The Contributions of Karl Barth and Hans Urs von Balthasar to Ecumenical Missional Ecclesiology

By

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A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Wycliffe College and the Department of Theology of the Toronto School of Theology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Theology awarded by the University of St. Michael’s College

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Abstract

This dissertation, “The Contributions of Karl Barth and Hans Urs von Balthasar to Ecumenical Missional Ecclesiology,” will explore the ecclesiological insights of these two twentieth-century theologians as well as their relevance to the contemporary missional church movement. In North America, this movement is responding to an urgent need to rethink the church’s missionary nature and its participation in God’s mission (missio Dei) in the world. In order to rediscover the church’s missional identity and vocation through dialogue with other Christian traditions, ecumenical missional ecclesiology has adopted an ‘incarnational’ framework for thinking about the church in context. It has developed a theological concept of the incarnation as the guiding principle for the church’s demonstration of an alternate culture and ethic in a Christ-like way. This dissertation will argue that this incarnational model which defines the church’s witness as the continuation of Christ’s work runs the risk of absorbing the missio Dei into the missiones ecclesiae, whereas Barth’s and Balthasar’s ecclesiologies present within themselves a missionary vision that affirms the dynamic relationship between God and his community. For Barth, the church bears witness to Christ’s accomplished work and
attests to its inherent effectiveness; for Balthasar, the church takes up its particular share
in Christ’s ongoing mission. If the Protestant account guarantees the distinction between
the divine and human work, then the Catholic approach stresses the participatory
character of the church in the divine drama opened by Christ. The aim of this study is to
show that these christological concentrations can help ecumenical missional ecclesiology
to establish a proper view of the relationship between the divine and human agency and
between the church and the world.
Acknowledgements

For the completion of this dissertation, I am conscious of the many people to whom I owe a debt of gratitude. To my teacher and thesis director, Professor Joseph Mangina, I owe thanks for his guidance, openness and patience. Working under his supervision makes me realize that this dissertation is worth undertaking. No doctoral student writing about Balthasar at the Toronto School of Theology could fail to express gratitude to Sister Gill Goulding, C.J., whose knowledge of Balthasar shapes my reading of his work in decisive and critical ways. I have some longstanding debts to Professor Ephraim Radner and Professor John Dadosky as well. Their kindness and encouragement shown during the process of drafting my thesis proposal could not be insignificant for the task of thesis writing.

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Abbreviations

Works of Karl Barth:

CD I/1  Church Dogmatics, vol. I, part 1, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975)
CD III/3 Church Dogmatics, vol. III, part 3 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1961)
CD IV/1 Church Dogmatics, vol. IV, part 1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956)
CD IV/2 Church Dogmatics, vol. IV, part 2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1958)

Works of Hans Urs von Balthasar:


Others:

AG Ad Gentes (Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity of the Second Vatican Council)
CICR Communio: International Catholic Review
CL Christifideles Laici (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II, December 30, 1988)
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<td>CWME</td>
<td>Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>IJST</em></td>
<td><em>International Journal of Systematic Theology</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMC</td>
<td>International Missionary Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>IRM</em></td>
<td><em>International Review of Mission</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSC</td>
<td>Missionary Structure of the Congregation (1961 study project of WCC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>VC</em></td>
<td><em>Vita Consecrata</em> (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II, March 25, 1996)</td>
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<tr>
<td>WCC</td>
<td>World Council of Churches</td>
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Ecclesiology is one of the major concerns in contemporary theology. By virtue of the nature of the church, it is far from a merely academic discipline but should be intended to explain how theological principles are consistent with empirical reality. In recent years, many theologians have sought to take a theological concept, such as ‘communion’ or ‘practice,’ to be the basic and normative principle guiding their description of the church and thereby to construct their accounts of ecclesiology. These articulations are generally judged to have proved themselves capable of getting us to the concrete substance of the church’s life. In many aspects they represent an attempt to refute docetic tendencies to downplay the social dimension of the church. Given the fact that there is no single model or image that does full justice to all the needs and challenges facing the contemporary church, this dissertation will address another prevailing trend common in ecumenical and evangelical circles. This trend tends to view mission as the overarching concept for ecclesiology. The church is accordingly understood as God’s visible instrument for his saving purpose and mission. As regards the foundation of the church, the language of mission is employed thereby to specify that the church must not simply have missionaries, but must be by its very nature missionary. In other words, it is “not the church which

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3 Emil Brunner’s well-known observation is here suggestive of this position: “Mission work does not arise from any arrogance in the Christian Church; mission is its cause and its life. The church exists for mission as a fire exists for burning. Where there is no mission, there is no church; and where there is neither Church nor mission, there is no faith.” See Emil Brunner, *The Word and the World* (London: SCM Press, 1931), 108.
‘undertakes’ mission; it is the *missio Dei* which constitutes the church.” With this shift in perspective, a vision of mission as the *missio Dei* movement emerges as a new paradigm, with the result that the church participating in God’s mission has come to be recognized as a theological consensus.

It is along with this historical and theological development that the missional church movement further attempts to reassess the ecclesial identity and vocation within the context of the *missio Dei*. This movement seeks to reshape the church in the postmodern culture, as one being sent into the world by God. Throughout the last decade, the term “missional” has been used in divergent ways but it has not lost its core definition which has meant “being sent.” This term “missional” may be applied to all Christians who fulfill mission in changing circumstances. This flexibility of the word “missional” “continues to be demonstrated through its use by various faith traditions to express an understanding of mission from within their own biblical and theological perspectives.”

As a result, doing theology from a missional perspective is essentially contextual. By conceiving of Jesus as our model for life, ecumenical missional ecclesiology has adopted an ‘incarnational’ framework for thinking about the church engaged in its local context. Instead of making an ontological claim, it has developed a theological concept of the incarnation as the guiding principle for the church’s demonstration of an alternate culture and ethic in a Christ-like way. In so doing, the church’s incarnational ministry is considered as the extension or continuation of Christ’s own work.

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5 It is from the late 1980s and early 1990s that “missional” began to be understood as tied to *missio Dei* and God’s sending. In the section “Linguistic Archaeology of the Word ‘missional’” of their recent book, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 42-6, Craig van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile give us a survey to show how the term “Missional” becomes part of our theological vocabulary.

6 Ibid., 3.
In this study, I will argue that this incarnational model which defines the church’s missional activities as the continuation of Christ’s work cannot avoid the risk of blurring the distinction between the human and divine agency. It will be noted that Christology is not taken as a starting point for doing ecclesiology in this case: the speech about Christ is set instead within a more comprehensive context, i.e. the *missio Dei*. Arguably, this dogmatic order entails theological claims that are both christologically and ecclesiologically inadequate, to the extent that the passivity of the church’s existence as the miracle of grace is not fully taken into account. As a result, missional ecclesiology hardly resists reverting to an ecclesiocentric view of mission. There is evidence to suggest that there is a lack of clarity in these ecclesiological statements concerning the sovereignty and lordship of Christ in the church.

Against this background, this dissertation will thus examine the ecclesiological thoughts of Karl Barth (1886-1968) and Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1988), whose work grounds the church and its mission in the doctrine of the Trinity, but more specifically in Christology. Thus they seek to avoid the danger of any ecclesiocentric focus in articulating the church’s mission. While taking very seriously the horizontal, visible aspects of the church, both Barth and Balthasar account for an invisible, spiritual reality as the essence of the church in order to maintain the dynamic of the divine and human agency in the sphere of the church. For them, the church always bears witness to the living presence of Christ in the Spirit. Despite their different approaches coming from their distinct theological traditions, both develop accounts of Christian mission that hinge on the personal and irreplaceable character of Christ’s mission for all without denying the authenticity of the church’s involvement.
Where Barth’s ethics of reconciliation is grounded in the objective reality of Christ’s revelation which characterizes human action as witness to that which Christ alone is doing, Balthasar’s dramatics of ecclesial mission constitutes an “acting space” for our participation in Christ’s love and suffering. We will see that Barth sheds great light on the ordered mutuality of the covenant in order to set forth the ecclesial response to the church’s dependent partnership. On the other hand, it will be shown that Balthasar stresses more the participatory character of the church as it plays its part in the divine drama. In his dramatic approach to *missio Dei*, where there is the interplay of the infinite and finite agency and freedom, mission is fundamentally self-disposing activity in creaturely freedom, rather than “a kind of passive activity.”

It is the task of this thesis to unpack the insights from both theologians and to explore their relevance and contribution to ecumenical missional ecclesiology.

**Method and Goals**

The method of this study will be a primarily doctrinal and conceptual analysis. This dissertation will present a comprehensive examination of Barth’s and Balthasar’s doctrines of the church in their major works. As the Protestant theologian develops his mature ecclesiology within the doctrine of reconciliation rooted in the doctrine of the Trinity and Christology, my focus will be set on the fourth volume of the *Church*

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7 Barth’s account of human agency proposes a fundamental *passivity* that corresponds to the fact that the human person is a creature of God’s covenant-establishing grace. See John Webster, *Barth’s Moral Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 149. Thus it is not inappropriate to suggest that Balthasar’s christological reinterpretation of the analogy of being offers a ‘greater’ capacity to explore human agency and freedom through the way of ontological transformation.

