{ministry reflection paper}

[doctor of ministry program]

Writing Sample Requirements
The purpose of this paper is to assess the academic writing and critical thinking ability of potential Doctor of Ministry students.

Write a 5 page paper based on the article "The Church as Missional Community" by Darrell Guder (Guder, Darrell L. "The Church as Missional Community" *The Community of the Word.* IVP Academic, 2005. [p 114 – 128)])

In this paper interact with this article by:

- Stating Guder's main argument(s)
- Critiquing his thoughts (both positively and negatively)
- Engaging content in light of your personal ministry context
- Demonstrating your interaction with this article through brief quotes and citing portions of the paper, including footnotes and a bibliography
- Citing other sources as well to further develop your thoughts.

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THE CHURCH AS MISSIONAL COMMUNITY

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The research project that generated the book *Missional Church*, published in 1998, must be held accountable, it appears, for the rapid spread of the term *missional* in many circles of discussion dealing with the situation of the church in North America.[1] Our research team chose the term precisely because it was a relatively unknown word. We wanted to stimulate a theological conversation about the church which took seriously the premise that, to use the language of Vatican II, "the church is missionary by its very nature."[2] Within the Gospel and Our Culture Network, which sponsored that particular project, this was our working consensus.[3] We needed, somehow, to find a way to talk about the fundamentally missional nature of the church without using terms freighted with all kinds of baggage. By proposing the term "missional" we wanted to claim the right to define what it means. Of course, since then the word has taken on so many meanings that any discussion must always begin with yet another clarification of terms! It is almost comparable to the terminological confusion that always surrounds the term "evangelical," for perhaps many of the same reasons.

Proliferation of possible meanings for the word "missional" complicates the terminological challenge we face when we approach the task of doing an "evangelical ecclesiology." The modern missionary movement of the last three centuries has generated a lot of vocabulary. It has restored the term "mission" to Western theological discourse, along with "missionary" and "missioner,"

[1]The term is not a neologism (the *Oxford English Dictionary* records its first usage in English in 1907), but has been rarely used until the last few years. See Darrell Guder et al., eds., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

[2]See *Ad Gents* 1; *Lumen Gentium* 1.

[3]See <www.gocn.org>.

"mission society," "mission field" and the problematic plural term "missions." And it fostered that more intimidating neologism, "missiology." Here in the West, in the old territories of established Christianity whose history and complexities we lump together under the term "Christendom," the emergence of the term "evangelism" parallels the growth of mission language. For centuries, Western Christendom rarely spoke of "mission," except as a technical term used by medieval theologians to discuss the internal dynamics of the Trinity. We had no need for a verb such as "to evangelize," if we could assume that everyone was a Christian by virtue of birth, baptism, social conditioning and geography. One still finds lexical definitions that speak of "mission" as that activity done by agents of Western Christendom when they are planting churches in non-Western cultures, and "evangelism" as that activity within Christendom which strives to make people who are culturally Christian into active and practicing Christians.[4] In either instance, the language of mission and evangelism has referred to one of the several programs that Christian communities may be involved in, perhaps even to one of several primary emphases of the church. We often find "mission" listed next to things like "worship" and "service" in contemporary discussions of the church's purpose and practice. Rarely, however, would either "mission" or "evangelism" appear in any classical discussion of the doctrine of the church emerging from the Christendom tradition.

There is, of course, a very different attitude out there in our late modern society with regard to the language of mission and evangelism. We do not have to go far to find wholesale condemnation of the entire vocabulary and practice of mission. Both the secularized intellectual establishment of the West and significant groupings within the theological guild pretty well agree that the missionary movement must be roundly criticized as a major misadventure—and not without some justification. As the sometime partner of colonialism, it is supposed to be regretted as the insensitive imposition of Western religious cultures on captive populations, motivated by the misguided assumption that the benefits of both the gospel and Western civilization were what the world outside Christendom desperately needed. The decline of Western Christendom in the last century has thus been welcomed not only as just desserts but as the only thing that enlightened societies could do after centuries of what Kant called "self-incurred tutelage,"[5] the tutor being the authoritarian tradition of Christianity embodied

[4]For a more detailed discussion of mission terminology, see Darrell L. Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), pp. 9-15, and the literature cited there.

[5]Immanuel Kant, "What Is Enlightenment," in *Kant: Selections*, ed. Lewis W. Beck (New York: Macmillan, 1988), p. 462.

in the powerful organization of the established churches. It has come as a great shock to this secularized intellectual establishment that Christendom is not disappearing, but has shifted, as Philip Jenkins documents in his important study of *The Next Christendom*.[6] While Christianity continues to recede in the territories of its former domination, Jenkins chronicles the enormous growth and vitality of the "next Christendom" in Africa, Southern and Eastern Asia, and Latin America. That much maligned Western missionary movement, to everyone's surprise, worked, and the former "daughter churches" are now our "sister churches," many of which are sending missionaries to the now post-Christian societies which, not along ago, sent missionaries to them.

The term *missional* is an attempt to move the discussion beyond too narrow definitions of mission as merely one among the various programs of the church, and to find ways to think about the church's calling and practice today in light of the fact of the multicultural global church, what Archbishop Temple famously called "the great new fact of our time." To describe the church as "missional" is to make a basic theological claim, to articulate a widely held but also widely ignored consensus regarding the fundamental purpose of the Christian church. Rather than seeing mission as, at best, one of the necessary prongs of the church's calling, and at worst as a misguided adventure, it must be seen as the fundamental, the essential, the centering understanding of the church's purpose and action. The church that Jesus intended, to use Gerhard Lohfink's provocative book title, is missional by its very nature.[7] The church that the triune God gathers, upbuilds and sends, to use the profoundly missional outline of Karl Barth's ecclesiology in volume four of *Church Dogmatics*, exists to continue the service of witness.[8]

The church whose planting is witnessed to in the New Testament is properly understood in terms of its missional calling.[9] That was the purpose of the

[6]Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[7]The original of Gerhard Lohfink, *Jesus and Community: The Social Dimension of Christian Faith*, trans. John P. Galvin (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), has the much more evocative title, *Wie hat Jesus Gemeinde gewollt* (Freiburg/Basel/Vienna: Herder Verlag, 1982) = "How Did Jesus Intend the Community."

[8]Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956-1962), vol. 4; see also David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Mission Theology* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1991), pp. 372-73.

[9]The subject under discussion is "missional hermeneutics," for which a small but important literature is beginning to appear. See, e.g., David Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, pp. 15-55; James V. Brownson, *Speaking the Truth in Love: New Testament Resources for a Missional Hermeneutic* (Harrisburg, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 1998); Richard Bauckham, *The Bible and Mission* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003).

apostolic mission: to found missional communities to continue the witness that had brought them into being. The interpretation of the New Testament Scriptures finds its key in that purpose. The apostolic witness preceded the writing of the scriptural documents. The communities were already missional when Gospel authors and epistle writers tackled the task of their continuing formation through these written testimonies. Thus, the Scriptures' collective purpose, we contend, was the continuing formation of already missional communities for faithful and obedient witness. This formation took place in the synoptic Gospels and John by incorporating young missional communities into the discipling process of Jesus, the outcome of which must always be apostolate, "being sent out." The formation took place in the Epistles as the apostolic authors affirmed, prayed for, corrected, argued with and continued to evangelize the missional churches to which they wrote. Their problems became the curriculum of continuing conversion to missional calling and its practice for the benefit of the church catholic.

