburgh conference envisioned the 20th century as the century that would bring about the spread of the Gospel throughout the entire world, and many parts of the world that were previously “non-Christian” or unaware of the Gospel *have* been exposed to and converted to Christianity. The booming expansion of Christianity in Africa, Central and South America, and Southeast Asia should remind us of and inspire joyful celebration in the work of the Holy Spirit.

Yet perhaps we have also been caught off guard by the sudden decline of the Church in the global West. Along with a decline in demographics, there has also been a decline in the self-identification as Christians among westerners (particularly in the United States).² Missiologists have begun to talk about the movement of the “center” of Christianity from the West to the global South and East. Andrew Walls and Lamin Sanneh have been two of the foremost scholars speaking to this point. Walls has rightly focused our attention of the movement of the Gospel historically, pointing to the moving center of Christianity—starting in Jerusalem and moving outward toward the Gentile regions and specifically Rome—eventually leading to the moving center as we find it today.³ Sanneh has been particularly helpful in emphasizing the African dimensions of Mission, emphasizing the need for the cultural translatability of the Gospel and the need

1 John R. Mott, “Closing Address,” *World Missionary Conference, 1910: The History and Records of the Conference Together with Addresses Delivered at the Evening Meetings*, vol. IX (Edinburgh & London: Oliphant, Anderson, & Ferrier, 1910 (1990)), 347.

2 Frank Newport, This Christmas, 78% of Americans Identify as Christian, Gallup.com, “<http://www.gallup.com/poll/124793/This-Christmas-78-Americans-Identify-Christian.aspx>,” accessed on March 6, 2010. While this percentage may seem high, Newport notes that this number has been in decline for the past couple decades.

3 Andrew Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 16-25.

for the Church to arise indigenously from within the culture to which the Gospel is being proclaimed.

But lacking from these keen observations has been any mention of the recovery of the western church. In my own observations, I perceive a tacit assumption that the western church is beyond the reach of the Gospel. Sanneh, for example, in distinguishing between “global Christianity” and “world Christianity” excludes the West from the preferred latter option:

“World Christianity” is the movement of Christianity as it takes form and shape in societies that previously were not Christian, societies that had no bureaucratic tradition with which to domesticate the Gospel.

... “Global Christianity,” on the other hand, is the faithful replication of Christian forms and patterns developed in Europe. It echoes Hilaire Belloc’s famous statement, “Europe is the faith.” It is, in fact, the religious establishment and the cultural captivity of faith.⁴

While Philip Jenkins has taken issue with Sanneh on these definitions in *The Next Christendom*, Jenkins only addresses the problem of semantics, never addressing the fact that that Sanneh’s definition of “world Christianity” leaves out three continents!⁵ Later in his book, Jenkins writes, “The era of Western Christianity has passed within our lifetimes, and the day of Southern Christianity is dawning.”⁶ Many similar discussions refer to western Christianity in the past tense.

It should be no surprise then that there is a peculiar silence in referencing the work of Lesslie Newbigin among these scholars.⁷ Newbigin, after finishing forty years of missionary work in India, spent much of the remainder of his career thinking and writing about what a genuine missionary encounter would look like in what he called “modern western culture.”⁸ He touches on many of the ideas that Sanneh, Walls and others have emphasized in their work, including the translatability of the Gospel, the importance of contextualization (as well as its dangers), and the centrality of the Holy Spirit to move the Church outside its walls and into the world. But in this conversation, there is little mention of Newbigin’s work, particularly when it comes to implementing a strategy to engage in mission to western culture. This absence is especially unfortunate when it seems that so much could (and should) be done to evangelize a part of the world that needs to hear the Gospel afresh.

4 Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity?: The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003), 22.

5 See Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, revised and expanded edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), xiii.

6 Ibid., 3.

7 There is a group of scholars, including Darrell Guder, Michael Goheen, and George Hunsberger, that do focus on and incorporate Newbigin’s work. Consequently, these scholars also tend to focus on reviving the western church.

8 Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), 1.

In light of the anniversary of the Edinburgh Conference and as we reflect on mission and ecumenics in 2010 and beyond, I would like to examine the work of Lesslie Newbigin and offer his model of mission to modern western culture as a strategy for renewing mission in the West. If the Church truly wants to embrace the dawn of World Christianity, it must embrace a world that includes Europe, North America and Australia. Neglecting these regions under the assumption that the western church is either dying or already dead is not only to make a sociological or anthropological statement but also a theological one, a point which Newbigin realizes and emphasizes in his work. For if we say that the western church is beyond the reach of the Gospel, we are making an assumption about the power of the Gospel to reach the lost. Further, we are making subtle statements about God's power and ability to work in the world. Can we still call our God a God who searches for the lost sheep and reaches out for the prodigal son if we assert that the western church is dying and beyond reclamation? Re-emphasizing Newbigin's work and contributions can help to revive the ailing western church and keep us from stumbling onto shaky theological ground.

Foundational to understanding Newbigin's approach of culture is his use of the term "plausibility structure," a term he borrows from Peter Berger.⁹ For Newbigin, the plausibility structure is the "patterns of belief and practice accepted within a given society, which determine which beliefs are plausible to its members and which are not."¹⁰ Every society, including the society which is proclaiming the Gospel in the missionary encounter, has a plausibility structure within which it operates. These plausibility structures will change over time and transform the meaning of what is rational and what is not. This is a key to understanding how the dialogue between modern western culture and the Gospel occurs. The challenging of a plausibility structure is central to how Newbigin understands the process of conversion.

Newbigin further expands his definition of plausibility structures by incorporating Michael Polanyi's "fiduciary frameworks"¹¹ into his understanding:

Tacit assent and intellectual passions, the sharing of an idiom and of a cultural heritage, affiliation to like-minded community: such are the impulses which shape our vision of the nature of things on which we rely for our mastery of things. No intelligence, however critical or original, can operate outside such a fiduciary framework.¹²

⁹ Newbigin cites Peter Berger's *Heretical Imperative* in *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 10.

¹⁰ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Erdmans Publishing Co., 1989), 8.

¹¹ While there are subtle differences between Polanyi's fiduciary frameworks and Berger's plausibility structures, the two terms will be used interchangeably for the purposes of this writing.

¹² Michael Polanyi in Lesslie Newbigin, *The Otherside of 1984: Questions for the Church* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1983), 29.

Newbigin sees these frameworks as especially important when talking about the authority of the Gospel and the authority of reason, the latter which is often considered some type of independent source of knowledge. Reason in the post-Enlightenment West has held a place of unquestioned authority; in other words, reason is the independent authority to which all other sources of knowledge, such as tradition or revelation must submit. So in the western fiduciary framework, Reason is the ultimate independent authority.¹³ Yet Newbigin points out that “Reason does not operate in a vacuum. The power of a human mind to think rationally is only developed in a tradition which itself depends on the experience of previous generations.”¹⁴ We will return to this point later in regard to the dialogue between the Gospel and western culture.