8 Of course, Barth’s and Balthasar’s christological ecclesiologies have their own limitations. Admittedly, they offer little space for inter-religious dialogue, to which both the WCC movement and post-Vatican II Catholicism pay great attention as essential part of the church’s mission.
Dogmatics. This thesis will argue, particularly referencing Barth’s perspective on the church’s missionary existence in the world, that Barth’s view of the church as witness is profoundly grounded in an ethics of reconciliation. Such an ethics addresses the church’s response to the living Christ in the event of personal encounter.

This study will particularly examine the central part of Balthasar’s trilogy, Theo-Drama, along with his other important works on ecclesiology. Balthasar’s entire trilogy envisions that the church is that which shares in Christ’s mission. Balthasar’s theo-dramatic theory which he develops in the trilogy establishes that there is a dramatic role for the church on the world’s stage. The Catholic theologian rejects any tendency of reducing the church to a merely juridical or sociological reality. Thus he argues that this opens up an “acting area” for human agency and freedom in the theo-drama. In particular, Balthasar develops and articulates a Mariology that provides the basis by which the church can live freely and genuinely in response to Christ’s mission. Nevertheless, this study will show that for Barth the church as witness guarantees that distinction will be maintained between divine and human work, while Balthasar’s view of the church as mission underscores the unique and active role of human agency in the God’s kenotic movement towards the world.

9 Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, ed. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956-75).
12 In addition, Balthasar seeks to go beyond what he alleges to be “christological constriction” in Barth. For this treatment, see Hans Urs von Balthasar, The Theology of Karl Barth: Exposition and Interpretation, trans. Edward T. Oakes (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1992). Balthasar’s charge, however, does not reflect the full scope of Barth’s concern, especially his mature treatment of the relation between the divine and human agency in his ethics of reconciliation in CD IV, which is published after Balthasar’s monograph on Barth. See John Webster, “Balthasar and Karl Barth,” in The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar, ed. Edward T. Oakes and David Moss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 241-55. A further and deeper discussion of the discrepancies between Barth and Balthasar is beyond the scope of this study.
This dissertation will further explore Barth’s and Balthasar’s relevance to ecumenical missional ecclesiology. This thesis will raise critical questions concerning the church’s dogmatic understanding of mission and the church’s place in relationship with the world. These questions are fundamental to the agenda of missional ecclesiology. Through a historical analysis of mission theology developed through the missionary conferences during the past half a century, this study will argue that to a certain extent the missional church movement continues the task of working out the relationship between the church and mission. Against this historical background, I will examine the development of missional ecclesiology by reviewing writings of three theologians – David Bosch (1929-1992), Lesslie Newbigin (1909-1998), and Darrell Guder (1939- ). Instead of exploring their theologies comprehensively, this study will only concentrate specifically on what these theologies offer to missional ecclesiology. In examining Bosch’s groundbreaking books *Witness to the Word* (1980) and *Transforming Mission* (1991) and revisiting his understanding of the relationship between the church and mission, I will posit that Bosch’s perspective on the church as grounded in the *missio Dei* establishes an important foundation for the development of missional ecclesiology. In examining the works of Newbigin, this study will concentrate on his compelling notion of “mission in Christ’s way,” which explains how the mission of Christ continues in the church. Finally, I will outline Guder’s construal of the incarnational-missional model of the church, in which he further develops the missiology of Bosch and Newbigin. Guder’s

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13 As Guder says, “The contemporary global exploration of the mission of the church, for which David Bosch’s magisterial *Transformation Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Mission Theology* is the most helpful overview, has proven to be a rich exploration as well as a theological homecoming. I have come to realize that one cannot address evangelization with theology integrity unless one approaches the subject missiologically, that is, within the context of the mission of the church as God’s sent people.” See Darrell L. Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), x.
work is essential and crucial for the ongoing missional church movement. Through this doctrinal analysis, this study will display some problematic tendencies in missional ecclesiology and raise some basic questions, especially as regards the relationship between the *missio Dei*, Christ and the church. As such this thesis will establish the context for drawing Barth and Balthasar into this discussion.

Barth’s dialectical theology has been usually referred to as an interpretative key for understanding the *missio Dei*, especially his works from the early decades of the twentieth century. Modern Protestant missiology has gained insights from Barth as the movement has sought to safeguard God’s initiative in the church’s mission. More recently, on the other hand, ecumenical missional ecclesiology has given certain attention to Barth’s mature ecclesiology as it relates to the concept of the church as witness.  

Given these attempts, this study seeks to reconsider carefully Barth’s ecclesiology within the dogmatic whole. Balthasar is seldom referred to as a missionary theologian. His christological ecclesiology which is rooted in his own Roman Catholic tradition yet influenced by Barth may offer distinctive resources, such as the integrity of human agency in the theo-drama, for the construction of missional ecclesiology. As the Second Vatican Council addressed the missionary dimension of the church, Balthasar’s dramatic ecclesiology may be now seen as a response to the ecclesial understanding confirmed by the Council.  

As long as the view remains that the church is intentionally a “missional church,” it should welcome ongoing critical ecumenical dialogue among Christians. Part of this ecumenical endeavor should include a deeper consideration of the work of Balthasar.

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14 Especially the section “§72 The Holy Spirit and the Sending of the Christian Community” in *CD* IV/3.
This study seeks to let Barth and Balthasar speak for themselves rather than attempting to soften the provocative nature of their theologies. In this way, their thought provoking work will provide rich theological resources for the church catholic and evangelical. As the term “missional” is used increasingly to express the notion of the church’s participation in God’s mission, it is noteworthy that Barth’s and Balthasar’s ecclesiological understandings should not be seen as wanting to reduce the focus on mission. The christological foundations of the church and the accounts of human agency which they offer can help ecumenical missional ecclesiology to refresh its understanding of the church and mission. This means that the following chapters do not aim to defend Barth’s and Balthasar’s own ecclesiological positions, but instead these chapters seek to use the works of these Swiss theologians as substantiating a better way to understand the church and its participation in Christ’s mission. In short, Barth and Balthasar offer a renewed sense of the relationship between the church and its mission, and provide insights for the further development and enrichment of missional ecclesiology.

Overview of this Study

Given the importance of Barth’s and Balthasar’s ecclesiological concerns, there is reason to examine their theological criteria and bring these into dialogue with missional ecclesiology. It should be acknowledged that, in what follows, there is not an attempt to analyze the theological difference between Barth and Balthasar, nor is there an attempt to provide a full account of the shifts and developments as their understandings of the church. Instead, this dissertation only focuses on their ecclesiological construals in terms of the dynamic relationship between God and his community. That is to say, this thesis is intended to pay special attention to Barth’s doctrine of reconciliation and Balthasar’s
theo-dramatics, in which the church is always understood in its relationship to divine grace and agency. As we cannot isolate one line of thought in either Barth’s or Balthasar’s corpus, this study draws upon their accounts of those connected themes which explain one another and are themselves necessary for understanding the church.

Thus, this study will be divided into three parts – an introduction to ecumenical missional ecclesiology, followed by a comprehensive treatment of Barth’s and Balthasar’s ecclesiologies in their own doctrinal contexts, and finally a concluding analysis with suggestions for a renewed understanding of ecclesiology in relation to missiology. In the first part, chapter 1 will set out the historical context which gives rise to the missional church movement. It will look at the relationship between the church and mission and their theological foundations. We will trace this throughout the history of the missionary conferences, and conclude that there is a growing consensus that in Christ’s incarnation is the criterion for mission in ecumenical missional ecclesiology. The second chapter will outline a theological framework for missional ecclesiology through the works of Bosch, Newbigin and Guder. By examining their thoughts and insights, we will see the theological development of the incarnational model for the missional church. The chapter will end with some essential theological questions emanating from this model, such as the relationship between Christ and the church, as well as the church’s role in missio Dei and hence in the world.

In the second part of the four chapters is the core of this thesis which explores Barth’s and Balthasar’s christological ecclesiologies. For each, after reviewing the specific doctrinal structure in the context of ecclesiology, the thesis will provide an articulation of the doctrine of the church with respect to the agendas and questions
considered in the first part, such as the continuation of Christ’s mission in the church. For Barth and Balthasar, ecclesiology always describes the dynamic relationship between God’s grace and the ecclesial response, which determines how the church understands itself and its mission. Remarkably, Barth treats ecclesiology as a derivative doctrine, for which a christological foundation must be provided, whereas Balthasar’s ecclesiology is rooted in his understanding of the trinitarian mission in Christ. The latter thus offers us a richer view of the relationship between the divine and human agency.

The first two chapters of the second part examine Barth’s view of the church. Chapter 3 will lay out Barth’s doctrine of reconciliation as a theological framework for understanding the nature and mission of the church. In particular, it will address the significance of the christological foundation of the church in Barth’s thinking as he distinguished God’s reconciling work in Christ from the work of the church. The analysis will concentrate on the sections in CD IV which address reconciliation’s objective accomplishment and its subjective realization as the truth of human existence. Chapter 4 will draw insights from the previous chapter and will specifically examine the ecclesiological writings in CD IV, so that we may better consider the missionary nature of the church in Barth’s approach. We will examine this material in order to gain an understanding of the church as a witnessing community which responds to God’s self-testimony in Christ and attests the self-effectiveness of God’s reconciliation with the world. We will demonstrate that, for Barth, the church’s mission as witness is always in response to Christ’s primary mission.