Defining *missional* in such a way has broad implications for the entire theological task, starting with ecclesiology but not stopping there. It certainly bears upon our understanding of what it means to be "evangelical." There is virtually no attempt to define *evangelical* which does not emphasize, in some way, the priority of mission and the essential importance of evangelism—however problematically either may be understood in these definitions. In what follows, I would like to suggest, in broad strokes, some aspects of the task of formulating a missional ecclesiology that may contribute to a clearer understanding of what we mean by *evangelical*.

THE REDUCTIONISM OF MISSION IN WESTERN THEOLOGIES

Wilbert Shenk defines "historical Christendom" as "the powerful religio-political synthesis that resulted when Christianity won recognition as the religion of state in the fourth century," with the result that "the church now took its place alongside the other powers controlling society but was thus itself redefined by its new role."[10] As one outcome of the process by which the Constantinian project reshaped Christianity, he then succinctly defines Christendom as "Christianity without mission." As helpful as his general analysis is, this is an oversimplification. It discounts such important movements as the Celtic mission of St. Patrick and the Iro-Scottish mission that it fostered, or the

[10]Wilbert Shenk, *Write the Vision: The Church Renewed* (Valley Forge, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 1995), p. 33.

Slavic mission of Saints Methodius and Cyril, or even the missional ministry within European Christendom of the Franciscan and Dominican movements. But it makes a valid point with regard to the formation of Christian *theology* within Christendom. It is not an oversimplification to say that the fundamentally missional nature of the church gradually disappears from the formulations of Western ecclesiology. We can only suggest some of the major reasons for that shift.

Certainly the reduction of mission in Western theology has to do with the so-called Christianization of Western cultures. Once the Christian religion had become the only allowed religion within the boundaries of Christendom, mission was not seen as the central task of the church. Rather, her theological definition gradually came to focus upon the care and tending of the salvation of her members, who were simultaneously citizens of Christendom. This centering on the savedness of the saved reflected another profoundly important shift in thought and practice, relating directly to the gospel itself. The biblical message of salvation underwent a reductionism that resulted in emphasis upon individual salvation, how it was attained and how it was maintained. The classic definition of Christian existence focused on the benefits the person receives from the gospel, to the neglect of the vocation of witness for which the benefits prepare the Christian.[11] The institutional church was thus construed as essential for individual blessedness, providing the rites which initiated salvation, baptism, and which tended and maintained it, from Eucharist through penance to unction. Diminished or distorted in the process was the biblical understanding of the corporate and cosmic scope of salvation as the healing of all creation, the restoration of all things to the sovereign and gracious rule of God. Together with that loss there was the diminishing of the church's understanding of how it did the minimal mission that remained. Ultimately, only the clergy did that mission—which consisted primarily of the administration of personal salvation—and the members simply received the benefits distributed by the church on behalf of God.

Further, the eschatological shaping of the gospel, so central to the New Testament, was distorted and reduced. Jesus' message was the inbreaking reign of God, and the early church confessed him as the one who is and brings that reign into human reality. He is enthroned and rules as Savior and Lord, witnessed to by his church through the empowering of the Holy Spirit. The church's empowered witness has, in the New Testament, a dynamic sense of God's work begun, God's work promised, and God's work being carried out now in the pilgrimage of faith and healing. The evidence of that inbreaking reign takes shape within the "community of the Word" in the reality of continuing conversion and healing, and in the empowering of the community to live publicly in ways that point to God's rule. God's future will, to be sure, bring the end of history, the judgment of humanity, the abolition of all opposition to God's rule and the "new heavens and new earth." But the community's common witness is so energized and focused by its confidence in God's future that its life now is already transformed and informed by the "living hope" established by "the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." It looks forward to "an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven" for God's children. Now, in this time of testing, God's power guards the community through the gift of faith "for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Pet 1:3-5). And during this passage through time, the community experiences the healing power of the gospel and witnesses to this new reality as it looks forward confidently.

That sense of radical and transforming anticipation, of living hope that profoundly shapes the "now" of the corporate Christian witness, was gradually reoriented to an individualistic emphasis on the second coming at the end of time with its threatening judgment that determines where each soul will spend eternity. The biblical emphasis on the "resurrection of the body" is replaced by the Hellenistic concept of the immortality of the soul, which changes the nature of Christian eschatology and diminishes the strong biblical emphasis upon the integrated wholeness of the human person as body, spirit and soul. Life now was understood not so much as faithful witness in hope but as wearisome and often anxious preparation in this vale of tears for what must come hereafter. Salvation is a question of where one spends eternity rather than the larger biblical witness to the restorative and salvific reign of God breaking in now, whose consummation is yet to come.

As heirs of the Christendom legacy, we inherit these tendencies toward reductionism both of the gospel of salvation (soteriological reductionism) and of the church's purpose and practices (ecclesiological reductionism). We struggle with the compromises made in the name of the gospel over the centuries that have gradually domesticated the gospel and produced what Dietrich Bonhoeffer so aptly called a gospel of "cheap grace."[12] The individualism of such a re-

[11]This is the focus of Karl Barth's critique of the "classic definition of a Christian," *Church Dogmatics* 4/3, pp. 561-73; see also my *Be My Witnesses: The Church's Mission, Message, and Messengers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985); idem, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church*, pp. 121-41.

[12]Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan, 1959), pp. 35ff.

ductionist soteriology has only intensified in the self-centered and consumerist culture of present-day North America. The church's focus on the tending and maintenance of the savedness of the saved is well attested today in churches that advertise themselves as "full-service" congregations and function as purveyors of the religious programs and products their member-consumers want. The partnership of church and state has, after the end of Christendom, effectively been replaced with the partnership of church and marketplace.

It is, however, an act of theological dishonesty to present the reductionist legacy of Christendom in monotonously somber tones. God has not been absent but graciously and powerfully present through this long history—God has been no more absent than he was from the long and unedifying history of Israel's kings. We are heirs of both our human reductionisms and of divinely empowered resistance to such disobedience. One of the pressing requirements for the development of a missional ecclesiology today is the task of learning how to read and interpret our history dialectically. We need to discern how God has been faithful in and through the lives and activities of both the known and anonymous mentors of witness and obedience, those "special individuals" whom Karl Barth describes as "models and examples" for the church in their "special calling and endowments."[13] We trace God's formation of his people in the prayers and liturgies, the neighborly love and innovative charity, the theological scholarship, the gifts for music and architecture, and the courage of public witness of so many members of the cloud of witnesses that surrounds and supports us. That dialectical realism allows us, constrains us, to speak without hesitation of the missional vocation and purpose of the church, in spite of the unquestioned fact that so much of our modern mission history is a very mixed and even questionable story. We did, in fact, confuse the message of the gospel with our own inflated sense of the normativity of our enlightened Western civilization. A reductionist soteriology did generate a reductionist vision of mission and a highly compromised understanding of the purpose of the church. But God has graciously overruled those shortcomings and allowed the message to be planted and the missional church to be formed in every major cultural area of the world. We are comforted by the wise word of the pastor from Malawi who told my class one day about all the changes the gospel had brought when the missionaries came to his tribe. "And," he concluded, "you must realize that we could always tell the difference between Jesus and the missionaries."

[13]Barth *Church Dogmatics* 4/3, p. 888.