Also crucial is to understand the model that Newbigin proposes for any cross-cultural missionary activity. He briefly outlines his approach to cross-cultural mission in *Foolishness to the Greeks*, the compilation of his 1984 Warfield lectures at Princeton Theological Seminary. His starting point for a missionary model is based on Paul’s speech to King Agrippa in Acts 26. The strategy Newbigin sees in this chapter can be laid out in three points.¹⁵ First, Newbigin essentially restates what Sanneh calls the fundamental translatability of the Gospel, i.e. the Gospel must be presented in the language of the culture to which it is being presented. This means using not only the actual language of the culture, but also the cultural language, including worldview, images, and customs. Second, the Gospel, while being presented in the language of the culture, should and will challenge basic assumptions, beliefs, and practices of that culture, leading to conversion. Finally, and most importantly for Newbigin, the conversion process is not a human activity but an act of divine agency: “true conversion...which is the proper end toward which the communication of the gospel looks, can only be a work of God, a kind of miracle – not natural but supernatural.”¹⁶

When this encounter between cultures has begun, the missionary preaching the Gospel now faces a greater challenge—to communicate the translated Gospel in such a way that it avoids falling into irrelevancy or complacency. An implication of this process is that the Gospel being preached and the person of Jesus being proclaimed will always be from the perspective of the missionary; he or she can never be an objective witness. While acceptance of the Gospel almost always includes acceptance of the missionary’s culture, the convert will put eventually the Gospel put in dialogue with their cultural tradition after time has passed.¹⁷ Newbigin emphasizes that the convert always has a reaction against the missionary’s culture. While sometimes this is a thoroughly negative reaction (which Newbigin thought fueled some of the Third World Theology done during his time), this reaction involved showing the Gospel to the missionary in light of

13 Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 8-9.

14 Ibid.

15 See Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 5-6.

16 Ibid., 6.

17 Ibid., 8-9.

their culture. In other words, the conversion process became a dialogue rather than a monologue in what Newbigin called “mutual correction.”¹⁸ In the best of circumstances, this dialogue becomes an opportunity for the receiving culture to show the missionary where the Gospel has become blurred and distorted¹⁹

But therein lies the problem—true dialogue rarely takes place because of the weight of western culture, which often dominated (and still does dominate) the discussion. Newbigin points out that the dialogue often occurs in the languages of western Europe by those who have been educated in western institutions. In other words, “[the dialogue] is confined to those who have been more or less co-opted into the predominant modern Western culture.”²⁰ Western culture is never seriously put into question and often becomes the authority to which all discussion partners, including the Gospel, must submit. This leads Newbigin to ask, “How, then can there be a genuine encounter of the gospel with this culture, a culture that has itself sprung from roots in Western Christendom and with which the Western churches have lived in a symbiotic relationship ever since its first dawning?”²¹ Newbigin explores the key assumptions of modern western culture in order to answer this question effectively.

For Newbigin, modern western culture began during the Enlightenment (at least in the culture’s self-awareness). While it would be foolish to attempt to summarize all the moves that led to this paradigm shift, Newbigin emphasizes two central moves that occurred during the Enlightenment that had a large influence on the western church: the abandonment of teleology and the public-private split of knowledge and value. For Newbigin, abandoning teleology was a key change to western culture. With the dawn of Newtonian physics came a paradigmatic change in understanding the movements of the universe which revealed those movements to be purposeless rather than purposeful. Among the consequences of such shifts were the replacement of the grand meta-narrative of the Bible for the explanations of modern science and the replacement of faith in God with certitude in reason. The pursuit of knowledge, undertaken by the rational individual, became the central thrust of life, and no one could justifiably take away that right. Consequently, this freedom to gain knowledge expanded into freedom for the individual to pursue his own rights, liberties and happiness. Happiness, according to Newbigin, is a term which cannot be defined without identifying purpose and is therefore an empty term to be fulfilled by the individual.²² Without the need for the meta-narrative provided by the Church, societies turned to the nation-state for the upholding of personal rights, placing increased emphasis on the evolving public realm. Further, common responsibilities of the Church, such as education, healing,

¹⁸ Ibid., 9. Walls reiterates this same idea in *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, 51-54.

¹⁹ Ibid.,

²⁰ Ibid.,

²¹ Ibid.,

²² Ibid., 23-26. Purposefully his rights, according to Newbigin, since men’s roles were relegated to the public, fact-driven realm while the woman was relegated to the private, value driven realm, a point to which we will return. See Ibid, 31.

and public welfare were given over to the nation-state. In short, the nation-state became the new centralized and organizing feature of western society.²³

While the loss of teleology was foundational, Newbigin argues that it was the dichotomizing of the public and private realms into realms of fact and value that ultimately changed western culture into modern western culture. Even though Enlightenment thinkers eliminated the need for teleology, the fact remained that humans pursue purposeful action. This is the paradox of western progress: “the ideal that [the westerner] seeks is to eliminate all ideals.”²⁴ This paradox manifests itself in the public-private split between fact and value: “The public world is the world of facts that are the same for everyone, whatever his values may be; the private world is a world of values where all are free to choose their own values and therefore to pursue such courses of action as will correspond to them.”²⁵ It follows that the Church was placed within the private world of values for its insistence on a worldview with a meta-narrative that cannot be sustained in a world of “value-free” facts. Newbigin notes, however, that not all religions were expelled from the public realm. He points out the rising interest of eastern religions in British schools during the 1960s precisely because the eastern religions do not put as much emphasis on purpose statements. Only those religions, such as Christianity, that insist on a worldview defined by purpose have been confined to the private realm.²⁶

This dichotomy of public and private realms is foundational to the plausibility structure of modern western culture. Statements of fact and value must be kept separate in modern western culture, and any attempt to bring value into the public realm will be rebuffed by this cultural boundary. It is within this framework that the Church has existed in western culture for the last 250 years; this is also the framework which the Church carried into the world through its missionary activity, especially throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. How is it that the Gospel can speak to this culture that seems unwilling to include its message in the public realm? For this, we must explore Newbigin’s understanding of the plausibility structure of the Gospel.