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Chapter 5 will review Balthasar’s understanding of theo-drama as God’s trinitarian movement within himself towards the creation. Through Christ’s mission, the whole Trinity is involved in the world, and draws the church into the divine theo-drama. The stress here will be on how this divine drama is a drama of divine and human freedom. This analysis will mainly focus on the christological and anthropological writings in *Theo-drama* and other works, which consider the dramatic character of existence in light of the revelation of our freedom in Christ. Given Balthasar’s theo-dramatic theory, the sixth chapter will emphasize his major ecclesiological writings. This will serve to illustrate the missionary existence of the church as a uniquely self-offering movement towards the world as she shares in Christ’s ongoing mission. As Balthasar demonstrates through his Marian and Eucharistic theologies, the church gives its genuine response of love for the sake of the world. Thus in his view the church is a Eucharistic community whose archetype is typified in Mary.

At the conclusion of this study in the third part, we will review how the christological grounds of the church’s being and mission for both of these theologians can prevent Christology from being absorbed into ecclesiology. It is this misconception that the incarnational model can hardly avoid. The third part of this thesis will stress that the ecclesiological expositions of Barth and Balthasar could help missional ecclesiology to achieve greater theological depth and clarity. In addition, it will open up some areas for rethinking the construal of missional ecclesiology in light of Barth’s and Balthasar’s theological insights. These reflections will not only help us to readdress the dogmatic specification of some crucial notions such as the church’s visibility, but it may also help to illuminate how the church today is to view itself and engage in the world. The church
gains its focus by remaining oriented to the core element of Christian belief, namely, that Jesus Christ is Lord. The final words of the gospel of Matthew reaffirm Christ’s promise: “And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Mt 28:20).¹⁷

¹⁷ In the rest of the dissertation, all Scripture texts are quoted from the New Revised Standard Version.
CHAPTER 1
MISSIONAL ECCLESIOLOGY DEVELOPMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF THE ECUMENICAL MISSIONARY MOVEMENT

1.1 Development before Willingen: Mission is the Road from the Church to the Church

“For an understanding of the shifts in Protestant thinking regarding the relationship between church and mission,” as Bosch puts it, “the contributions of the world missionary conferences are of primary importance.”

The emergence of these ecumenical gatherings in the twentieth century has marked significant developments in the theology of mission. The result has been that missionary goals and practices have undergone some profound modifications. Mission has truly become an ecumenical priority. The new paradigm of missiology, as a result of the global cooperative effort, has not only broadened the scope of mission to the whole of human life, but has also made fruitful developments towards a missionary ecclesiology. In particular, ecumenical cooperation has brought to the fore an exploration of the church’s missionary nature.

The ecumenical movement of this new era, however, like any other church movement, was not born in a vacuum. Rather it developed within its own peculiar historical setting. Coupled with the cumulative impact of the nineteenth century Protestant missionary expansion across the world, the ecumenical movement began out of an urgent need to foster missionary co-operation between churches and agencies in the first decade of the twentieth century. As concerns for mission together continued to grow, having

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2 Bosch, Transforming Mission, 369.

conferences together became a natural progression. It was so in 1910 that the first world missionary conference took place in Edinburgh. That conference stood as the hallmark event which enhanced the formation of a new Christian global community recognizing the inner unity which marked “the transition from the old to the new.”

In practice, Edinburgh 1910 was the first real encounter between continental European and Anglo-American theologies of mission. There was a new willingness to respect and recognize differences and at the same time to cooperate with each other. From it has flowed a “new concern for the church, its nature, its ministry, and its unity.” Under the “irresistible mandate,” as John Mott recalled at Edinburgh, “what led to action was getting people associated in action.” This tendency, however, to emphasize activism rather than reflection, meant that “the theological question of the relationship between

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5 Hogg, *Ecumenical Foundations*, 98. Hogg also recalls that “the historian of Christianity’s spread has designated the nineteenth century, ‘the Great Century.’ It was a period of expansion for European peoples over the face of the globe. Imperialism, political and economic, was in the air, and it affected the missionary thinking of many Christians. … Edinburgh 1910, came just on the eve of the mood-change from the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries.” See Ibid., 100-1. In Bosch’s words, mission during the 19th century was rooted in four motivations: “Sometimes it was interpreted primarily in soteriological terms: as saving individuals from eternal damnation. Or it was understood in cultural terms: as introducing people from the East and the South to the blessings and privileges of the Christian West. Often it was perceived in ecclesiastical categories: as the expansion of the church (or of a specific denomination). Sometimes it was defined salvation-historically: as the process by which the world – evolutionary or by means of a cataclysmic event – would be transformed into the kingdom of God” (Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 389). We will see that the *missio Dei* theology developed in the 1960s retrieved the fourth missionary drive but negated the third one.

6 In general, the American theology of mission tends to emphasize on missionary action while the European missiology gives more appreciation of theological reflection. See Bosch, *Witness to the World*, 159-60.


8 This statement was used by John Mott in a personal interview at Whitby in July 1947, quoted in Hogg, *Ecumenical Foundations*, 140. We may also remember Mott’s famous concluding words at Edinburgh 1910: “The end of the conference is the beginning of the Conquest; the end of the planning is the beginning of the Doing.” See W.H. Temple Gairdner, *Edinburgh 1910* (London: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1910), 267.
church and mission was hardly touched.”

The central and all-embracing aim of mission remained God’s victory and the extension of his kingdom. Edinburgh’s common use of militaristic metaphors, in this spirit, implied that mission still stood under the not so subtle banner of world conquest.

Theologically speaking, Edinburgh “represented the culmination of Western messianic consciousness according to which the gospel, in its ‘Western Christian’ robes, was the solution to the problems of the entire world.” In this view the decisive role of the (Western) church was seen as developing strategies for the evangelization of the “non-Western” world. The relationship between God’s kingdom and the church remained unexamined and unclear. This distorted view meant that the world was still divided between the Christian West where there was no need for mission and the pagan non-West which was seen as the mission field. Thus at its high point of missionary enthusiasm, the Edinburgh conference retained a reductionist view of mission. At the Tambaram meeting of the International Missionary Council (IMC) in 1938, there was a turning point in ecumenical thinking on mission. At Tambaram, for the first time in the history of the missionary movement, “an urgent global consensus began to form that mission and church somehow belonged together.”

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9 Bosch, Transforming Mission, 367. That is why Bosch, quoting Heinrich Frick, argues that “Edinburgh indisputably inaugurated the triumph of Americanism in missionary theology” (Bosch, Witness to the World, 160).

10 Bosch, Witness to the World, 160-1.

11 Bosch, Witness to the World, 161.


13 Charles van Engen, Mission on the Way: Issues in Mission Theology (Grand Rapids: Baker Books: 1996), 148. The Continuation Committee of Edinburgh 1910 had turned into the International Missionary Council in 1921, and the first mission conference of the IMC was held at Jerusalem in 1928. At Jerusalem 1928 the theology of mission was given primary consideration under the title ‘The Christian Life and Message in Relation to Non-Christian Systems of Thought and Life.’ But “while the Jerusalem did bring the whole question of theological presuppositions to the fore, it did not penetrate the issue to any significant degree.”
call for ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, Tambaram brought a new and unprecedented awareness of the church’s nature, function and most notably its relation to mission. For this reason, it is worth examining in some detail.

Inspired by the prevailing currents of dialectical theology that questioned the optimistic identification of culture and Christianity, Tambaram in principle abandoned the distinction between Christian and non-Christian countries, between the ‘older’ and ‘younger’ churches, and hence the idea of ‘Christian imperialism.’ Embracing this new ecclesiological vision, the conference participants gave attention to the church but did not absolutize it. Instead of perpetuating a nineteenth century triumphalist ecclesiology, Tambaram set forth that the church should exercise critical self-examination, in terms of recognizing the weakness and worldliness of the church, and sought to remind the church that it stands under God’s judgment. With this awareness of the vulnerability and limitation of the church, Tambaram marked an important advance towards developing a more adequate missionary ecclesiology. Another crucial feature of Tambaram was its articulation of the relationship between the church and mission. The conference

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15 As Hogg points out, “Jerusalem had accorded the younger churches parity, but Madras (Tambaram) gratefully acknowledged their major contribution. Younger and older churches together made vivid the centrality of the church for the world community of the faithful” (Hogg, Ecumenical Foundations, 298).

16 One of the central themes of Tambaram, for instance, is “the conception of the nature and function of the Church which [the committee of the council] there present inevitably lays the main emphasis on its active and witness-bearing character” (World Mission of the Church, 26). For this kind of statement, Scherer argues that Tambaram cannot evade “its church-centric tendencies.” See Scherer, “Ecumenical Mandates for Mission,” 34-7. By quoting John Mott’s words in Tambaram’s opening address that “It is the Church which is to be at the centre of our thinking … the Divine Society founded by Christ and His Apostles to accomplish His will in the world,” Johannes Aagaard argues that at Tambaram “certainly the church-centric view had become dominant.” See Aagaard, “Some Main Trends,” 243.