THE WESTERN SHIFT TO POST-CHRISTENDOM AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE THEOLOGY OF THE *MISSIO DEI*

Now, however, we are coming to terms with the obvious fact that Christendom has ended— although, in some places it is more accurate to say that it is ending (there is a significant difference in the "state of Christendom" between Atlanta and Seattle!). Historians and social scientists must date and analyze the complex process of its ending and the character of the paradigm shift in which we find ourselves. Pastors must accompany their congregations through the painful recognition that we as the Christian church have indeed lost much, and that we are truly in a situation like that of Israel in exile, as Walter Brueggemann frequently has said.[14] Counselors must help parents deal with the challenge and the sadness of living with the decisions made by their adult children and their grandchildren to leave their faith behind and embrace our modern secularism or the growing variety of new age religions. Students of culture must help us learn and understand the changes, the new languages, the values and goals of our rapidly changing society in all its subcultures. And theologians must recognize anew that, as Martin Kähler said over a century ago, "mission is the mother of theology."[15] We find ourselves as heirs of Christendom in a radically changed territory, the Western mission field, which by any standards is one of the world's most difficult and complex arenas for Christian witness.

We are handicapped by some of the assumptions and attitudes of Christendom that are still very powerful in our minds and congregations. Our ecclesiologies of institutional maintenance and the tending of savedness are not adequate to the task that faces us now. We cannot evangelize under the assumption that most of what it means to be a practicing Christian is already handled by one's being born and raised in so-called Christian North America—so that all one needs to do is accept Jesus, join a church and perhaps start tithing. Nor can we evangelize under the assumption that our culture prepares people for Christ, so that we merely need to recognize the "felt needs" that people bring to church with them. The "felt needs" of a society shaped by consumerism and the entertainment industry may, instead, generate a kind of church that continues the gospel reductionism already so deeply engrained in Western Christianity. What may then happen could be nothing more than a last, desperate attempt to recover the popularity by other means that Chris-

[14]See, e.g., Walter Brueggemann, *Cadences of Home: Preaching Among Exiles* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1997).

[15]Martin Kähler, *Schriften zur Christologie und Mission* (1908; reprint, Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1971), p. 190.

tianity seemed to enjoy during Christendom, popularity that Christians continue to confuse with faithful witness and genuine mission. Genuine missional vocation today must take seriously that process of dilution that David Bosch aptly described when he commented that Western theology could be characterized as a process of explaining why the Sermon on the Mount does not apply to us.[16] Much of our evangelism is based upon unquestioned, undoubted versions of "cheap grace." And much of our understanding and practice of the church's calling and ministry is based upon a reductionist ecclesiology that cannot pretend to be "evangelical" because it is not "missional."

That process of theological reorientation has been emerging for a long time. Although the Reformation does not generate an explicitly missional theology for Christendom, the first resources for such a theology can be traced in Luther's vision of the priesthood of all believers and Calvin's radical understanding of God's grace effecting our justification, our forgiveness and our sanctification in an inextricably intertwined process that generates public witness affecting very area of the community's life. It advances in Kierkegaard's attack upon Christendom[17] and P. T. Forsyth's comprehensive understanding of the formation of the congregation of believers for faithful witness as service.[18] It is certainly accelerated by the beginnings of the Ecumenical Movement at the Edinburgh Conference of 1910 and the subsequent study and exploration under the aegis of the Faith and Order movement, the Life and Work movement and the International Missionary Council.[19] Karl Barth recognized by the early 1920s that "the idol is tottering,"[20] and that it was time to rethink all of Christian doctrine from the perspective of what serves the formation of the church for its faithful witness in an increasingly post-Christian and even hostile world—the result is *Church Dogmatics* rather than a "systematic theology."

With regard to the challenge of developing a missional ecclesiology, there

[16]"Indeed, this sermon expresses, like no other New Testament passage, the essence of the ethics of Jesus. Through the ages, however, Christians have usually found ways around the clear meaning of the Sermon on the Mount" (Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 69).

[17]Søren Kierkegaard, *Attack Upon "Christendom,"* trans. W. Lowrie (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968).

[18]See, e.g., P. T. Forsyth, *The Church and the Sacraments* (London: Independent Press, 1947, 1917).

[19]A comprehensive survey of these ecumenical developments is found in W. Richey Hogg, *Ecumenical Foundations: A History of the International Missionary Council and its Nineteenth Century Background* (1952; reprint, Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2003).

[20]Letter from Karl Barth to Eduard Thurneysen of April 20, 1920, in Ernst Wolf et al., *Antwort: Karl Barth zum siebzigsten Geburtstag am 10. Mai 1956* (Zollikon-Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag AG, 1956), p. 856.

appear to have been two major factors that have shaped the process. On the one hand, there was the theological significance of the emergence of new and autonomous churches in the non-Western world, as the result of the modern missionary movement. It is widely acknowledged that the planting of new churches in previously unevangelized cultures was undertaken with a very inadequate ecclesiology. Most modern mission was undertaken by voluntary societies, not by the established churches of the West. There was virtually no theological attention given to mission by the Western academic guild, and so the mission societies had little ecclesiological equipment to guide the formation of new churches. Thus, Christendom's focus on the salvation of individual souls shaped the proclamation of the modern missionary movement, and so the newly formed mission churches figured largely as a kind of ecclesiastical receptacle for converts. Since Western ecclesiology did not operate under the fundamental principle that the church is called, gathered, formed and sent to be God's witnesses in the world, we did not initially form churches with that sense of missional vocation. The question of missional calling was really forced upon the emerging global church by the reality of being minority churches in completely non-Christian settings and illumined by their own interaction with Scripture as translations into vernacular languages made this possible.

As representatives of Christendom, used to the privileges and protections of majority status, we had little to offer our new sister churches as they began to take up the challenge of their calling in their contexts. But as they received the Bible in their own languages and began to grasp how this story was now their story, and that the missional mandate of the New Testament church defined them as well, they began to address the ecclesiological deficiencies exported by Christendom. The urgent concern for Christian unity pressed upon the complacent denominations of Christendom by the sister churches in the non-Western world grew out of their clear understanding that their divisions invalidated their witness. The issue was well summarized in the statement on mission and evangelism drafted by the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches and adopted in 1982: "The present ecumenical movement came into being out of the conviction of the churches that the division of Christians is a scandal and an impediment to the witness of the church. There is a growing awareness among the churches today of the inextricable relationship between Christian unity and missionary calling, between ecumenism and evangelization. 'Evangelisation is the test of our ecumenical vocation.' "[21]

[21]World Council of Churches, *Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1983), §1.

The other factor forcing the issue of a missional ecclesiology has been the disintegration of Christendom in the West, and with it a growing sense of the deficiency of the ecclesiologies we inherit. It is gradually becoming clear that the Christian church in the West can no longer assume that it has a cordial Christian context within which it can go about its duties. When confronted by secularism and paganism today, both the traditional inherited church structures and the theological systems that inform them find themselves largely at a loss. But our theologies of the church do not prepare us for this missional challenge in our own previously Christianized territory. Before we can turn our theological attention to themes like ordered ministry, sacraments and spiritual disciplines, we have to grapple with the basic questions: Who is the church of Jesus Christ and what is it for? As I have shown, the ecclesiological mindset we inherit tends to define the church in terms of the benefits it provides its members, as Avery Dulles explained in his classic discussion of the *Models of the Church*.[22] Thus, mission had to be interpreted as all those activities that build and expand the church. Such ways of thinking, which we group together as ecclesiocentric theologies of the church, are necessarily having to give way to another theological center of gravity. Since the 1930s, the consensus has gradually emerged that the church is not about itself, as though it were a self-justifying end, but the church must be defined and must act as part of the larger mission of God.