Newbigin’s interpretation of the doctrine of election provides the foundation for the Gospel’s plausibility structure. One of the primary challenges to the Gospel is how God can work universally through a particular people group and particular events. Newbigin calls this the “scandal of particularity.”²⁷ Yet, Newbigin argues that the existence of the particular and the universal in the Bible do not contradict but instead complement each other. This tension is resolved in Newbigin’s interpretation doctrine of election. “The one (or the few) are chosen for the sake of the universal” because at the center of this dissonance “is the conviction that my

23 See Newbigin, *The Other Side of 1984*, 15.

24 Newbigin, *Foolishness*, 35.

25 Ibid., 36.

26 Ibid., 38-40.

27 Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, revised edition (Grand Rapids: Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 66.

own identity and my own destiny are, in the last analysis, mine alone.”²⁸ He states further that “the human in the Bible exists only in relationship with other persons and only as part of the created world. [...] Human life from its beginning is a life of shared relationship in the context of a task – a task that is continuous with God’s creative work in the natural world.” Thus, there emerge two key concepts present in the plausibility structure of the Gospel. First, the cosmos is ultimately a community of interrelationships between God, the created world, and human beings. Second, God is active within the cosmos and continues to have an effect on the natural world. For Newbigin, these concepts are embodied in Christ, the true elect of God. Through Christ’s particular death, the whole of humanity is saved from sin and completely redeemed, enabled to be the witnessing community of God.²⁹ Newbigin’s understanding of the universal and the particular in the Gospel lays the groundwork for his eventual rejection of the public-private dichotomy in modern western culture.

Newbigin’s understanding of the Gospel also entails an affirmation of a meta-narrative or, to use a theological term, eschatology. If God has been and is working through history, then particular events have revealed God’s plan for history and are leading to an eventual goal. Teleology is central to the Gospel; without it, human life is meaningless.³⁰ The meta-narrative of the Gospel speaks about the ongoing reconciliation of the peoples of the world to the God of Heaven and Earth, accomplished through Jesus Christ on the cross and finished in Christ’s second coming and consummation of the Kingdom of God. This story is ultimately contained in the texts of the Bible, which reveal the work of God throughout history, centered around Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection.

Centered around these two loci, Newbigin comes to the crucial point—the plausibility structure of the Gospel requires the Church to reject the split of knowledge into public fact and private value. If God truly is the God who created the world and works through history as well as the human soul, there cannot be a fissure between the public and the private. This is exemplified in what Newbigin calls “the hermeneutical circle” which the Church uses to understand the Gospel: “The Bible functions as authority only within a community that is committed to faith and obedience and embodying that commitment in an active discipleship that embraces the whole life, public and private.”³¹ Part of this commitment means that the Gospel cannot distinguish between what Newbigin calls secular history and sacred history. He further states that “it is idle to suppose that any kind of peaceful co-existence is possible between these two ways of understanding history. [...] We who are at the moment making and suffering history know that there is only one history, but we know that it can be understood theistically or atheistically.”³² It means the Church must avoid the mistake of distinguishing between the Jesus

28 Ibid., 68.

29 Ibid., 70-71.

30 “Meaningful action in history is possible only when there is some vision of a future goal.” Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 114.

31 Newbigin, *Foolishness*, 58.

32 Ibid., 61.

of History and the Christ of Faith; in the world of the Gospel, this dichotomy does not exist.

But Newbigin also states the obvious problem: “both the society [the Church] and the book [the Bible] are already extremely familiar. They are not perceived as addressing any fresh challenge to our accepted world-view.”³³ Both have been desacralized and deconstructed by modern Western culture. To borrow from George Hunsberger, “[the Bible] is not so domestic as it is domesticated.”³⁴ And yet, this is not necessarily problematic for Newbigin because the Gospel, in any form, is not separate from culture. As he states it, “the Bible is not an extraterritorial entity that has been dropped into our world from another; it is a part of our world.”³⁵ Nevertheless, the challenge remains as to how the Gospel can impact the modern western worldview.

Newbigin rejects a model in which the Church seeks to re-establish its dominance within the fiduciary framework of modern western culture. Part of this is a rejection of what Newbigin calls a return to “Constantinian” establishment in which the Gospel was connected with supreme political power. “In such a framework there is no room for dialogue. Deviation from the ‘fiduciary framework’ means exclusion from civil society.”³⁶ Further, “our modern western culture now acknowledges plurality as an irreversible fact, relegating most religious convictions the private realm of value.”³⁷ The Gospel cannot and should not, according to Newbigin, seek to re-establish itself as the fiduciary framework of the public realm. Aside from the political temptation, modern western culture does not have a plausibility structure that will support the claims of the Gospel as public fact. Those claims are simply irrational. When the Church attempts to present the Gospel for acceptance within the public realm, it is also forced to submit to the rules of the plausibility structure, which will inevitably lead to the Church’s rejection and confinement to the private realm of values.³⁸

Newbigin argues that it is essential for the Church to view modern western culture through the lens of the Bible rather than the reverse. After all, true dialogue begins with the willingness of each conversation partner to call into question its plausibility structure.³⁹ He identifies one possible starting point: “The dichotomy between a world of so-called objective fact that can be ‘scientifically’ known apart from faith commitment on the part of the knower and a world of beliefs that are solely the personal responsibility of the believer is precisely what has to be

33 Ibid., 42.

34 George R. Hunsberger, “The Newbigin Gauntlet: Developing a Domestic Missiology for North America” in *The Church Between Gospel and Culture*, George R. Hunberger and Craig Van Gelder, eds (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), 5.

35 Newbigin, *Foolishness*, 50.

36 Newbigin, *Other Side of 1984*, 30.

37 Ibid.

38 Newbigin, *Foolishness*, 63.

39 Newbigin, *Other Side of 1984*, 30.

questioned in light of the gospel.”⁴⁰ Recent developments in science suggest that what was once considered absolute and constant is actually contingent and subject to change.⁴¹ Further, the claim can be made (as we have already seen) that to have value-free facts is impossible. Newbigin rightly argues that scientists must make value judgments when engaging in their research. Problems worth researching, questions worth answering, when to continue research or engage in a new project; all of these decisions are value judgments: “[The scientist’s] enterprise is not value-free: it is impregnated through and through by a commitment to a purpose.”⁴² By calling into question this foundation of modern western culture’s plausibility structure, an opportunity for true dialogue emerges.

Newbigin admits that this dialogue is not a debate that can be won solely by logical arguments, and so he turns his attention to the central act of Christians: witness. Newbigin puts it this way:

The Church, therefore, in its missionary encounter with modern Western culture, has to be quite bold and unembarrassed in using the language of testimony, since this testimony, so far from being capable of validation by methods of modern science, provides itself with the foundation on which modern science rests, namely, the assurance that the world is both rational and contingent.⁴³

This endeavor requires the Church to be a witness both in the private and public realms, including the realm of politics and economics.⁴⁴ Again, this is not a call to co-opt culture for the political gain of the Gospel; he does not advocate a return to Constantine. But if Christians are truly called to be a witness to the Gospel that does not recognize a fissure between the public and private realms, then the Gospel will inevitably speak to and penetrate our political, economic and social realities as well as our personal and spiritual lives. Avoiding this point prevents the Church from fully living out the Gospel’s message.