17 World Mission of the Church, 14, 16-27.
concluded that the mission of the church is empowered by the Holy Spirit and this is “a sure indication that evangelism is not due merely to the zeal of Christian people but rather is the outcome of a Divine initiative. Such movements are the urging of the Spirit to the church to fulfill its great commission, relying not merely upon human resources, but upon the power of God.”

Though it was not explicitly articulated at the conference, the basic idea of *missio Dei* had begun to be explored at Tambaram. In the midst of the chaos of the Second World War and the destruction of so much Western civilization, the church started to rethink its self-identity and its reason for being. It sought to reexamine its concept of mission in order to be able to engage a broken world.

During the period from 1938 until 1952, a missionary ecclesiology began to develop in the context of the IMC. Some critical questions were already asked at Tambaram such as, “What is the essential nature of the church, and what is its obligation to the world?” The idea that the church itself was the divinely ordained community responsible for mission increasingly gained acceptance in ecumenical circles after World War II. At Whitby 1947, considered “the first real post-war reunion of the world-wide Protestant Christian fellowship,” the committee of the IMC employed the phrase ‘partnership in obedience’ to further dismantle the differentiation among churches, and to recall the vision of a universal mission as the common task of all churches:

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18 *World Mission of the Church*, 33. Thus Hogg finds that Tambaram has taken significant strides in its definition of mission, as he says, “the mission is not a segment of the church’s life. On the contrary, the church exists to fulfill a divinely ordained mission, and responsibility for it rests upon every Christian” (Hogg, *Ecumenical Foundations*, 298).


By the grace of God we have been vouchsafed as never before a vision of the reality and fullness of the universal Church. We have felt the power of God’s Spirit breaking down old barriers and welding us into the supreme fellowship of His Church. … [A]bove all earthly circumstances stand unchanged the command of Christ to preach the Gospel to every creature. This command has not yet been fulfilled by the Church. It cannot be fulfilled unless all the forces of all the churches, older and younger alike, are gathered in a common loyalty, inspired by a common task and mobilized in a common service. The situation is one of extreme urgency. \[22\]

While the distinctions emerging from the colonial past were seriously challenged, Whitby, as Michael Coheen stresses, “did not issue a consistent missionary ecclesiology.” \[23\] It emphasized the lordship of Christ over the church and all life, but scarcely articulated a theology of mission in christological or trinitarian terms which might have furthered the gains of the prewar conferences. Remarkably, however, Whitby anticipated positive developments in later ecumenical mission thinking and policy and it recognized the urgent need for a deeper understanding of the basis and nature of the Christian mission. In particular, the 1947 IMC gathering at Whitby “took the first step toward launching a major ecumenical study of the ‘Missionary Obligation of the Church.’” \[24\] A few years later, this phrase became the major theme of the second postwar meeting of the IMC in Willingen, Germany, in 1952.

1.2 Willingen and its aftermath: The Rise of Missio Dei Paradigm

It cannot be denied that Willingen 1952 marked a milestone in the development of mission theology. \[25\] Prior to Willingen, certain preparatory studies had worked intensively

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\[23\] Goheen, “The Missional Church,” 481.
\[25\] For a comprehensive study of Willingen’s historical background and setting, see Norman Goodall, “Willingen – Milestone, not Terminus,” in Missions Under the Cross: Addresses delivered at the Enlarged Meeting of the Committee of the International Missionary Council at Willingen, in Germany, 1952; with Statements issued by the Meeting, ed. Norman Goodall (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1953), 9-23.
on draft statements dealing with the theological basis of world mission.\textsuperscript{26} Although it could not possibly absorb all these wide-ranging perspectives, Willingen reflected a number of significant theological developments in its reports and statements.\textsuperscript{27} In contrast with the hope expressed at Whitby, mission leaders at Willingen realized that “in too many parts of the world the churches [gave] the impression of being on the defensive, struggling to conserve their resources amidst the storms, instead of advancing into new areas of need in the name of the Saviour of the world.”\textsuperscript{28} This awareness, however, did not diminish the importance of the theological questions which they asked. Rather this new awareness heightened the significance of these concerns and sharpened particularly those aspects such as the theological basis for mission and the relationship between church and mission.\textsuperscript{29} With Willingen’s effort to “search for theological clarity,” missio

\textsuperscript{26} Besides the aforementioned project, “Missionary Obligation of the Church,” another important study was undertaken by the North American study group and consequently developed into a report named \textit{Why Missions?}. Moreover, a number of individuals offered their own preparatory contributions, including Johannes Hoekendijk, Walter Freytag, and Max Warren. In particular, Hoekendijk’s influence was far-reaching in the 1960s and so forth. His work and significance will be examined in the next section.

\textsuperscript{27} That is why Norman Goodall remarks that Willingen brought forth cooperate reflection and discussion rather than the debate to a conclusion: “In relation to all this, Willingen was envisaged, from the outset, not as the end of the process but as a time of stock-taking – a special opportunity for cooperate reflection and discussion on this two-fold task of theological enquiry and policy re-formulation” (Goodall, “Willingen – Milestone, not Terminus,” 13).

\textsuperscript{28} “Introduction,” in \textit{Missionary Obligation of the Church: Willingen, Germany, July 5-17, 1952} (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1953), v. I will cite the Willingen statements from \textit{Missions Under the Cross}, instead of this pamphlet. In the midst of the winds of change around the world after 1947, Max Warren declared at Willingen that “At Whitby, in 1947, we hoped that the most testing days of the Christian mission, at least for our generation, lay behind us. … But here at Willingen clouds and thick darkness surround the city, and we know that complete certainty that the most testing days of the Christian mission in our generation lie just ahead” (M.A.C. Warren, “The Christian Mission and the Cross,” in \textit{Missions Under the Cross}, 40). It should also be noted that the WCC was inaugurated in 1948, a year after Whitby. For the formation of the WCC, see Yate, \textit{Christian Mission in the Twentieth Century}, 155-66.

\textsuperscript{29} Rodger Bassham prompts that beside these two interests Willingen also concerned with the themes “Evangelism and Social Action” and “Mission and Unity.” But these are not our main concern in this study. See Rodger C. Bassham, “Seeking a Deeper Theological Basis for Mission,” \textit{IRM} 67 (1978): 329-37.
*dei* (God’s mission) became the key concept which allowed for the coordination of various theological and ecclesiological developments in an apparently harmonized way.\(^{30}\)

Willingen largely understood the *missio Dei* theology in trinitarian terms. In its final statement on missionary obligation, the trinitarian basis for mission is explicitly stated:

> The missionary movement of which we are a part has its source in the Triune God Himself. Out of the depths of His love for us, the Father has sent forth His own beloved Son to reconcile all things to Himself, that we and all men might, through the Spirit, be made one in Him with the Father in that perfect love which is very nature of God.\(^{31}\)

Thus the starting point of Willingen’s theology of mission is not to be found in the church, but in the triune God, from whose nature and purpose the church receives the commission and power to engage in mission.\(^{32}\) “The *missio Dei,*” as Bosch nicely puts it, “institutes the *missiones ecclesiae.*”\(^{33}\) While affirming the trinitarian grounding of missionary activity, Willingen also maintained its christological focus for understanding the church’s missionary nature. The same statement goes on to say:

\(^{30}\) Since Willingen, Bosch notes, “the understanding of mission as *missio Dei* has been embraced by all Christian persuasions – first by conciliar Protestantism, but subsequently also by other ecclesial groupings, such as the Eastern Orthodox and many evangelicals” (Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 390-1). Although the most important legacy of Willingen to mission theology is the concept of *missio Dei,* as Tormod Engelsviken observes, the term does not exist in the documents from the conference itself. It seems that Karl Hartenstein first coined the phrase when in a report about Willingen he spoke of mission as “participation in the sending of the Son, in the *missio Dei,* with an inclusive aim of establishing the lordship of Christ over the whole redeemed creation.” See Tormod Engelsviken, “*Missio Dei:* The Understanding and Misunderstanding of a Theological Concept in European Churches and Missiology,” *IRM* 42 (2003): 482; Karl Hartenstein, “Theologische Besinnung,” in *Mission zwischen Gestern und Morgen,* ed. Walter Freytag (Stuttgart: Evangelischer Missionsverlag, 1952), 54. For Hartenstein’s contribution to the development of mission theology, see John G. Flett, *The Witness of God: The Trinity, Missio Dei, Karl Barth and the Nature of Christian Community* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 124-36, 150-2.

\(^{31}\) “A Statement on the Missionary Calling of the Church,” in *Missions Under the Cross,* 189.

\(^{32}\) Regarding the church’s participation in God’s mission, Johannes Aagaard asserts that “The church being part of this Mission, the mission of the church can only consist in ‘Nachfolge’, i.e. in the following of God’s Mission in the same way as a dog follows the steps of its master” (Aagaard, “Some Main Trends,” 244). See further Wilhelm Andersen, *Towards a Theology of Mission: A Study of the Encounter between the Missionary Enterprise and the Church and its Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1955), 40-4.