The theology of the *missio Dei* defines the church within the framework of the doctrine of the triune God. David Bosch has described this theological consensus succinctly, explaining that mission is "understood as being derived from the very nature of God. It was thus put in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity, not of ecclesiology or soteriology. The classical doctrine on the *missio Dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit was expanded to include yet another 'movement': Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world."[23] The fundamental assumption here has to do with the revealed nature and purpose of God: "mission is not primarily an activity of the church, but an attribute of God. God is a missionary God."

It is not possible in this paper to explore all the twists and turns of the *missio Dei* debate since it became a focusing theme of missiological discussion in the 1950s.[24] It is intriguing, however, that this theological consensus emerges as Christendom is unraveling in the West. Scripture discloses that God's mission is the outworking of God's love for his entire creation, which God translates into purposeful action to bring about the healing of his broken creatures, restoration to himself and to his good design, and incorporation into his kingdom as its witnesses and servant. The theology of the *missio Dei* is making clear that our ecclesiology, if it is truly to be a doctrine for the church that is continuing the apostolic witness, must be rooted in God's nature, purpose and action. It must be developed out of the mission of God as the One who calls and empowers his people to be the sign, foretaste and instrument of God's new order under the lordship of Christ. This ecclesiology understands the church as Christ's witness, living in continuing community with him in its midst, prepared by his Word through Scripture to be sent into the world which he loves and for which he died. Such a doctrine must serve the formation of the "community of the Word" for comprehensive missional witness.

TO BE AUTHENTICALLY "EVANGELICAL," OUR ECCLESIOLOGY MUST NECESSARILY BE "MISSIONAL"

If our concern is faithful witness to the gospel, then our doctrine of the church must be built upon and expound the mission for which the church is called, formed and sent, according to the biblical witness. As I said, the point is God's love for the world and the concrete demonstration of that love in the incarnation, ministry, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. The divine strategy for the healing of the world is the calling, setting apart, formation and sending of a particular people whose witness has, as Newbigin puts it, "universal intent." God's gospel is to be made known to all people as an invitation to healing and to enlistment in the service of God as part of his witnessing people. Christian vocation is not merely to individual savedness, but to the service of God's mission to bring healing to the nations. Therefore, Christian witness is corporate in order that it can also be individual and personal. God calls a people into discipleship, formation by Jesus, in order to send it out as an apostolic community, so that each of its members can be an apostolic witness with that flame of the Spirit ignited on every head. The community of the Word is

[22]Avery Dulles, S.J., *Models of the Church* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Image Books, 1978), pp. 45ff.

[23]Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 390.

[24]For a thorough review of the *missio Dei* discussion in the latter half of the twentieth century, see the edition of the *International Review of Mission* 92, no. 367 (2003) titled *Missio Dei Revisited: Willingen 1952-2002*, for a series of informative articles examining this tradition from diverse perspectives.

neither a safe enclave nor a colony walled off from the world, although it is, to be sure, always an alternative community within its context. It is a people *in via*, en route, on a pilgrimage definitively shaped by the incarnation, ministry, message, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, moving with him along his narrow path toward the certain consummation of God's work of salvation. The church that Jesus intended is a community that lives its message publicly, transparently, vulnerably—that is why it is called *ecclesia*, an assembly set apart to do public business in view of the watching world.[25] Its public witness has its dynamic focus on its gathered worship and proclamation of the Sent One. In Word and sacrament, Jesus encounters us in this central event of inward and focused devotion with the explosive outwardly thrusting commission, "So I send you." The ancient greeting that ended the liturgy, "*Ite missa est*" must be understood not merely as "Go, you are dismissed," but rather, "Go, you are sent."

To be authentically evangelical, I repeat, our ecclesiology must be missional. Such an ecclesiology will function then theologically as an integrative discipline, drawing all of the theological discourses into constructive interaction for the sake of building up the body of Christ and equipping it for its ministry (Eph 4:11-12). Rooted in the trinitarian nature and action of God, this ecclesiology derives its purpose from God's mission. It defines the way it goes about its work by means of God's self-disclosure in the history of Israel and supremely in the earthly ministry of Jesus. As an ecclesiology of Pentecost, this doctrine confesses the church's dependence upon the empowering work of the Spirit as it enables witness to Christ in all that the church is, does, and says. It will be the work of the Spirit to guide the missional church in its disciplined engagement with God's Word as the instrument God uses for the continuing formation of the community of the Word for its vocation. As a result of that biblical formation, the community will grow in its understanding of how its corporate public witness must be practiced, and at the same time, how each member will lead his and her life as an apostolic missionary in the daily neighborliness of witness to Jesus Christ.

Such an ecclesiology pays particularly close attention to the "as" and the "so" in John's missional summary: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you" (Jn 20:21). God's incarnational action in history provides the church the content of its witness and defines how it is to be carried out. "Mission in Jesus' way" has become a much-explored theme in missional theology these last decades, and such thinking must shape our missional ecclesiology.[26] Theological ethics must school the missional church to practice witness with integrity, must guide the community to discern how, in fact, we are to "live our lives worthy of the calling with which we have been called."[27] The dominical and apostolic formation of the missional church focuses upon the concrete obedience of the called community and of all its members; it works intentionally on the transparency and integrity of its common life and its scattered life in an often-hostile world.

There is particular urgency today for a missional ecclesiology to reclaim the profoundly eschatological character of the church's calling. The theological reductionism of both gospel and church has been accompanied, over the centuries, by a great loss of that future tense of faith that should powerfully shape our present life and action. In place of fruitless speculation about events that have not yet happened, we must focus upon the certainty of our hope that enables us now to witness to Christ fearlessly and point away from ourselves modestly. A missional ecclesiology will always be candid about its penultimate nature; the continuing conversion of the church will necessitate obedient and serendipitous re-visiting of all our theological formulae and propositions. This does not mean that the gospel is not sufficient to the task; it means that the church lives with the open confession that its grasp of and response to the gospel is always partial, that there is yet more healing to be done, more conversion to submit to, more wonder to worship.

♦ ♦ ♦

Paul wrote to the Corinthians, after a particularly evocative exposition of the gospel's vocation (in 2 Cor 4:1-14), "Everything is for your sake" (2 Cor 4:15)—and Christendom would like to stop there, would like to leave us as Christians enjoying the benefits of our salvation and working away at the threats to our blessedness that arise both out of the world and our own rebellions. But the text has no period there. It says, "Everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory

[25]John Howard Yoder, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community Before the Watching World* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1992, 1997).

[26]Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, *The San Antonio Report: Your Will Be Done: Mission in Christ's Way* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1990); Lesslie Newbigin, *Mission in Christ's Way* (New York: Friendship Press, 1988); "Turn to the Living God: A Call to Evangelism in Christ's Way," in Office of Theology and Worship, *Selected Theological Statements: Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) General Assemblies (1956-1998)* (Louisville, Ky.: Presbyterian Church [U.S.A.], 1998), pp. 617ff.

[27]Eph 4:1; see also this fundamental theme in Paul's community formation in Phil 1:27 and the theme of imitation generally in that epistle; 1 Thess 2:11-12; 2 Thess 1:11; Col 1:9.

of God." The purpose of God's mission is ultimately the acknowledgment and enjoyment of the glory of God; it happens as grace extends to more and more people; the evidence of that spread is growing thanksgiving to God which displays before the world the loving character and purposes of our God. It is the task and privilege of a missional ecclesiology to serve God's glory by guiding the church to an ever-growing understanding of who it is and what it is for. Thus, every classical theme of ecclesiology—the doctrine and practice of the sacraments, of proclamation, of ordered ministry, of membership, of stewardship, of spiritual disciplines—will be drawn into and redefined by the foundational vocation of the church to be Christ's witness, to lead its life worthy of its calling, to be Christ's letter to the world, to be, as Peter summarized it, "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Pet 2:9).