As the Church seeks to bridge the gap between the public and private in modern western culture, Newbigin calls the Church back to the New Testament, particularly apocalyptic literature which emphasizes the teleological hope of the Gospel. The apocalyptic texts call the Church to enter a world where there is little hope of progress, peaceful resolution, or establishment of justice through any of our missionary activity. They emphasize the struggle and what appears to be the apparent failure of the Gospel to have any meaningful impact upon the world. Apocalyptic texts point the Church to the conductor behind reality, the living God who works through history. Because of the hope the Church has in this God,

40 Newbigin, *Foolishness*, 50.

41 Ibid., 71-73.

42 Ibid., 77.

43 Ibid., 94.

44 Ibid., 98 – 102; Newbigin, *Other Side of 1984*, 37-43.

Christians are led to have patience and endurance through persecution and hardship.⁴⁵

Apocalyptic literature also reminds the Church that its faith in the conversion and transformation of modern western culture lies in the work of the Holy Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit, all missionary efforts are fruitless. And specifically at this point, the importance of Newbigin's work becomes clear. If the Church reduces the work of missionaries (and all Christians) to sociological or anthropological studies, then our efforts are reduced to actions governed by human agency. The statements we make about our missionary activity are thoroughly theological because in the end our work is for the sake of God's mission, which is manifested through the work of the Holy Spirit.

In this brief summary, I have attempted to describe Newbigin's model for a genuine missionary encounter with modern western culture. He envisioned this encounter in similar terms to any general cross-cultural missionary endeavor with the exception that the culture the Church seeks to change must go through reconversion. Though Newbigin does not explicitly state it, one can infer that part of the mission to the West must come from non-western culture. It is only by moving across cultures that the plausibility structures of a culture are exposed, enabling us to question them in light of the Gospel which the Church proclaims.

The question as to why the Church should engage modern western culture in missionary activity may still remain. Yet two answers immediately come to mind based on Newbigin's work. First, the assumptions of modern western culture are planted more widely than just the "western regions" of the world. One of the challenges in Newbigin's own missionary work was encountering the assumptions of modern western culture outside the West. Newbigin confronted this problem in his own work in India, where modernization meant implementing or reinforcing a split between public and private knowledge, particularly in scientific endeavors. He pointed out that modern western culture is "at present a world culture and exercises the dominant role everywhere," and that "the Eastern religions find it easy to be at home in this modern scientific world. And this in turn strengthens those elements in Western Christendom that have tried to find a place for religion within the world-view of post-Enlightenment Europe."⁴⁶ Even if this influence has declined in recent years, the fact remains that western culture continues to dominate both the economic and political landscape of the entire world. To engage in missionary activity even in the non-western world is to engage at some level with modern western culture.

Second, and more importantly, the call to be God's witnesses always remains for Christians throughout the entire world. Especially in light of the centennial of the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, we should be reminded that our vocation as Christians is to go out and be witnesses to God's reconciliation in the world. It seems fitting to end with the words of Newbigin in his work *Christian Witness in a Plural Society*:

45 Newbigin, *Other Side of 1984*, 36.

46 Newbigin, *Foolishness*, 40.

We have been given a commission. We are not better than others, more competent than others, more enlightened than others. We have been chosen for this task, that is all. God could have chosen others, but he has chosen us. We cannot say why. But we know wherefore: he has chosen us to be the bearers of his promise of blessing of all mankind. ‘If I preach the gospel that gives me no ground for boasting. Necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel. For if I do this of my own will I have a reward, but if not of my own will, I am entrusted with a commission.’ (1 Cor 9:16f)

This commission, as Paul constantly insists, means that we are not wiser or stronger or more able than others; rather it is discharged in what seems the weakness and foolishness of the small and insignificant. But we have been given a commission. We are responsible to him who entrusted us with it. That is enough for us.⁴⁷

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47 Lesslie Newbigin, *Christian Witness in a Plural Society* (London: The British Council of Churches, 1977), 25-26.

THE CHURCH'S FUTURE WITNESS AND THE NECESSITY OF A DIALECTICAL/HISTORICAL SELF-APPRAISAL

Cody Lewis Oaks

APPRAISAL

As the Christian church approaches and remains in the midst of the paradigm shift from modernity into postmodernity, the church must assess the historical legacy of “Christendom” to make such a shift responsibly. It does the church no good to cover her eyes from her historical sins or forge ahead blindly with a false sense of triumphalism. The church’s future witness to Jesus Christ depends upon a sober, honest appraisal of the relationship between church and world for the last two millennia. But the legacy of Christendom is not tidy. If the story of the church¹ is evaluated truthfully, we must say that it is rather convoluted; it is a story that must be neither embraced fully nor rejected wholesale. Nor should the present-day church succumb to laziness in her historical reflection and simply shrug her shoulders in apathy. How, then, is the church to think about her mission historically? She must do so *dialecticallly*, that is, by holding two opposing realities in tension and thereby resisting the temptation for one-sidedness – for only telling “half of the story” at the expense of the other. By providing a brief historical survey of the church and her mission in dialectical fashion, this paper aims to assist the church in gaining not only proper knowledge, but also the proper posture by which she can faithfully encounter her future mission and witness.

The first historical paradigm of “Christendom” is what David Bosch calls “The Missionary Paradigm of the Eastern Church.”² This refers to the period in history in which Christianity “changed from a Jewish into a Greco-Roman religion.”³ As Christianity expanded outward from Palestine into the Hellenistic empire, it began to appropriate its surrounding culture. It did so in several ways, but perhaps the most important is how Christianity changed in the way it

1 Given my own familiarity with the Western historical legacy, this discourse focuses primarily on the history of the Western church, though a dialectical-historical self-appraisal for the entire church is commendable.