\(^{33}\) Bosch, *Transforming Mission,* 370.
We who have been chosen in Christ, reconciled to God through Him, made members of His Body, sharers in His Spirit, and heirs through hope of His Kingdom, are by these very facts committed to full participation in His redeeming mission. *There is no participation in Christ without participation in His mission to the world.* That by which the Church receives its existence is that by which it is also given its world-mission. ‘As the Father hath sent Me, even so send I you.’

Bosch puts a finer point on it this way: “mission should not be based on ecclesiology but on Christology.” The doctrine of the Trinity helped to anchor this theology of the *Missio Dei* in the doctrine of the atonement of, and reconciliation in Christ. In other words, the *Missio Dei* does not attempt to explain away the mission in Christ. As Wilhelm Andersen observes, “at no other of the earlier international conferences on missions did the Cross of Jesus Christ stand so very much in the center at Willingen. … We must learn ever anew to see [mission] from the standpoint of the Cross.” This also explains why the Willingen Report was not published under the name of the original conference’s theme but with the title *Missions under the Cross.*

Willingen took up the task of redefining the theological basis of the Christian missionary enterprise, and thereby spelled out two different yet non-contradictory perspectives in understanding mission. As such, mission is seen within a trinitarian view, which also reaffirms a christological foundation for the church’s participation in it. This twofold position, however, points to some unsolved problems and tensions beneath the

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34 “A Statement on the Missionary Calling of the Church,” 190, emphasis mine. In a preparatory document, John Mackay also argues that “To be a Christian, to be a missionary, is, in the completest sense ‘to adhere to Jesus Christ’, to be supremely Christo-centric both in one’s theology and in one’s behaviour” (John Mackay, “The Great Commission and the Church Today,” in *Missions Under the Cross,* 133). Mackay finds that Willingen’s christological understanding of mission goes beyond that made at Jerusalem (Ibid, 130).

35 Bosch, *Witness to the World,* 179.

final statements. There were “persistent differences” unresolved among delegates in their discussion of the theology of mission. As Rodger Bassham points out, the debate was mainly the result of different interpretations of the phrase *missio Dei*. While a majority viewpoint linked God’s mission primarily with his evangelizing action through the church of Christ, another, though unadopted, view pointed to God’s hidden action in the world in judgment and mercy as the primary focus for mission. One prominent example of this minority view is to be found in the North American Report, *Why Missions?* In it one can foresee what would become a secularized version of *missio Dei* theology growing up in the 1960s.

*Why Mission?* suggests that the direction of mission theology should move “from vigorous Christo-centricity to thoroughgoing trinitarianism.” It promotes this shift in theological focus in order to defend “against charges of propaganda and imperialism as

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37 For instance, an Interim Report, which was not adopted as a final statement, notices that “Some phrases in our report, though they represent what we can with good conscience say together, cover up persistent differences among us which require further prayerful thought and study if we are to grow together in mutual understanding, and gain from God through each other, the full riches of the fervour for the missionary task within our different traditions” (“The Theological Basis of the Missionary Obligation,” in *Missions Under the Cross*, 244, emphasis mine). Scherer also explains that “A Statement on the Missionary Calling of the Church” wavered uncertainly “between Trinitarianism, Christocentrism, and church-centrism.” See James A. Scherer, *Gospel, Church, & Kingdom: Comparative Studies in World Mission Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1987), 97-8. In his official reflection on Willingen, Goodall finds that the statements and reports “did not finally emerge the one inevitable word in which theological clarity and prophetic insight were manifestly conjoined. Nor did there appear the one new directive which might set the world mission of the Church on a surer and swifter road towards its fulfillment” (Goodall, “Willingen – Milestone, not Terminus,” 14). See further Andersen, *Towards a Theology of Mission*, 45-58.

38 Bassham, “Seeking a Deeper Theological Basis for Mission,” 332.

39 Ibid.

40 That is why I take into account the American Report here. Its continuity with the development of mission theology in the 1960’s is addressed by John Flett and Bosch. Flett, for instance, views that “the problematic developments in ‘The Missionary Structure of the Congregation’ as in direct continuity with the American Report” (Flett, *The Witness of God*, 148 n80). See also Bosch, *Witness to the World*, 179-80.

these are the result of an improper christological emphasis that expresses itself in an easy identification of Christ with domestic structures.”

In other words, the doctrine of the Trinity “resists domestication by forcing the Christian community into culture as the proper sphere of God’s activity.” Since the gospel is “the good news of God and of his doings in the world,” his mission is far from “an ingenious secretarial maneuvering for the territorial and financial expansion of the mission and its efficient administration, but a creative enterprise of word and deed in the formation and the transformation of individual lives and of cultural and social patterns.” This connection of the Trinity to the culture enables the church to be engaged in the missionary task as this task is grounded in the reconciling action of the triune God. The church’s missionary obligation is “the sensitive and total response of the Church to what the triune God has done and is doing in the world.” The missionary movement as such is therefore “itself the proof that an exclusive concentration upon Jesus Christ is not enough.” Only a robust trinitarianism does justice to God’s missionary activity that “propels Christian into an engaged life, abandoning the safe shelters of the church for culture as witnesses to the in-breaking reign of God.”

In summary, the trinitarian emphasis on God’s act in the world demonstrated in Why Mission? as well as some other preparatory documents, directed attention to the world, rather than the church being the locus of God’s activity. Over against such a world-oriented view of mission, Willingen did not discredit the church, but rather sought

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42 Flett, The Witness of God, 142.
43 Ibid., 145.
45 Ibid., 22, emphasis mine.
46 Ibid., 21.
48 For instance, Hoekendijk, “The Church in Missionary Thinking,” 324-36. This article will be discussed together with Hoekendijk’s other works in the next section.
to redefine a specific role of the church in mission. Instead of possessing a mission of its own, according to Willingen, the church comes into existence as the instrument or agent of the *missio Dei*, in such a way that, as a final statement claims,

> The church is … compelled by the terms of its charter not merely to build up its life where it is and as it, but also to go forth to the ends of the earth, to all nations, and to the completion of time. … The church is like an army living in tents. God calls His people to strike their tents and go forward. And Christ’s promise holds that He will be with them even to the end of the world.\(^49\)

Thus the church has a special role, sent by God as an ambassador,\(^50\) and the church’s vision of mission is “mission as participating in the sending of God.”\(^51\) The Willingen conference which was sensitive to the problematic church-centrism in the past produced a *missio Dei* theology in response to the old view of mission. The church is part of the *missio Dei*, but its mission cannot simply be identified with God’s mission. The primary purpose of the church’s mission “can therefore not simply be the planting of churches or the saving of souls; rather, it has to be service to the *missio Dei).*\(^52\) In view of earlier warnings of the dangers of church-centrism, and of the challenge from the world-directed missionary thinking, Willingen at its heart places a new emphasis on the role of the church within the framework of the *missio Dei*.

As Tormod Engelsviken rightly points out, Willingen attempted to hold together without conflict both “the *missio Dei* vision” and “the vision of the church as the

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\(^49\) “A Statement on the Missionary Calling of the Church,” 191. Besides this idea of pilgrimage, the Willingen document also uses the language of the body of Christ and its unity to describe the church’s nature. See “A Statement on the Missionary Calling of the Church,” 189, and “A Statement on the Calling of the Church to Mission and Unity,” in *Missions Under the Cross*, 193-4.

\(^50\) “A Statement on the Missionary Calling of the Church,” 190-1.

\(^51\) Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 390. The idea of mission as sending is further elaborated by the missional church movement.

\(^52\) Ibid., 391.
instrument or agent of the *missio Dei*.” Willingen’s new insight into the theological formulation of the relationship between church and mission did help to shape a consensus which “united church and mission in a way never before accomplished.” Arguably, however, the official position of the conference could not really settle the sharp debate among delegates. The differences between the trinitarian concentration and christological concentration revealed the starkness of the differences between the world-directed and church-centered views of mission. The polar disparity was evidenced in the various theological fronts which could be distinguished among the working groups and participants. Before and after Willingen the church-centric orientation of the missionary enterprise came under attack, but it was not totally dethroned. Yet, at the same time, neither did the world-oriented view win the day in the 1950s. Although the latter understanding of mission was not formally accepted at Willingen, its influence would henceforth be unmistakable. In 1952, the claims that the world was the locus of *missio Dei*...
Dei were for the time being pushed aside. About a decade later, these claims would arise anew as the proponents of this view would seek to claim their due and explain away what was originally intended.

1.3 The Legacy of Johannes Hoekendijk: The Church is Mission

At the New Delhi Assembly of the WCC in 1961, the year the IMC merged with the WCC, a study project on the “Missionary Structure of the Congregation” was authorized under the auspices of the Department of Studies in Evangelism.57 This would be “the most important WCC study in the theology of mission in the years between New Delhi and Uppsala (1968).”58 The study project sought a new theological understanding of missio Dei and its relation to the world and to the church. The decade of the 1960s displayed radical changes in society and politics and showed a sharp discontinuity with that which had gone before.59 “The radicalism of the period,” as Timothy Yates argues, “had caused the WCC leadership to move increasingly in radical directions.”60 When the missio Dei concept became the focal point of ecumenical mission theology of the day, the primary meaning conveyed by the MSC project became “the one which Willingen had set aside, namely, the notion of participating in God’s action and presence in the world and in history.”61 It was the Dutch mission theologian, Johannes Hoekendijk (1912-75), who...
through his own writings as well as his leadership would be mostly responsible for this shift in the understanding of the *missio Dei*.  