6

THE CHURCH AS MISSIONAL COMMUNITY

DARRELL L. GUDER

The research project that generated the book *Missional Church*, published in 1998, must be held accountable, it appears, for the rapid spread of the term *missional* in many circles of discussion dealing with the situation of the church in North America.[1] Our research team chose the term precisely because it was a relatively unknown word. We wanted to stimulate a theological conversation about the church which took seriously the premise that, to use the language of Vatican II, "the church is missionary by its very nature."[2] Within the Gospel and Our Culture Network, which sponsored that particular project, this was our working consensus.[3] We needed, somehow, to find a way to talk about the fundamentally missional nature of the church without using terms freighted with all kinds of baggage. By proposing the term "missional" we wanted to claim the right to define what it means. Of course, since then the word has taken on so many meanings that any discussion must always begin with yet another clarification of terms! It is almost comparable to the terminological confusion that always surrounds the term "evangelical," for perhaps many of the same reasons.

Proliferation of possible meanings for the word "missional" complicates the terminological challenge we face when we approach the task of doing an "evangelical ecclesiology." The modern missionary movement of the last three centuries has generated a lot of vocabulary. It has restored the term "mission" to Western theological discourse, along with "missionary" and "missioner,"

[1]The term is not a neologism (the *Oxford English Dictionary* records its first usage in English in 1907), but has been rarely used until the last few years. See Darrell Guder et al., eds., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

[2]See *Ad Gents* 1; *Lumen Gentium* 1.

[3]See <www.gocn.org>.

"mission society," "mission field" and the problematic plural term "missions." And it fostered that more intimidating neologism, "missiology." Here in the West, in the old territories of established Christianity whose history and complexities we lump together under the term "Christendom," the emergence of the term "evangelism" parallels the growth of mission language. For centuries, Western Christendom rarely spoke of "mission," except as a technical term used by medieval theologians to discuss the internal dynamics of the Trinity. We had no need for a verb such as "to evangelize," if we could assume that everyone was a Christian by virtue of birth, baptism, social conditioning and geography. One still finds lexical definitions that speak of "mission" as that activity done by agents of Western Christendom when they are planting churches in non-Western cultures, and "evangelism" as that activity within Christendom which strives to make people who are culturally Christian into active and practicing Christians.[4] In either instance, the language of mission and evangelism has referred to one of the several programs that Christian communities may be involved in, perhaps even to one of several primary emphases of the church. We often find "mission" listed next to things like "worship" and "service" in contemporary discussions of the church's purpose and practice. Rarely, however, would either "mission" or "evangelism" appear in any classical discussion of the doctrine of the church emerging from the Christendom tradition.

There is, of course, a very different attitude out there in our late modern society with regard to the language of mission and evangelism. We do not have to go far to find wholesale condemnation of the entire vocabulary and practice of mission. Both the secularized intellectual establishment of the West and significant groupings within the theological guild pretty well agree that the missionary movement must be roundly criticized as a major misadventure—and not without some justification. As the sometime partner of colonialism, it is supposed to be regretted as the insensitive imposition of Western religious cultures on captive populations, motivated by the misguided assumption that the benefits of both the gospel and Western civilization were what the world outside Christendom desperately needed. The decline of Western Christendom in the last century has thus been welcomed not only as just desserts but as the only thing that enlightened societies could do after centuries of what Kant called "self-incurred tutelage,"[5] the tutor being the authoritarian tradition of Christianity embodied

[4]For a more detailed discussion of mission terminology, see Darrell L. Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), pp. 9-15, and the literature cited there.

[5]Immanuel Kant, "What Is Enlightenment," in *Kant: Selections*, ed. Lewis W. Beck (New York: Macmillan, 1988), p. 462.

in the powerful organization of the established churches. It has come as a great shock to this secularized intellectual establishment that Christendom is not disappearing, but has shifted, as Philip Jenkins documents in his important study of *The Next Christendom*.[6] While Christianity continues to recede in the territories of its former domination, Jenkins chronicles the enormous growth and vitality of the "next Christendom" in Africa, Southern and Eastern Asia, and Latin America. That much maligned Western missionary movement, to everyone's surprise, worked, and the former "daughter churches" are now our "sister churches," many of which are sending missionaries to the now post-Christian societies which, not along ago, sent missionaries to them.

The term *missional* is an attempt to move the discussion beyond too narrow definitions of mission as merely one among the various programs of the church, and to find ways to think about the church's calling and practice today in light of the fact of the multicultural global church, what Archbishop Temple famously called "the great new fact of our time." To describe the church as "missional" is to make a basic theological claim, to articulate a widely held but also widely ignored consensus regarding the fundamental purpose of the Christian church. Rather than seeing mission as, at best, one of the necessary prongs of the church's calling, and at worst as a misguided adventure, it must be seen as the fundamental, the essential, the centering understanding of the church's purpose and action. The church that Jesus intended, to use Gerhard Lohfink's provocative book title, is missional by its very nature.[7] The church that the triune God gathers, upbuilds and sends, to use the profoundly missional outline of Karl Barth's ecclesiology in volume four of *Church Dogmatics*, exists to continue the service of witness.[8]

The church whose planting is witnessed to in the New Testament is properly understood in terms of its missional calling.[9] That was the purpose of the

[6]Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[7]The original of Gerhard Lohfink, *Jesus and Community: The Social Dimension of Christian Faith*, trans. John P. Galvin (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), has the much more evocative title, *Wie hat Jesus Gemeinde gewollt* (Freiburg/Basel/Vienna: Herder Verlag, 1982) = "How Did Jesus Intend the Community."

[8]Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956-1962), vol. 4; see also David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Mission Theology* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1991), pp. 372-73.

[9]The subject under discussion is "missional hermeneutics," for which a small but important literature is beginning to appear. See, e.g., David Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, pp. 15-55; James V. Brownson, *Speaking the Truth in Love: New Testament Resources for a Missional Hermeneutic* (Harrisburg, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 1998); Richard Bauckham, *The Bible and Mission* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003).

apostolic mission: to found missional communities to continue the witness that had brought them into being. The interpretation of the New Testament Scriptures finds its key in that purpose. The apostolic witness preceded the writing of the scriptural documents. The communities were already missional when Gospel authors and epistle writers tackled the task of their continuing formation through these written testimonies. Thus, the Scriptures' collective purpose, we contend, was the continuing formation of already missional communities for faithful and obedient witness. This formation took place in the synoptic Gospels and John by incorporating young missional communities into the discipling process of Jesus, the outcome of which must always be apostolate, "being sent out." The formation took place in the Epistles as the apostolic authors affirmed, prayed for, corrected, argued with and continued to evangelize the missional churches to which they wrote. Their problems became the curriculum of continuing conversion to missional calling and its practice for the benefit of the church catholic.

Defining *missional* in such a way has broad implications for the entire theological task, starting with ecclesiology but not stopping there. It certainly bears upon our understanding of what it means to be "evangelical." There is virtually no attempt to define *evangelical* which does not emphasize, in some way, the priority of mission and the essential importance of evangelism—however problematically either may be understood in these definitions. In what follows, I would like to suggest, in broad strokes, some aspects of the task of formulating a missional ecclesiology that may contribute to a clearer understanding of what we mean by *evangelical*.