2 David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991). *TM* hereafter.

3 *Ibid.*, 190.

articulated itself intellectually. In its Jewish/Biblical expression, the theology of the early Christian movement was a reflection on the significance and implication of the event of God's action in history. But as Christianity encountered Greek culture and consequently Platonism, it took on a more otherworldly form and became more abstract. Christian thought began to operate within metaphysical categories like "being" and "substance" and the importance of God's involvement in history was downplayed in favor of speculation regarding what God is *in God's self*: God's *attributes* over against God's *action*. As Bosch puts it "ontology (God's being) became more important than history (God's deeds). It became more important to reflect on what God is in himself than to consider the relationship in which people stand to God."⁴

As tempting as it may be, the "Hellenization" of Christian thought must not be considered a "Golden Age." There were, and continue to be, consequences for Christian mission because of the Greek shift toward the theoretical. Christianity had shown that it could adapt to the sophistication of Greek philosophy quite harmoniously. This led Christianity to an unprecedented place of privilege in its surrounding culture which in turn produced an air of superiority. With the rise of Constantine and the consequent ending of Christian persecution, Christians adopted the Greek notion of the "outsider" – a lower class not privy to the cultural benefits of the elite. With the Greeks, it had been the *barbaroi*; for the 3rd Century Christians it became the *pagani*.⁵ The urgent and even confrontational missionary impulse which had been present in the earlier apostolic movement was replaced by a Christianity which had become not the prophetic word *to* the surrounding culture, but the intellectual pinnacle *of* its culture, with the result that "mission became a movement from the superior to the inferior."⁶ Christianity had lost its initial revolutionary character and had become overly institutionalized and "bourgeois."

Still, to speak only about the negative aspects of the encounter between Christianity and Hellenism is to tell only half of the story. The appropriation of Greek philosophy provided Christian theology with a completely new universe of discourse with which to propagate the gospel. But more than that, Greek categories of thought actually brought the Greek Christians into a deeper understanding of the contents of their faith. It gave them the conceptual framework to understand more fully what had been revealed to them in Scripture. As Paul Knitter explains, "they discovered...what had been revealed to them. The doctrines of the trinity and of the divinity of Christ...for example, would not be what they are today if the church had not reassessed itself and its doctrines in the light of the new historical cultural situations during the third through the sixth centuries."⁷ In this way, the *translatability* of the Christian message was made manifest –and such translations

4 Ibid., 194.

5 Ibid., 193.

6 Ibid.

7 Paul F. Knitter, *No Other Name?: A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1985), 19.

must occur.⁸ As Bosch asserts, “Unless the church chooses to remain a foreign entity, it will always enter into the context in which it happens to find itself.”⁹ The problem then, is not that Christianity took on a Greek look. It was that, in taking on a Greek appearance, Christianity sometimes lost sight of its pilgrim character. Moreover, there may be nothing intrinsically amiss concerning the intellectually privileged place which Christianity occupied. For better or worse, it provided for the dissemination of the Christian message on an unparalleled scale. It was the proclivity of the church’s missionary efforts to be a confrontational witness to its own culture for which we can say that the church is culpable as it rose to cultural prominence.

If the church had begun to feel at home in Hellenistic culture, it was during the medieval paradigm in which culture and Christianity, as manifested in the Roman Catholic Church, were inextricably linked. After the conversion of Constantine, Christianity had become the official religion of his empire, and consequently, of the West. The truth of Christianity now went virtually unchallenged throughout Europe. The church had gained monolithic status and now saw itself as the exclusive institutional bearer of salvation. Safeguarded by the support of a vast empire and therefore in effect unthreatened, Christianity now shifted its focus from outward proclamation to the deep soteriological reflection of the individual. This led to a propensity in the medieval church to view salvation as simply a matter between the individual and God, thus downplaying the cosmic dimension of salvation. As individualistic as salvation had been conceived, it was also ironically highly institutionalized, and in this sense communal. In his *Confessions*, Augustine had delved deeply into the journey of his individual soul toward God. But even Augustine would not deny that the institutional church was the sphere in which this conversion must take place. Since soteriology was now part and parcel with ecclesiology, mission now *had* to be conceived as the further conquest of Christendom, which collapsed both church and state into one. This inevitably led to the notion of *mission by conquest*; colonization became in fact, a “christening.”

On the other hand, we must wonder if anything could have been done differently. For any kind of movement, institutionalization seems to be inevitable so long as that movement continues to reassemble, organize, and articulate itself. So it also seems with the medieval Christian church. The turn to the individual may have neglected a more comprehensive view of salvation, but Western Christianity also enjoys a tradition of expressing the subjective, inner dimension of spirituality (Augustine, Pascal, Kierkegaard to name a few), and countless numbers have been attracted to Christianity by deep, existential reflection on the individual’s relation to God. Finally, it is in the medieval paradigm where Christendom established the European university system (after which North America modeled its own centers of learning), which even today continues to be the epicenter of higher education in the world.

⁸ See Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2008) for a full treatment of this issue.

⁹ Bosch, *TM*, 191.

The Protestant Reformation was, of course, a reaction to the medieval paradigm which preceded it. This reaction was primarily theological, though there were social and political implications as well. In essence, the Reformers did not so much object to the turn to the individual as exemplified in Augustine, but they repudiated the idea that the institutional church should be the sole means by which one may be made right with God. In the Reformers view, the church had perverted and complicated the nature of salvation for her own greedy ends. Instead of looking to the church for the security of one's soul, the Reformers stressed the centrality and sufficiency of Scripture, which taught that salvation was simply a matter of faith, and not in need of works for its efficacy. Salvation needed a sure and certain ground, and for the Reformers, this could only be found in God himself. Salvation was secure because *God* had initiated it through the sending of his Son, Jesus Christ. For the Lutherans, then, the cross became an emblem of salvific certitude; it was here where sinners became justified before God. Calvinists tended to stress God's prior decision in the doctrine of predestination. Either way, the ground of salvation was objective and outside of the institutional church's control; it was grounded in God's action as attested in Scripture.

The Reformation brought a much needed correction to the church, and its message soothed the consciences of many faithful Christians plagued by anxiety concerning salvation. But even today, five hundred years after the break with Rome, too much Protestant triumphalism lives on in movements to "get back to the Reformation" or to reproduce a theology which purports to be the "pure" teaching of Luther or Calvin, while any innovation outside of this alleged "pure" teaching cannot properly be called "Reformed" or "Lutheran." This was surely the case in the Lutheran and Reformed orthodoxy which succeeded the Reformers and continues today in conservative branches of Protestantism. This "dark side" of the Reformation legacy has virtually ignored all attempts towards ecumenism in the last century for fear that their "pristine theology" would have to be compromised, resulting in an almost total disregard in the unity of the global church and therefore her witness to a watching world. Moreover, God's sovereignty, once a comforting pastoral doctrine, received so much emphasis by Protestant orthodoxy that it "sometimes exercised a paralyzing influence on even the idea of missionary involvement."¹⁰ Though many of us who are Protestants think fondly on the Reformation as the time when the gospel was finally set free, we must also lament where it has still remained captive.