Hoekendijk had served as a secretary of evangelism in the WCC from 1949 to 1952.  

Already in 1951 he organized a Continental Missionary Conference in Freudenstadt, Germany, on behalf of the IMC. There he had read a very important paper on “the Church in Missionary Thinking” which had shocked the attendees. In preparation for the Willingen conference, particularly through his marked influence in the preliminary documents for “Missionary Obligation of the Church” project, Hoekendijk again had caused serious consternation among the delegates. During the following years, the force of Hoekendijk’s argument had emerged more strongly, and, as a result, his school of “shalom theology” had become dominant among ecumenical circles by the 1960s. Before examining Hoekendijk’s influence upon in the MSC project and Uppsala, we will first trace the formation of his ecclesiology, beginning in 1950. In “The Call to Evangelism,” he declared:

> [W]e should be aware of a temptation to take the church itself too seriously, to invite the church to see itself as well-established, as God’s secure bridgehead in the world, … I believe in the church, which is … an instrument of God’s

... secularization which flowed through the following decade, and went in a direction different from what I had hoped” (Lesslie Newbigin, *Unfinished Agenda: An Autobiography* (London: SPCK, 1985), 166).

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62 Hoekendijk’s influence is clearly evident in the background papers to the “Missionary Structure of the Congregation” study published as Thomas Wieser, ed., *Planning for Mission: Working Papers on the New Quest for Missionary Communities* (New York: WCC, 1966). The influence of his ecclesiology and missiology, the primary source of this “radical reconceptualization” of the *missio Dei*, is not only upon this project and its interim and final reports, but “also evident at the CWME meeting in Mexico City in 1963 and … the Fourth Assembly of the WCC (Uppsala, 1968), as well as the CWME gathering in Bangkok in 1973” (van Engen, *Mission on the Way*, 153-4).


64 Hoekendijk, “The Church in Missionary Thinking,” 324-36.

redemptive action in this world … a means in God’s hands to establish shalom in this world.\textsuperscript{66}

Here we see that the seedbed of “shalom theology” and Hoekendijk’s pessimism about the church were already germinating in 1950. Two years later, Hoekendijk opened a strong attack on “church-ism in contemporary missionary thinking.”\textsuperscript{67} He found that “The missionary now hardly leaves the ecclesiastical sphere. … The world has almost ceased to be the world and is now conceived of as a sort of ecclesiastical training-ground.”\textsuperscript{68} He said at the time, “the thinking … has apparently become a veritable merry-go-round around the Church,” and such church-centric missiology “is bound to go astray, because it revolves around an illegitimate centre.”\textsuperscript{69} Against this excessive emphasis on the church, Hoekendijk argued that “the oecumenical world church cannot possibly be the centre of our missionary thinking”;\textsuperscript{70} rather, the world (oikumene) should be viewed in such a way that the church might see that

[the] world and kingdom are correlated to each other; the world is conceived of as a unity, the scene of God’s great acts: it is the world which has been reconciled (2 Cor. 5:9), the world which God loves (John 3:16) and which He has overcome in His love (John 16:33); the world is the field in which the seeds of the kingdom are sown (Matt. 13:38) – the world is consequently the scene for the proclamation of the kingdom.\textsuperscript{71}

Within the framework of “kingdom-gospel-apostolate-world,” the church could “be sufficiently defined by its function, i.e. its participation in Christ’s apostolic ministry,” and “never be ‘more’ than the Mission.”\textsuperscript{72} For Hoekendijk, as Bosch explains, “There was no room for a ‘doctrine of the Church.’” We should refer to the Church only in

\textsuperscript{67} Hoekendijk, “The Church in Missionary Thinking,” 325.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., 324.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 324, 332.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., 331.
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., 333.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., 334-5.
passing and without any emphasis.”73 Underlying the phrase “the church is mission” is the view that the church is a function of mission, but not the other way around.

Hoekendijk’s thought was more radically expressed in the 1960s, especially in the MSC project which was later published as The Church for Others and the Church for the World.74 Also one sees this “shalom theology” expressed in his well-known work, The Church Inside Out.75 But most clearly his thought was expressed amid the climate of that decade at the Uppsala conference.76 He had pressed the theology of the missio Dei as the totality of God’s activity, to the point that his theology by-passed the church and stressed the God-world movement towards the establishing of the kingdom. For this reason, Hoekendijk changed the order from “God-church-world” to “God-world-church.”77 The church was no longer the agent of God’s mission, but was at most to be regarded as “a function of the apostolate.”78 The structure and aim of the church’s mission were legitimate only insofar as they served God’s mission for the world. This (new) perspective on the missio Dei movement had looked for a different starting point in the world,79 and the new focus of the apostolic ministry was God’s humanizing work in the world, which pointed to the total integrity of the whole creation as represented in the

73 Bosch, Witness to the World, 177.
77 Hoekendijk, The Church Inside Out, 71. See also The Church for Others, 16-7.
78 Hoekendijk, The Church Inside Out, 43.
79 In The Church for the World, for instance, the American committee asked: “Instead of starting from the church, and the problem of ‘what is the true church?’, why not start our investigation in the world, especially at the points where attempts are being made to respond to the agenda of the world? We might then find that some of our traditional formulations might need recasting for our time; and that real freedom for mission will come only when we break loose from assumptions that we have taken for granted” (The Church for the World, 61).
humanity of Christ. In this scheme, the church should be understood in its world-relation only as “a segment of the world, a *postscript* … added to the world for the purpose of pointing to and celebrating both Christ’s presence and God’s ultimate redemption of the whole world.” If the church fails to fulfill its missionary commission to the world, it is “abusing … the gifts of God, and God’s judgment … begins with the church.”

The church, in other words, should “live ex-centredly,” moving to the world, and should experience there the reality of the *missio Dei*, joining forces with those in the world who are striving for liberation and humanization of life. The goal of the church’s existence, therefore, is to establish God’s shalom for the world. For Hoekendijk, shalom is not an abstract soteriological concept but a concrete “social happening, an event in inter-human relations, a venture of co-humanity.” The church should be “found and worked out in actual situations, [and] relevant shalom … can only be discovered, tested and achieved in actual co-operation.” In its service to the *missio Dei* and in imitation of Christ, “the prince of shalom,” the church itself becomes a sign of shalom in the world, and as such, it “becomes mission, … the living outreach of God to the world.”

In short, Hoekendijk’s ecclesiology aimed at demonstrating the relativity of the church. He had attempted to move mission from an ecclesiological, to a socio-political point of departure. This radical shift redefined the church’s nature, not in its institutional character, but only

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80 Ibid., 77-8.
81 Ibid., 70.
82 *The Church for Others*, 43.
84 Ibid., 44-5.
85 Hoekendijk, *The Church Inside Out*, 43.
in actu, in its missionary witness to the world. Hoekendijk’s instrumentalist ecclesiology was officially adopted by Uppsala 1968, and resulted in catch-phrases such as “the world sets the agenda for the church.” If mission had been nothing but the church’s missionary enterprise in the past, then now the church in turn was swallowed up in mission.

Under Hoekendijk’s influence, “everything became mission at Uppsala: health and welfare services, youth projects, work with political interest groups, constructive use of violence, the protection of human rights.” Despite favorable signs, like the achievements of the Second WCC Assembly at Evanston in 1954, which pointed towards a successful transition from the church-centered to a fully trinitarian (and notably christological) understanding of mission after Willingen, the goal was not finally attained. What came to be predominant at Uppsala was “a horizontal view of Christian mission which adopted the revolutionary movements of society as the activity of God’s Spirit and which allied itself with social betterment in the name of ‘humanisation’.” The trinitarian view of the missio Dei was replaced by a secularized theory about the transformation of the world by means of an immanent historical process. In the Uppsala Report on “Renewal in Mission,” for instance, the missio Dei was described as “the invitation to

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87 See, for instance, Goodall, “Editoral,” in The Uppsala 68 Report, xvii; The Church for Others, 20-3. See also Bosch, Transforming Mission, 383.
89 See Christ – The Hope of the World: Documents on the Main Theme of the Second Assembly, World Council of Churches, Evanston, August 15-31, 1954 (Geneva: WCC, 1954). We will briefly discuss the Evanston conference in the last section.
91 “This new view,” in other words, “was actually a secular reworking of the trinitarian missio Dei concept.” See James A. Scherer, “Church, Kingdom and Missio Dei: Lutheran and Orthodox Corrections to Recent Ecumenical Mission Theology,” in The Good News of the Kingdom: Mission Theology for the Third Millennium, ed. Charles van Engen et al. (New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 85.
men to grow up into their full humanity in the new man, Jesus Christ.” Just as Jesus is the new man for humankind, so the church in mission is the church for the improvement of the world. Because of the preoccupation with the secular world, Uppsala favored “a Christological statement of the mission mandate which took ‘humanization’ in Jesus Christ as its theological keyword.” In the final section of this chapter, we will explore in more detail how a secular approach to Christology developed in the 1960s and consequently consolidated the radical redefinitions of the church, mission and their interrelationship.