THE REDUCTIONISM OF MISSION IN WESTERN THEOLOGIES

Wilbert Shenk defines "historical Christendom" as "the powerful religio-political synthesis that resulted when Christianity won recognition as the religion of state in the fourth century," with the result that "the church now took its place alongside the other powers controlling society but was thus itself redefined by its new role."[10] As one outcome of the process by which the Constantinian project reshaped Christianity, he then succinctly defines Christendom as "Christianity without mission." As helpful as his general analysis is, this is an oversimplification. It discounts such important movements as the Celtic mission of St. Patrick and the Iro-Scottish mission that it fostered, or the

[10]Wilbert Shenk, *Write the Vision: The Church Renewed* (Valley Forge, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 1995), p. 33.

Slavic mission of Saints Methodius and Cyril, or even the missional ministry within European Christendom of the Franciscan and Dominican movements. But it makes a valid point with regard to the formation of Christian *theology* within Christendom. It is not an oversimplification to say that the fundamentally missional nature of the church gradually disappears from the formulations of Western ecclesiology. We can only suggest some of the major reasons for that shift.

Certainly the reduction of mission in Western theology has to do with the so-called Christianization of Western cultures. Once the Christian religion had become the only allowed religion within the boundaries of Christendom, mission was not seen as the central task of the church. Rather, her theological definition gradually came to focus upon the care and tending of the salvation of her members, who were simultaneously citizens of Christendom. This centering on the savedness of the saved reflected another profoundly important shift in thought and practice, relating directly to the gospel itself. The biblical message of salvation underwent a reductionism that resulted in emphasis upon individual salvation, how it was attained and how it was maintained. The classic definition of Christian existence focused on the benefits the person receives from the gospel, to the neglect of the vocation of witness for which the benefits prepare the Christian.[11] The institutional church was thus construed as essential for individual blessedness, providing the rites which initiated salvation, baptism, and which tended and maintained it, from Eucharist through penance to unction. Diminished or distorted in the process was the biblical understanding of the corporate and cosmic scope of salvation as the healing of all creation, the restoration of all things to the sovereign and gracious rule of God. Together with that loss there was the diminishing of the church's understanding of how it did the minimal mission that remained. Ultimately, only the clergy did that mission—which consisted primarily of the administration of personal salvation—and the members simply received the benefits distributed by the church on behalf of God.

Further, the eschatological shaping of the gospel, so central to the New Testament, was distorted and reduced. Jesus' message was the inbreaking reign of God, and the early church confessed him as the one who is and brings that reign into human reality. He is enthroned and rules as Savior and Lord, witnessed to by his church through the empowering of the Holy Spirit. The church's empowered witness has, in the New Testament, a dynamic sense of God's work begun, God's work promised, and God's work being carried out now in the pilgrimage of faith and healing. The evidence of that inbreaking reign takes shape within the "community of the Word" in the reality of continuing conversion and healing, and in the empowering of the community to live publicly in ways that point to God's rule. God's future will, to be sure, bring the end of history, the judgment of humanity, the abolition of all opposition to God's rule and the "new heavens and new earth." But the community's common witness is so energized and focused by its confidence in God's future that its life now is already transformed and informed by the "living hope" established by "the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." It looks forward to "an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven" for God's children. Now, in this time of testing, God's power guards the community through the gift of faith "for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Pet 1:3-5). And during this passage through time, the community experiences the healing power of the gospel and witnesses to this new reality as it looks forward confidently.

That sense of radical and transforming anticipation, of living hope that profoundly shapes the "now" of the corporate Christian witness, was gradually reoriented to an individualistic emphasis on the second coming at the end of time with its threatening judgment that determines where each soul will spend eternity. The biblical emphasis on the "resurrection of the body" is replaced by the Hellenistic concept of the immortality of the soul, which changes the nature of Christian eschatology and diminishes the strong biblical emphasis upon the integrated wholeness of the human person as body, spirit and soul. Life now was understood not so much as faithful witness in hope but as wearisome and often anxious preparation in this vale of tears for what must come hereafter. Salvation is a question of where one spends eternity rather than the larger biblical witness to the restorative and salvific reign of God breaking in now, whose consummation is yet to come.

As heirs of the Christendom legacy, we inherit these tendencies toward reductionism both of the gospel of salvation (soteriological reductionism) and of the church's purpose and practices (ecclesiological reductionism). We struggle with the compromises made in the name of the gospel over the centuries that have gradually domesticated the gospel and produced what Dietrich Bonhoeffer so aptly called a gospel of "cheap grace."[12] The individualism of such a re-

[11]This is the focus of Karl Barth's critique of the "classic definition of a Christian," *Church Dogmatics* 4/3, pp. 561-73; see also my *Be My Witnesses: The Church's Mission, Message, and Messengers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985); idem, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church*, pp. 121-41.

[12]Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan, 1959), pp. 35ff.

ductionist soteriology has only intensified in the self-centered and consumerist culture of present-day North America. The church's focus on the tending and maintenance of the savedness of the saved is well attested today in churches that advertise themselves as "full-service" congregations and function as purveyors of the religious programs and products their member-consumers want. The partnership of church and state has, after the end of Christendom, effectively been replaced with the partnership of church and marketplace.

It is, however, an act of theological dishonesty to present the reductionist legacy of Christendom in monotonously somber tones. God has not been absent but graciously and powerfully present through this long history—God has been no more absent than he was from the long and unedifying history of Israel's kings. We are heirs of both our human reductionisms and of divinely empowered resistance to such disobedience. One of the pressing requirements for the development of a missional ecclesiology today is the task of learning how to read and interpret our history dialectically. We need to discern how God has been faithful in and through the lives and activities of both the known and anonymous mentors of witness and obedience, those "special individuals" whom Karl Barth describes as "models and examples" for the church in their "special calling and endowments."[13] We trace God's formation of his people in the prayers and liturgies, the neighborly love and innovative charity, the theological scholarship, the gifts for music and architecture, and the courage of public witness of so many members of the cloud of witnesses that surrounds and supports us. That dialectical realism allows us, constrains us, to speak without hesitation of the missional vocation and purpose of the church, in spite of the unquestioned fact that so much of our modern mission history is a very mixed and even questionable story. We did, in fact, confuse the message of the gospel with our own inflated sense of the normativity of our enlightened Western civilization. A reductionist soteriology did generate a reductionist vision of mission and a highly compromised understanding of the purpose of the church. But God has graciously overruled those shortcomings and allowed the message to be planted and the missional church to be formed in every major cultural area of the world. We are comforted by the wise word of the pastor from Malawi who told my class one day about all the changes the gospel had brought when the missionaries came to his tribe. "And," he concluded, "you must realize that we could always tell the difference between Jesus and the missionaries."

[13]Barth *Church Dogmatics* 4/3, p. 888.

THE WESTERN SHIFT TO POST-CHRISTENDOM AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE THEOLOGY OF THE *MISSIO DEI*

Now, however, we are coming to terms with the obvious fact that Christendom has ended— although, in some places it is more accurate to say that it is ending (there is a significant difference in the "state of Christendom" between Atlanta and Seattle!). Historians and social scientists must date and analyze the complex process of its ending and the character of the paradigm shift in which we find ourselves. Pastors must accompany their congregations through the painful recognition that we as the Christian church have indeed lost much, and that we are truly in a situation like that of Israel in exile, as Walter Brueggemann frequently has said.[14] Counselors must help parents deal with the challenge and the sadness of living with the decisions made by their adult children and their grandchildren to leave their faith behind and embrace our modern secularism or the growing variety of new age religions. Students of culture must help us learn and understand the changes, the new languages, the values and goals of our rapidly changing society in all its subcultures. And theologians must recognize anew that, as Martin Kähler said over a century ago, "mission is the mother of theology."[15] We find ourselves as heirs of Christendom in a radically changed territory, the Western mission field, which by any standards is one of the world's most difficult and complex arenas for Christian witness.