The last and final historical paradigm rings most familiar since its attitudes and perspectives linger on (though it is disappearing rapidly): the Enlightenment. After the Reformation and consequently the challenge of Christendom, Europe was constantly embroiled in conflict as countries warred against one another in the struggle for religious and political identity. It was a time of uncertainty, since the medieval worldview had been dealt a severe blow by the Reformation and was decidedly terminated by the scientific findings of Galileo. Whereas the Reformation had sought its grounds for certainty in God's action as attested to

10 Bosch, *TM*, 261.

by Scripture, Enlightenment intellectuals argued for a criterion, a foundation in the human mind which would yield certainty. Rationalists argued that these foundational truths were innate to all humanity; therefore they required no other contingent truths for their justification. Empiricists argued that humans contain no innate truths; the mind is *tabula rasa*, a blank slate which only receives truths about the world as it is apprehended by the senses. In either case, the point is simply that the Enlightenment elevated reason so high that it became autonomous; it was self-sufficient, not fallen (as the Reformers has suggested), and not in need of revelation to understand truth. Everything else was subject to reason, while reason was subject to nothing. As a consequence, Christianity lost much of its supernatural character and could for the first time be viewed as a sociological or psychological phenomenon without any reference to its ontological claims.¹¹

Living on the edge of the paradigm shift between the Enlightenment and Postmodernity, it is perhaps as easy to criticize the Enlightenment as it was for the Reformation to criticize the medieval church. Yet the church must resist the attempt to reject the Enlightenment wholesale. The medical and technological achievements much of the world enjoys are products of the always-inquiring Enlightenment mind. Because of these technological advances, the Christian gospel can be heard by radio, TV, or internet all over the world. Admittedly, it may yet be too early to mine the Enlightenment for the benefit of contemporary Christian witness as Postmodernity continues to define itself *contra* Enlightenment. This attitude is understandable, for never in any epoch of history had Christianity been on the defensive as intensely as in the Enlightenment. Suffice it to say for now (that this mining project must not fall by the wayside), it too demands a dialectical assessment in spite of the present reactive impulse.

Throughout this sketch of the historical paradigms of Christendom, it has been stressed that what is called for is a historical assessment that is willing to see the light and the darkness, the good and the bad, in each epoch of the church's history. The good news is that the church should already be accustomed to reflection in this mode – for is this not what Scripture demands? God's transcendence and immanence, Christ's deity and humanity, the distinction and unity of the Trinity are all realities of which Scripture commends belief as if the *real* truth of the matter cannot be fully mastered by the human mind. And so it is with the history of God's church. She can deny neither her historical witness nor her denial of the gospel in every age. Therefore, the church must move forward as the witnessing community she has always been, understanding herself *as* witness without presuming herself to contain that to which she witnesses. To that, she can only point.

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11 e.g. Emile Durkheim's non-realism, Ludwig Feuerbach's assertion of religion as psychological projection, etc.

BOOK REVIEWS

R. Michael Allen, *The Christ's Faith: A Dogmatic Account*, London: T&T Clark, 2009, pp. xii + 243. \$130 (hardback)

Dogmatic theology at its most rigorous engages seamlessly with both previous tradition and new problems that have arisen amidst or between various traditions of doctrine. Michael Allen's study of the faith of Jesus in God the Father is exemplary of such standards, and its contribution to a number of current discussions in constructive theological reflection will be substantial.

Allen addresses the human faith of Christ in the wake of an ongoing debate amongst biblical exegetes concerning the meaning of *pistis Christou* and seeks to initiate a more serious dogmatic assessment of the implications of the subjective interpretation (asserting a faith “of Christ”) for Chalcedonian Christology and Reformed soteriology. While prior dogmatic commitments are often portrayed as unduly constraining in the biblical studies debate over Christ's faith, Allen seeks to argue precisely from within such commitments for the coherence and even necessity of the affirmation of the human faith of Christ.

Chapter One supplements the exegetical discussion with a helpful account of 20th-century Reformed and Catholic proponents of Christological faith. Allen concludes with an outline of his intentions to enlist the earlier voices of Aquinas, Calvin, and Reformed orthodoxy in order to defend Christ's faith. Chapter Two tackles what is perhaps the primary obstacle to affirming this faith—Thomas's objection that the fittingness of perpetual beatific vision and human omniscience for the Son of God precludes his ignorance and thus human faith. Allen convincingly argues that “Christ's life was singular and metaphysically different from any other life, yet this singularity does not follow from any lack or implosion of his humanity, but from a divine excess” (59). Yet whether or not Christological perfection entails Christ's perpetual human experience of the beatific vision, Allen goes on to argue in Chapter Three for an “extended definition of faith” that rejects the limitations of faith/sight or faith/knowledge binaries in the first place. Such criteria of epistemological fulfillment do not stand in a competitive relationship with faith because faith itself “involves both mind and will, intellect and aesthetic taste; it is knowing trust or intellectual *fiducia*” (103).

Chapter Four shifts attention to a set of metaphysical questions concerning the doctrine of God and the incarnation. Four major areas of significance are discussed, from theological ontology and analogy to Reformed appropriation of Chalcedonian Christology, to the current dispute over the fallen or unfallen status of Christ's assumed human nature, and finally to pneumatological concerns. The qualitative transcendence of God and an account of Christ's two natures

that preserves the integrity of this transcendence through the work of the Spirit provide the dogmatic groundwork needed to affirm a doctrine of faith amenable to the Reformed tradition in its application to Christ's human life. In Chapter Five, Allen applies the dogmatic position he has established in the previous two chapters to three "case studies" that have already offered historical counterpoints throughout the study: Thomas Aquinas, the Federal theologians of the Reformed tradition, and Karl Barth. The points of critique and the wider scope of friendly appropriation in each of these three traditions are at this stage already familiar and are now fleshed out in some conclusive depth. Chapter Six expands the implications of Allen's work, making clear that a seemingly isolated disputation over intricate matters of Christology in fact offers serious reverberations for the soteriological and ethical shape of the life of the believer.

While the primary focus of *The Christ's Faith* is obviously Christological, the doctrine of faith discussed in Chapter Three may actually represent the most substantial advance of the study, independent of its particular application to Christ's humanity. The biblical critique of faith/knowledge dichotomies and the non-competitive epistemic relationship thereby established is a welcome paradigm for re-working past dualisms that have created unnecessary roadblocks for modern theology.

From a structural standpoint, the program laid out in "The Metaphysics of the Incarnation" seems to stand apart from the rest of Allen's concerns. While a comprehensive defense of Christ's faith depends upon the foundations laid in this chapter, the wide range of problems with which Allen engages here could become the subject of a book in its own right and may perhaps be worth considering independently in the future.

Allen's contribution to the question of Christ's faith is both richly substantive and far-reaching. The thesis is carefully executed. Apart from merely arguing for a certain position, Allen recognizes the obstacles and concerns blocking an embrace of the human faith of Christ by Reformed theologians, and he seeks to allay these concerns through appeal to Scripture and ecumenical dialogue between Thomist and Reformed traditions. In this goal he is impressively successful. Even those personally unconvinced of the human faith of Christ will find a compelling account of the receptiveness of Reformed and Chalcedonian dogmatic commitments to such an affirmation.