At Uppsala the development of the missio Dei climaxed as the conference viewed the world as the locus of God’s mission, and the locus of the continuing encounter between God and humanity. The proceedings at Uppsala evaluated the world in an entirely positive light and in the process the WCC continued on a course of secularization. In the aftermath of Uppsala the CWME initiated a three-year study project on “Salvation Today,” which culminated in the Bangkok Assembly of the CWME (1973). The chief goal of this conference was to explore “the promise and demands of Salvation Today … without evading or minimising theological debates around the person of Jesus Christ.”

At Bangkok, liberation was another word for salvation, and it is Jesus Christ “the

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92 “Renewal in Mission,” in The Uppsala 68 Report, Section Reports, Section II, 28.
93 Scherer, Gospel, Church, & Kingdom, 119.
94 On the other hand, Uppsala foreshadowed the growing rift with evangelical, epitomized in the responses from John Stott, an evangelical leader of the Lausanne movement, and Donald McGavran, the father of the ‘church growth’ school. Stott contended that “the prior concern of the Church should be in relation to the millions of people who, being without Christ, are perishing” (“Renewal in Mission,” 26). According to McGavran, Uppsala proposed a secularized gospel and neglected the billion persons who had never heard of Jesus. See Donald McGavran, “Do Not Betray the Two Billion!,” in Classic Texts in Mission & World Christianity, ed. Norman E. Thomas (New York: Orbis Books, 1995), 158-9. For the Evangelical missionary movement after Uppsala, see Bosch, Witness to the World, 193-5; Scherer, Gospel, Church, & Kingdom, 164-95; Yates, Christian Mission in the Twentieth Century, 193-223.
Liberator” who frees “the whole of human reality … from all that keeps it in slavery.”

Since “the salvation which Christ brought … offers a comprehensive wholeness in this divided life,” the missio Dei manifests itself through “the struggles for economic justice, political freedom and cultural renewal.” Still, Bangkok continued Uppsala’s emphasis on mission in the secular world and its focus on the world as the arena for mission. The missio Dei which was understood to go far beyond the church was seen as being worked out in world history. Developed from a perspective which saw a continuity from New Delhi to Uppsala, the comprehensive approach to salvation at Bangkok nevertheless proved theoretically inconclusive, and gave rise to criticism that “this approach created a specific danger - that missions will simply be supplanted by the different problems of modern contemporary society.” After the tumultuous debates which marked Uppsala and Bangkok, the Fifth Assembly of the WCC in Nairobi, Kenya, in 1975, was judged to be “an assembly of consolidation, renewal and reconciliation.” As Bosch remarks, Nairobi 1975 “registered a mood about the church different from that of previous meetings.” What may be most significant about Nairobi, not least for our concern, is that the WCC reconsidered the church as the proper and primary instrument of God’s mission in the world. This reinstatement of the church’s abiding validity foreshadowed

96 Ibid.
97 Ibid., 88-9.
98 Peter Beyerhaus, Bangkok 73: The Beginning or End of World Mission? (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 26. See further Scherter, Gospel, Church, & Kingdom, 121-2; Bosch, Transforming Mission, 397-9.
100 Bosch, Transforming Mission, 388.
101 Breaking Barriers Nairobi 1975, 48-57.
the new dynamic and balance between church and mission which would emerge in the 1980s.

1.4 Reorientation of the 1980s: Towards an Incarnational Model of Mission

It was no surprise that the main theme of the CWME Melbourne conference of 1980 was “Your Kingdom Come.”102 This chosen theme, the kingdom of God, as Philip Potter puts it, “has been dominant in all the world missionary conferences up to the last one in Bangkok,” and lies at the heart of the “great missionary movement which launched the decisive stage of the ecumenical movement at Edinburgh 1910.”103 Melbourne’s task was to offer a vision and a theological perspective which saw the kingdom as Christ’s kingdom which has broken into the world through his earthly life, ministry and death. The kingdom may be seen also through the church’s missionary praxis in terms of “a clear invitation to announce the name of Jesus Christ in relation to the cutting issues of human concern.”104 Thus, as Jacques Matthey asserts, the Melbourne conference at its core was christological as well as ecclesiological,105 in the sense that the mission of the church should correlate to the life of Jesus Christ. Since its Lord “manifested God’s way of reigning by giving up his equal to God, becoming a Galilean, living among the poor and disenfranchised, dying on the cross in our place,” the church is called to “nothing less

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102 The next CWME missionary conference in San Antonio, 1989, continued to use a kingdom-related theme -- “You Will be Done: Mission in Christ’s Way.”
103 Philip Potter, “From Edinburgh to Melbourne,” in Your Kingdom Come: Report on the World Conference on Mission and Evangelism Melbourne, Australia 12-25 May 1980 (Geneva: WCC, 1980), 6-8. Thus, Potter regarded the WCC as the inheritor of the Edinburgh tradition (ibid., 6). This raises charges by evangelicals that the ecumenical movement had forfeited its claim to be the successor to that tradition, and that only the evangelical movement legitimately continued the Edinburgh missionary movement. For the background and context of this debate, see Bosch, Witness to the World, 193-5; Yates, Christian Mission in the Twentieth Century, 203-4, 224-6.
104 Emilio Castro, “Reflection after Melbourne,” in Your Kingdom Come, 231.
than to follow that way.”¹⁰⁶ “The whole church of God,” in short, “is a sacrament of the kingdom which came in the person of Jesus Christ and will come in its fullness when he returns in glory.”¹⁰⁷ Here we find, in the post-Nairobi discussion, one of the clearest affirmations of the status given to the church as the instrument of divine mission.

Maintaining the sacramental character of the church, at Melbourne, was the way to recover the dialectic of the church’s participation in the missio Dei.¹⁰⁸ In speaking of the kingdom as the goal of mission, and the poor as a new missionary yardstick,¹⁰⁹ Melbourne kept its statements from overstating the church’s role and claiming that the church could serve as the source of mission. In the eschatological perspective of God’s kingdom, “the church attains its rightful place as servant and herald of the kingdom, not its final expression.”¹¹⁰ It does not possess, but only bears witness to the kingdom. Far from preserving its own established ecclesiastical existence, the church should struggle to evangelize itself in order to become the instrument of the kingdom. This means returning “to a full understanding of the Gospel as a proclamation of a message to the world and, at the same time, a proclamation of a way of life.”¹¹¹ The gospel, therefore, converts not only the world but also the church, and it is the crucified and risen Christ who judges “shallow lifestyles and invites the churches to repentance and new life.”¹¹² In the section of Melbourne Report on Christology, the life of Jesus Christ - “moving from the centre to the periphery, towards those who are marginalized, victims of the demonic powers, political, economic, social, cultural, and even religious” – is held up not simply as an

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., xvii-xviii.
¹⁰⁷ “The Church Witness to the Kingdom,” in op. cit., Section Reports, Section III, 193.
¹⁰⁸ “The Kingdom of God and Human Struggles,” in op. cit., Section Reports, Section II, 180-1.
¹⁰⁹ “Good News to the Poor,” in op. cit., Section Reports, Section I, 171-2. The discussion in this paragraph is indebted to Scherer’s summary of the Melbourne Report in Scherer, Gospel, Church, & Kingdom, 141-5.
¹¹⁰ Scherer, Gospel, Church, & Kingdom, 144.
¹¹¹ “The Kingdom of God and Human Struggles,” 181.
¹¹² Ibid., 190.
object of faith but in a specific way as a model for mission.\textsuperscript{113} This means that the church can carry out its mission only in obedience to the crucified and risen Lord. In giving its life for Christ’s sake and striving to adopt a kenotic life-style, the church as the living body of Christ finds its true missionary identity and continues Christ’s mission to the world.\textsuperscript{114}

Melbourne reaffirmed the missionary vocation of the church as well as calling for a new missionary lifestyle based on Christ’s self-giving model. It showed a more serious effort than any previous case since the radical change of the missio Dei concept in 1960s, to reestablish the understanding that it is through Christ that there is a relationship between the church and God’s mission. After Melbourne, the trend of mission theology and ecclesiology appeared to continue in this new direction. In 1982, the Central Committee of the WCC adopted the document, \textit{Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation}, prepared by the CWME, which has since received widespread favorable acceptance both within and outside ecumenical circles.\textsuperscript{115} The document unequivocally sets forth an ecclesiological vision grounded in God’s revelation through Christ, according to which the church is sent into the world to “witness to the full realization of

\begin{footnotes}
\item[113]“Christ – Crucified and Risen – Challenges Human Power,” in \textit{Your Kingdom Come}, Section Reports, Section IV, 219.
\item[114]The Section II of the Melbourne Report refers to the church as “a sign of the kingdom because it is the Body of Christ in the world,” and as being called to be “an instrument of the kingdom of God by continuing Christ’s mission to the world in a struggle for the growth of all human beings into the fullness of life” (see “The Kingdom of God and Human Struggles,” 183-4).
\end{footnotes}
God’s kingdom in Jesus Christ.” 116 This commission, moreover, should be “patterned on the ministry and teaching of Jesus”; that is that the ecclesial mission is to be exemplified in a Christ-like way:

The self-emptying of the servant who lived among the people, sharing in their hopes and sufferings, giving his life on the cross for all humanity – this was Christ’s way of proclaiming the Good News, and as disciples we are summoned to follow the same way. 117

Thus, the mission of the church and the way in which the church is to fulfill that mission are grounded in God’s mission in Christ. Missio Dei calls for a serving church, which “is willing to be marked with the stigmata (nailmarks) of the crucified and risen Lord. In this way the church will show that it belongs to that movement of God’s love shown in Christ who went to the periphery life.” 118 Since Christ’s mission is the source of and the basis for the mission of the church, the church as the body of Christ renews its missionary vocation in joyful fellowship with its risen Lord (1 John 3:16). 119

Beginning with the Melbourne Report, and continuing with the 1982 WCC statement, the church’s mission was seen as doing mission in the way of Jesus Christ. This appeared as a new paradigm to correlate the church with mission. This “mission in Christ’s way,” 120 is not simply a human choice to follow the divine command, but rather it is a sharing in Christ’s life and vocation which is rooted in the fellowship with God.