We are handicapped by some of the assumptions and attitudes of Christendom that are still very powerful in our minds and congregations. Our ecclesiologies of institutional maintenance and the tending of savedness are not adequate to the task that faces us now. We cannot evangelize under the assumption that most of what it means to be a practicing Christian is already handled by one's being born and raised in so-called Christian North America—so that all one needs to do is accept Jesus, join a church and perhaps start tithing. Nor can we evangelize under the assumption that our culture prepares people for Christ, so that we merely need to recognize the "felt needs" that people bring to church with them. The "felt needs" of a society shaped by consumerism and the entertainment industry may, instead, generate a kind of church that continues the gospel reductionism already so deeply engrained in Western Christianity. What may then happen could be nothing more than a last, desperate attempt to recover the popularity by other means that Chris-

[14]See, e.g., Walter Brueggemann, *Cadences of Home: Preaching Among Exiles* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1997).

[15]Martin Kähler, *Schriften zur Christologie und Mission* (1908; reprint, Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1971), p. 190.

tianity seemed to enjoy during Christendom, popularity that Christians continue to confuse with faithful witness and genuine mission. Genuine missional vocation today must take seriously that process of dilution that David Bosch aptly described when he commented that Western theology could be characterized as a process of explaining why the Sermon on the Mount does not apply to us.[16] Much of our evangelism is based upon unquestioned, undoubted versions of "cheap grace." And much of our understanding and practice of the church's calling and ministry is based upon a reductionist ecclesiology that cannot pretend to be "evangelical" because it is not "missional."

That process of theological reorientation has been emerging for a long time. Although the Reformation does not generate an explicitly missional theology for Christendom, the first resources for such a theology can be traced in Luther's vision of the priesthood of all believers and Calvin's radical understanding of God's grace effecting our justification, our forgiveness and our sanctification in an inextricably intertwined process that generates public witness affecting very area of the community's life. It advances in Kierkegaard's attack upon Christendom[17] and P. T. Forsyth's comprehensive understanding of the formation of the congregation of believers for faithful witness as service.[18] It is certainly accelerated by the beginnings of the Ecumenical Movement at the Edinburgh Conference of 1910 and the subsequent study and exploration under the aegis of the Faith and Order movement, the Life and Work movement and the International Missionary Council.[19] Karl Barth recognized by the early 1920s that "the idol is tottering,"[20] and that it was time to rethink all of Christian doctrine from the perspective of what serves the formation of the church for its faithful witness in an increasingly post-Christian and even hostile world—the result is *Church Dogmatics* rather than a "systematic theology."

With regard to the challenge of developing a missional ecclesiology, there

[16]"Indeed, this sermon expresses, like no other New Testament passage, the essence of the ethics of Jesus. Through the ages, however, Christians have usually found ways around the clear meaning of the Sermon on the Mount" (Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 69).

[17]Søren Kierkegaard, *Attack Upon "Christendom,"* trans. W. Lowrie (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968).

[18]See, e.g., P. T. Forsyth, *The Church and the Sacraments* (London: Independent Press, 1947, 1917).

[19]A comprehensive survey of these ecumenical developments is found in W. Richey Hogg, *Ecumenical Foundations: A History of the International Missionary Council and its Nineteenth Century Background* (1952; reprint, Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2003).

[20]Letter from Karl Barth to Eduard Thurneysen of April 20, 1920, in Ernst Wolf et al., *Antwort: Karl Barth zum siebzigsten Geburtstag am 10. Mai 1956* (Zollikon-Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag AG, 1956), p. 856.

appear to have been two major factors that have shaped the process. On the one hand, there was the theological significance of the emergence of new and autonomous churches in the non-Western world, as the result of the modern missionary movement. It is widely acknowledged that the planting of new churches in previously unevangelized cultures was undertaken with a very inadequate ecclesiology. Most modern mission was undertaken by voluntary societies, not by the established churches of the West. There was virtually no theological attention given to mission by the Western academic guild, and so the mission societies had little ecclesiological equipment to guide the formation of new churches. Thus, Christendom's focus on the salvation of individual souls shaped the proclamation of the modern missionary movement, and so the newly formed mission churches figured largely as a kind of ecclesiastical receptacle for converts. Since Western ecclesiology did not operate under the fundamental principle that the church is called, gathered, formed and sent to be God's witnesses in the world, we did not initially form churches with that sense of missional vocation. The question of missional calling was really forced upon the emerging global church by the reality of being minority churches in completely non-Christian settings and illumined by their own interaction with Scripture as translations into vernacular languages made this possible.

As representatives of Christendom, used to the privileges and protections of majority status, we had little to offer our new sister churches as they began to take up the challenge of their calling in their contexts. But as they received the Bible in their own languages and began to grasp how this story was now their story, and that the missional mandate of the New Testament church defined them as well, they began to address the ecclesiological deficiencies exported by Christendom. The urgent concern for Christian unity pressed upon the complacent denominations of Christendom by the sister churches in the non-Western world grew out of their clear understanding that their divisions invalidated their witness. The issue was well summarized in the statement on mission and evangelism drafted by the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches and adopted in 1982: "The present ecumenical movement came into being out of the conviction of the churches that the division of Christians is a scandal and an impediment to the witness of the church. There is a growing awareness among the churches today of the inextricable relationship between Christian unity and missionary calling, between ecumenism and evangelization. 'Evangelisation is the test of our ecumenical vocation.' "[21]

[21]World Council of Churches, *Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1983), §1.

The other factor forcing the issue of a missional ecclesiology has been the disintegration of Christendom in the West, and with it a growing sense of the deficiency of the ecclesiologies we inherit. It is gradually becoming clear that the Christian church in the West can no longer assume that it has a cordial Christian context within which it can go about its duties. When confronted by secularism and paganism today, both the traditional inherited church structures and the theological systems that inform them find themselves largely at a loss. But our theologies of the church do not prepare us for this missional challenge in our own previously Christianized territory. Before we can turn our theological attention to themes like ordered ministry, sacraments and spiritual disciplines, we have to grapple with the basic questions: Who is the church of Jesus Christ and what is it for? As I have shown, the ecclesiological mindset we inherit tends to define the church in terms of the benefits it provides its members, as Avery Dulles explained in his classic discussion of the *Models of the Church*.[22] Thus, mission had to be interpreted as all those activities that build and expand the church. Such ways of thinking, which we group together as ecclesiocentric theologies of the church, are necessarily having to give way to another theological center of gravity. Since the 1930s, the consensus has gradually emerged that the church is not about itself, as though it were a self-justifying end, but the church must be defined and must act as part of the larger mission of God.

The theology of the *missio Dei* defines the church within the framework of the doctrine of the triune God. David Bosch has described this theological consensus succinctly, explaining that mission is "understood as being derived from the very nature of God. It was thus put in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity, not of ecclesiology or soteriology. The classical doctrine on the *missio Dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit was expanded to include yet another 'movement': Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world."[23] The fundamental assumption here has to do with the revealed nature and purpose of God: "mission is not primarily an activity of the church, but an attribute of God. God is a missionary God."