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Peter Heltzel, *Jesus and Justice: Evangelicals, Race and American Politics*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009, pp. xxiii + 259. \$30 (hardback)

In this prophetic, engaging text, Peter Goodwin Heltzel draws from the history of jazz and the environmentalism to call evangelicals into a "blue-green" future that integrates structural and personal responses to injustice in a revolutionary intercultural counterpolitics. Heltzel traces significant historical

details while seeking their political significance for contemporary evangelical identity.

In Part One, Heltzel explores revivalism and issues of race. He articulates the intersecting dilemmas of racism, economic injustice and nationalism at the heart of the Civil War and the reshaping of identity that followed with particular attention to sexualization as a means of reasserting white power. It is within this context that Heltzel expands the work of the Faith and Order conference, “On Being Christian Together” (Oberlin, 2007), in attempting to theologize history beyond the black/white and conservative/liberal binaries. While Donald Dayton traces two theological streams diverging in the institutional histories of Oberlin College and Wheaton College, Heltzel wrestles with the contested biographies of Martin Luther King Jr. and Carl F. H. Henry to rehabilitate (or disparage, depending on your point of view) both figures in their complex particularity. Their shared Baptist revivalist heritage becomes a lens for assessing divergent ecclesial responses to society in general and the civil rights movement in particular.

Part Two considers first Focus on the Family and the National Association of Evangelicals as manifestations of Henry’s influence and then the Christian Community Development Association and Sojourners as manifestations of King’s. Heltzel addresses James Dobson as a public theologian whose commitments reflect a Nazarene soteriology focused on human responsibility, social holiness, and Jesus as healer. He describes how Dobson’s “patriarchal politics” rooted in southern white bourgeois culture breaks from earlier Wesleyan commitments but does not press the implication that focus on abortion and homosexuality extends antebellum sexualization of politics into contemporary discourse. Heltzel summarizes recent history of the National Association of Evangelicals, noting the leadership of white Pentecostal Donald Argue in mediating a black evangelical vision of Jesus to the white evangelical world and forging connections with Roman Catholic and Orthodox leaders, the missional focus of Kevin Mannoia as an extension of Argue’s ecumenical efforts, and the church growth emphasis of Ted Haggard before his scandalous departure. Though Heltzel decries the absence of white evangelicals from the civil rights movement as a repetition of their absence from anti-lynching campaigns, he argues that the work of Samuel Rodriguez Jr. on immigration, Richard Cizik on care for creation, and Deborah Fikes on Sudan symbolize the hopeful broadening of “evangelical issues.” The seventh and eighth chapters return to a more biographical focus as Heltzel considers how the experiences of Christian Community Development Association founder, John Perkins, and Sojourners founder, Jim Wallis, shaped their understanding of Jesus as “both the savior and a seeker of justice.” For Perkins, Heltzel argues, the suffering of Jesus illuminates not just his own suffering at the hands of white police officers, but black suffering collectively, as the body of Christ becomes the space to “live out creative alternatives.” For Wallis, observation of racism and poverty in Detroit provides the backdrop for his later utilization of the insights and tactics of King, John Howard Yoder, the Catholic Worker movement, and contemplative spirituality.

Throughout the book, Heltzel holds up the power of narrative and follows James Kameron Carter in affirming the mulattic flesh of Jesus while cautioning against reified conceptions of blackness. The analysis is primarily Christological and soteriological, though there are hints of ecclesiological and pneumatological implications.

The immense contribution of this book to thinking about racism in the history of evangelicalism suggests three further areas of inquiry. First, the depiction of “theological commitment to order” as a barrier to justice is striking but left largely unexplored in its ecclesial, cultural, and sociological complexity. Second, while affirmation of willingness to endure the cost of collective struggle provides an important corrective to a sometimes myopic Euro-American theology of celebration, apart from a brief citation of Delores Williams, Heltzel’s work leaves open the question of whether theological treatment of the blues must be carried out within a soteriological framework of suffering. Third, though Heltzel frames the later chapters in terms of *organizations*, it is clear that these particular organizations cannot be understood apart from the biographies of their founders or key leaders. To what extent are such leaders forced to be selective in addressing *either race or gender or sexuality* (as perhaps the stories of Cizik and Haggard imply)? Should those sinking roots deep into dark blue-green simply look for greater diversity among figureheads vying for media status or is the new horizon of justice an organizational paradigm yet to be discovered? Though predictions that the culture-warrior ideal has lost its allure may strike some as over-optimistic, Heltzel artfully casts an alternative vision of “worldly love and justice” capable of migrating from a *politics of identity* to a *politics of intercultural community* that is surely to be welcomed with hope and prayers.

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Mark Johnston, *Saving God: Religion After Idolatry*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009, pp. 248. \$24.95 (paperback)

Mark Johnston’s *Saving God: Religion After Idolatry* presents a critique of monotheism and supernaturalism as idolatry and an argument defending panentheism. Unlike much contemporary work from recent critics of Christianity, this book contains a number of substantial arguments, some of them quite interesting. I will address three.

Monotheism is idolatry. In his account, the three major monotheistic religions share the view that there is a God, who is deeply interested in the salvation of humans. (The concern for the salvation of humans is what is really distinctive of monotheism.) Idolatry “invariably involves the attempt to evade or ignore the demanding core of true religion: radical self-abandonment to the

Divine as manifested in the turn toward the other and toward objective reality.” (24). Monotheisms are idolatrous because they direct our attention away from this self-abandonment and toward personal salvation in the afterlife.

The major monotheisms do not reveal the Highest One. How can we know what the highest one is like? Johnston suggests that we can examine the alleged revelations “phenomenologically” (i.e. by examining the content of their revelatory experiences) to see if they disclose the character of the Highest One. The acknowledged presumption of this method is that we have at least some independent knowledge of the Highest One’s character. This knowledge comes from a natural “religious sense” which can be refined by reflection just like a “musical sense.” Johnston says that we know in this way that the Highest One “could not have evil intent, nor a contempt for truth” (36). The next several chapters are devoted to showing that, taken on their own terms, the major monotheisms do reveal not a being with this character; what they reveal instead is a God uniquely tied to our own idolatrous self-interest. However, the devil is in the details of Johnston’s biblical exegesis, as in, for example, his treatment of Job (64-69).

In defense of panentheism. After defending a naturalist view about the makeup of the world and rejecting supernaturalism (because it conflicts with science and inclines us toward idolatrous longing for the afterlife), Johnston takes up panentheism. In his view, the ‘Highest One’ is constituted by, but not identical with, the natural world (127). Johnston argues that process panentheism has two advantages over monotheism. First, it provides a more appropriate object of worship, and combined with his loosely articulated view of analogical predication, it avoids the problem of unnecessary evil. The second advantage depends on understanding divine goodness as the mere self-disclosure of Being, which is not directed toward any particular human purpose (such as alleviating human suffering) (115-121). If this construal of divine goodness seems to you to push the analogy with human goodness past its breaking point, you’re not alone. It is also less than clear in Johnston’s account what the ontological difference is between panentheism and pantheism (119), and for that matter what the difference is between panentheism and classical theism (120).

In a book that glances over so many different topics and, as Johnston says in his preface, is less a work of technical philosophy than “the expression of a certain sensibility,” some topics are bound to receive treatment that remains open to serious question. At several points Johnston attributes to Christian theologians both generally and particularly views that they do not hold. For example, he says that Christians think of the afterlife only as a reward for obedience. He also attributes to Aquinas views about the Divine nature (103-107) that will meet considerable skepticism from Thomists. But he also presents a fascinating naturalistic account of the fall, and novel, compelling views about the relation between being, perception, and mental representation (129-151). The reader who has sampled without benefit the range of Christianity’s most recent cultured despisers, but cannot resist the inclination for more, would be well advised to put down the Dawkins and the Zizek and pick up *Saving God* and its 2010 companion *Surviving Death*.

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Masters of Divinity Senior

Gordon Mikoski, *Baptism and Christian Identity: Teaching in the Triune Name*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009, 253 pages. \$30.00 (paperback)

Gordon Mikoski's recent book, *Baptism and Christian Identity: Teaching in the Triune Name*, is concerned with Christian identity and openness in the pluralistic modern world (xiv). He seeks to avoid closed, sectarian responses to the diverse and democratic public realm (45, 198-199) while maintaining the particularities and integrity of the Christian faith (205). Mikoski worries that Christian distinctiveness is currently rooted in abstract theology rather than practicality (56), which he believes is a consequence of the subordination of the sacraments to merely visual aids for the Word during worship. This abstract foundation of Christian identity is theoretical and decontextualized in character, which leads to the breakdown of useful participation in the public realm (5-6). Following the theologies of Gregory of Nyssa and John Calvin, Mikoski argues that a Christian identity centered in baptism with its inherent Trinitarian grammar and engaged through a lifetime of pedagogy (33) will center theology in praxis rather than abstraction (55) and will prepare Christians for positive engagement with the non-Christian world (36).

While reviewing the challenge posed to Trinitarian faith by the Enlightenment and Christian responses to this challenge, Mikoski argues that theology has lost its practical foundation (44). After Kant relegated Trinitarian theology solely to moral symbolism, Feuerbach and then Marx attempted to reinterpret the doctrine in the anthropological terms of human need and revolt. Barth critiqued this Enlightenment understanding of religion as idolatry and centered faith in divine revelation, particularly Christ. Moltmann then focused this paradigm on the cross and divine love (46-54). Mikoski contends, however, that this theology failed to have a practical center because it was not orientated around ecclesial practice or pedagogy. Thus, it led to theological abstraction rather than Christian practice.

Mikoski then argues for the Church to revisit Gregory of Nyssa's and John Calvin's practical and Trinitarian theologies of baptism. Gregory argued that theology originated from practice; the Triune God is revealed in the injunction to baptize in the triune name (Matt. 28:19-20) (99). Likewise, Calvin always employed theology for the benefit of ecclesial practice (162). His concept of baptism was also deeply Trinitarian, explaining it as the action of the Spirit connecting the baptized to the person of Christ to the glory of God the Father (159). Also, both theologians stressed the pedagogical necessities and consequences inherent in the sacrament. Gregory understood baptism as regeneration, setting the baptized on the everlasting journey of divinization toward participation with the Trinity (126). This journey is nourished by a lifetime of scriptural instruction

(119). For Calvin, because the rite connects one to Christ, it stands as the standard for the whole of Christian life (175), which must be nurtured through a lifetime of pedagogy in and outside of the Church (178-183).

Mikoski also argues that the baptismal theologies of Gregory of Nyssa and Calvin root the sacrament in biblical, concrete convictions but leave space for engagement with the non-Christian world (195). Both Gregory and Calvin embraced the limits of human knowledge of the divine. They stressed that divine revelation presented knowledge of transforming grace but condescended to human understanding. There remain limits to what humanity can know of God. In today's pluralistic democracy, Christians are called upon to hear and understand divergent points of view (210). Gregory's and Calvin's stress on Triune love and mystery in their description of baptism-centered identity allows Christians to seek truth in and outside of the Church while maintaining their particularity as baptized believers.

Mikoski concluded with several suggestions to make baptism become central in Christian worship and pedagogy. His proposals include placing the font on an equal level with the pulpit, using more time in a service to focus on the rite, and being more pedagogically intentional with baptismal liturgy (218-221). To facilitate openness within identity, he also advises pedagogy to center on dialogue, mystery, and artistic expression (225-229).

Mikoski's greatest strength is his foundation in Christian theology. He does not compromise the thought of either Gregory or Calvin. To stay true to their intentions, Mikoski reviews and critiques Gregory's understanding of divinization (126) and Calvin's double predestination (158, 187) in light of his argument for pluralistic dialogue. At the same time, Mikoski also points out new implications in their theology for his thesis. His interpretation of Gregory's apophatic, or negative, theology (72) and Calvin's hesitation against abstraction (162) as both "intellectual humility" (195) and theological openness seeks to stay true to the intentions of the writers while utilizing their theology for the demands of our democratic context. This theological foundation enables Mikoski to extend established and foundational theologians and doctrines to engage pluralism, a controversial and open-ended topic in Christian theology.

Mikoski's greatest weakness is that he spends far more time explaining the solution than the problem. His engagement with Enlightenment thought and theological responses assumes that the reader is already versed in the intricate arguments of Kant, Hegel, Feuerbach, Marx, Barth, and Moltmann (44-57). If he intends to engage worship leaders and pastors rather than the scholarly elite, he should spend more time addressing the foundations of our current theological abstractions so that we can see where and how we err in abstracting theology from practice and engagement.

The book provides a theologically sound and contemporarily practical organizing principle for worship and discourse in the Christian life. If baptism is the root of Christian identity, then it will play a central role in worship. Mikoski spends his last two chapters offering suggestions to amplify the role of the sacrament in worship while highlighting its mysterious and open character. A

worship planner should read these suggestions in light of Mikoski's complete argument and his or her current context to discern what can be incorporated. I would recommend the book to anyone in this role as well as to all Christians who seek engagement outside the walls of the church but are afraid of watering down their identity.

Richard Coble

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