It is not possible in this paper to explore all the twists and turns of the *missio Dei* debate since it became a focusing theme of missiological discussion in the 1950s.[24] It is intriguing, however, that this theological consensus emerges as Christendom is unraveling in the West. Scripture discloses that God's mission is the outworking of God's love for his entire creation, which God translates into purposeful action to bring about the healing of his broken creatures, restoration to himself and to his good design, and incorporation into his kingdom as its witnesses and servant. The theology of the *missio Dei* is making clear that our ecclesiology, if it is truly to be a doctrine for the church that is continuing the apostolic witness, must be rooted in God's nature, purpose and action. It must be developed out of the mission of God as the One who calls and empowers his people to be the sign, foretaste and instrument of God's new order under the lordship of Christ. This ecclesiology understands the church as Christ's witness, living in continuing community with him in its midst, prepared by his Word through Scripture to be sent into the world which he loves and for which he died. Such a doctrine must serve the formation of the "community of the Word" for comprehensive missional witness.

TO BE AUTHENTICALLY "EVANGELICAL," OUR ECCLESIOLOGY MUST NECESSARILY BE "MISSIONAL"

If our concern is faithful witness to the gospel, then our doctrine of the church must be built upon and expound the mission for which the church is called, formed and sent, according to the biblical witness. As I said, the point is God's love for the world and the concrete demonstration of that love in the incarnation, ministry, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. The divine strategy for the healing of the world is the calling, setting apart, formation and sending of a particular people whose witness has, as Newbigin puts it, "universal intent." God's gospel is to be made known to all people as an invitation to healing and to enlistment in the service of God as part of his witnessing people. Christian vocation is not merely to individual savedness, but to the service of God's mission to bring healing to the nations. Therefore, Christian witness is corporate in order that it can also be individual and personal. God calls a people into discipleship, formation by Jesus, in order to send it out as an apostolic community, so that each of its members can be an apostolic witness with that flame of the Spirit ignited on every head. The community of the Word is

[22]Avery Dulles, S.J., *Models of the Church* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Image Books, 1978), pp. 45ff.

[23]Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 390.

[24]For a thorough review of the *missio Dei* discussion in the latter half of the twentieth century, see the edition of the *International Review of Mission* 92, no. 367 (2003) titled *Missio Dei Revisited: Willingen 1952-2002*, for a series of informative articles examining this tradition from diverse perspectives.

neither a safe enclave nor a colony walled off from the world, although it is, to be sure, always an alternative community within its context. It is a people *in via*, en route, on a pilgrimage definitively shaped by the incarnation, ministry, message, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, moving with him along his narrow path toward the certain consummation of God's work of salvation. The church that Jesus intended is a community that lives its message publicly, transparently, vulnerably—that is why it is called *ecclesia*, an assembly set apart to do public business in view of the watching world.[25] Its public witness has its dynamic focus on its gathered worship and proclamation of the Sent One. In Word and sacrament, Jesus encounters us in this central event of inward and focused devotion with the explosive outwardly thrusting commission, "So I send you." The ancient greeting that ended the liturgy, "*Ite missa est*" must be understood not merely as "Go, you are dismissed," but rather, "Go, you are sent."

To be authentically evangelical, I repeat, our ecclesiology must be missional. Such an ecclesiology will function then theologically as an integrative discipline, drawing all of the theological discourses into constructive interaction for the sake of building up the body of Christ and equipping it for its ministry (Eph 4:11-12). Rooted in the trinitarian nature and action of God, this ecclesiology derives its purpose from God's mission. It defines the way it goes about its work by means of God's self-disclosure in the history of Israel and supremely in the earthly ministry of Jesus. As an ecclesiology of Pentecost, this doctrine confesses the church's dependence upon the empowering work of the Spirit as it enables witness to Christ in all that the church is, does, and says. It will be the work of the Spirit to guide the missional church in its disciplined engagement with God's Word as the instrument God uses for the continuing formation of the community of the Word for its vocation. As a result of that biblical formation, the community will grow in its understanding of how its corporate public witness must be practiced, and at the same time, how each member will lead his and her life as an apostolic missionary in the daily neighborliness of witness to Jesus Christ.

Such an ecclesiology pays particularly close attention to the "as" and the "so" in John's missional summary: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you" (Jn 20:21). God's incarnational action in history provides the church the content of its witness and defines how it is to be carried out. "Mission in Jesus' way" has become a much-explored theme in missional theology these last decades, and such thinking must shape our missional ecclesiology.[26] Theological ethics must school the missional church to practice witness with integrity, must guide the community to discern how, in fact, we are to "live our lives worthy of the calling with which we have been called."[27] The dominical and apostolic formation of the missional church focuses upon the concrete obedience of the called community and of all its members; it works intentionally on the transparency and integrity of its common life and its scattered life in an often-hostile world.

There is particular urgency today for a missional ecclesiology to reclaim the profoundly eschatological character of the church's calling. The theological reductionism of both gospel and church has been accompanied, over the centuries, by a great loss of that future tense of faith that should powerfully shape our present life and action. In place of fruitless speculation about events that have not yet happened, we must focus upon the certainty of our hope that enables us now to witness to Christ fearlessly and point away from ourselves modestly. A missional ecclesiology will always be candid about its penultimate nature; the continuing conversion of the church will necessitate obedient and serendipitous re-visiting of all our theological formulae and propositions. This does not mean that the gospel is not sufficient to the task; it means that the church lives with the open confession that its grasp of and response to the gospel is always partial, that there is yet more healing to be done, more conversion to submit to, more wonder to worship.

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Paul wrote to the Corinthians, after a particularly evocative exposition of the gospel's vocation (in 2 Cor 4:1-14), "Everything is for your sake" (2 Cor 4:15)—and Christendom would like to stop there, would like to leave us as Christians enjoying the benefits of our salvation and working away at the threats to our blessedness that arise both out of the world and our own rebellions. But the text has no period there. It says, "Everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory

[25]John Howard Yoder, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community Before the Watching World* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1992, 1997).

[26]Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, *The San Antonio Report: Your Will Be Done: Mission in Christ's Way* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1990); Lesslie Newbigin, *Mission in Christ's Way* (New York: Friendship Press, 1988); "Turn to the Living God: A Call to Evangelism in Christ's Way," in Office of Theology and Worship, *Selected Theological Statements: Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) General Assemblies (1956-1998)* (Louisville, Ky.: Presbyterian Church [U.S.A.], 1998), pp. 617ff.

[27]Eph 4:1; see also this fundamental theme in Paul's community formation in Phil 1:27 and the theme of imitation generally in that epistle; 1 Thess 2:11-12; 2 Thess 1:11; Col 1:9.

of God." The purpose of God's mission is ultimately the acknowledgment and enjoyment of the glory of God; it happens as grace extends to more and more people; the evidence of that spread is growing thanksgiving to God which displays before the world the loving character and purposes of our God. It is the task and privilege of a missional ecclesiology to serve God's glory by guiding the church to an ever-growing understanding of who it is and what it is for. Thus, every classical theme of ecclesiology—the doctrine and practice of the sacraments, of proclamation, of ordered ministry, of membership, of stewardship, of spiritual disciplines—will be drawn into and redefined by the foundational vocation of the church to be Christ's witness, to lead its life worthy of its calling, to be Christ's letter to the world, to be, as Peter summarized it, "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Pet 2:9).