The imagery of the body of Christ, employed in both documents, 121 guarantees an

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117 Ibid., 48.
118 Ibid., 49-50.
119 Ibid., 50.
120 This phrase occurs not only as the title of the fourth section of Mission and Evangelism, but also as the subtitle of the conference theme of the San Antonio 1989. See Frederick R. Wilson, “Introduction,” in The San Antonio Report: Your Will be Done: Mission in Christ’s Way, ed. Frederick R. Wilson (Geneva: WCC, 1990), 4-5.
121 Melbourne regards the church not only as a sacramental reality, but also the living body of Christ: “The existence of the Church as it is true to its witness is a positive reality. The Church is the Body of Christ, and
intimate relationship between the church and its head, Christ, in which the church is to be oriented in service to the mission reflected in its total sacramental and missionary life.

Emilio Castro highlights this same linking in his reflection on *Mission and Evangelism*:

> The mission of the church is not an activist handling of an institution that carries on an assigned task. It is participation in the inner life of the Trinity. It is God the Father, through the love of the Holy Spirit, who sends his only begotten Son to share the human predicament and to work for its salvation. … The church in its very life shares in the mediation of Jesus Christ, in the sense that intercessory prayer raises before the Father the sins and hopes, the promises and failures of the surrounding community.\(^{122}\)

The trinitarian basis for mission and its christological concentration, which were already expressed in the Willingen statement, came to the fore again through ecumenical discussions. Willingen’s theological ambiguity, discussed above, was now generally resolved through understanding the church’s mission as joined to Christ whose activity is rooted in the trinitarian relationship. The same tone is also echoed in the report of the San Antonio CWME conference (1989):

> At the very heart of the church’s vocation in the world is the proclamation of the kingdom of God inaugurated in Jesus the Lord, crucified and risen and made present among us by the Holy Spirit. … [W]e become involved in God’s mission only because the living God has created us for life in communion, has first turned to us in grace and love, and has done so supremely in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. … Christian mission is [therefore] the humble involvement of the one body of Christ in liberating and suffering love, the witness of God’s saving acts in Christ, and the practice of God’s incarnational love for all humankind.\(^{123}\)

Mission in Christ’s way is in essence participation in the trinitarian life of love. At the WCC conference in San Antonio, when it spoke of mission as doing God’s will, it also spoke of discerning this will through the revelation of the triune God in Christ. The 122


\(^{123}\) “Turning to the Living God,” in *The San Antonio Report*, Section Reports, Section I, 25-7.
conference called for examining the life of the church in light of Christ’s life.\textsuperscript{124} San Antonio posited that without losing sight of its identity in Christ, the church should be present amid human struggles, not only “resisting the temptation to succumb to the spirit of the age and to withdraw into a ghetto existence,”\textsuperscript{125} but “embodying and communicating values of oneness, reconciliation, equality, justice, freedom, harmony, peace and love.”\textsuperscript{126} Sharing the same suffering and struggles of its Lord, the church is called to involvement in the world which means bearing witness to God’s will to give life to all through Christ. This ecclesial witness is exemplified by the incarnation of Christ:

As the eternal word was incarnated not at the centre of power but among those who were scattered like sheep that have no shepherd, so the churches are invited to discover their mission incarnated among suffering and struggling, resisting the powers of evil and, \textit{in the manner of Christ}, bearing witness among them to the will of God to pull down the mighty from their thrones but exalt those of low degree, to set free those who are oppressed, and to invite the hungry and homeless to the feast.\textsuperscript{127}

The incarnation thus serves as the preeminent example of this creative and transformative power for the world. Such world-changing power, which also enables the church to challenge all oppressive forces in Christ’s way, is “grounded in the brokenness of the crucifixion and the transformation of death to fullness of life.”\textsuperscript{128} Here we see that at San Antonio the christological focus is in the cross of Christ, through which sin, death and human misery are dissolved by the self-giving love of the Son of God. Thus the church’s mission cannot but flow from God’s unconditional love for all.\textsuperscript{129} Christologically

\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., 25-6.
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., 30.
\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., 34.
\textsuperscript{127} “Participating in Suffering and Struggle,” in \textit{op. cit.}, Section Reports, Section II, 46. Emphasis mine.
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., 39. Moreover, the church called to fulfill its mission in Christ way is “sent in the way of Christ bearing the marks of the cross in the power of the Holy Spirit” (ibid., 37).
\textsuperscript{129} “Turning to the Living God,” 25.
speaking, San Antonio appreciates the significance of the incarnation, but its overall argument still hinges upon the uniqueness of the death of Christ on the cross.\textsuperscript{130}

The discussion of “mission in Christ’s way” in the 1980s revisited two Willingen’s theological motifs – missio Dei as the basis of mission, and the church’s participation in Christ’s mission. They were now integrated into a new exposition of the church and its relation to mission. San Antonio now understood that the church as God’s instrument is called to continue the mission of Christ within the trinitarian movement of missio Dei. This ecclesiological insight based on the conviction that the church exercises the mission entrusted by Christ is, however, open to the possibility of misunderstanding when speaking of the continuation of Christ’s mission through the church. There is a danger that the mission of Christ is not taken with sufficient seriousness as to express a reality which is different from the church’s participation in it. A critical and determining factor related to this problem is the recognition of the incarnation as a key to understanding the mission of the church. In 1988, the WCC published a preparatory booklet on the theme of the San Antonio conference. This study calls for a stronger incarnational thrust than the San Antonio official report holds:

The coming of the eternal Logos into the world in the form of Christ (the incarnation) \textit{is} mission. At the incarnation, God-in-Christ set about a renewed mission in God’s own world. Of course, God had been in mission since creation; human rebelliousness against God does not stop mission. Now in Christ a new beginning of mission is embarked upon. Christ the Word joins in and continues God’s mission. … The incarnation, whatever else it may be, \textit{is} mission – a sending by God of Christ into God’s own world and creation, that people may

\textsuperscript{130} It should be noted that at San Antonio “mission in Christ’s way” is also understood as a living expression of prayer: “Proclamation of the kingdom, of hope for the whole creation, of a Mission in Christ’s Way, is not just an affirmation, but a way of life. We are called to concrete acts of faithfulness, a living expression of the prayer that Christ taught us: ‘YOUR WILL BE DONE’” (“Message of the Conference,” in \textit{The San Antonio Report}, 24).
have life and creation may be restored to God’s glory. The incarnational mission of Christ is thus the only model of mission.\textsuperscript{131}

This is a crucial link for mission. The incarnation here refers to both the unique event of the Word becoming flesh \textit{and} the norm that governs the movement of \textit{missio Dei} in Christ, which continues through the church. The church’s participation in God’s mission is hence \textit{incarnational}, modeled by Christ’s mission. We have seen that San Antonio maintained a rather balanced Christology which addressed Christ’s unique mission accomplished by his death, in which the church’s mission was rooted.\textsuperscript{132} But it has been recently more common to employ the adjective “incarnational” to describe the church as the continuing embodiment of the presence of Christ.\textsuperscript{133} This is especially true in the missional church movement, which develops an incarnational approach to \textit{missio Dei} that specifies how God achieves his saving purposes through the church in the world. We will explore in detail the ecclesiological construal of this new movement in the next chapter.

\section*{1.5 Concluding Reflections on Christology: From Willingen to San Antonio}

The ecumenical development of mission theology and ecclesiology over the last half century was coupled with a christological conception as the basis of the church’s mission. In the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, Christology, if it was articulated, was usually linked with particular institutional forms of the visible church, or

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{131} \textit{Your Will be Done: Mission in Christ’s Way: Study Material and Biblical Reflection} (Geneva: WCC, 1988), 37.
\item \textsuperscript{132} See especially Anastasios of Androussa, “Address by the Conference Moderator,” in \textit{The San Antonio Report}, 105-6.
\end{itemize}
it was used exclusively to describe the church’s missionary enterprise. There was an attempt somehow to construe the church as the anticipative realization of God’s kingdom in the world. This church-centered Christology was deeply challenged by the rise of the *missio Dei* theology. Since Willingen there has been a growing emphasis, through the phrase *missio Dei*, on mission being God’s initiative, rather than that of the church. The Willingen statement, inspired by the *missio Dei* concept, particularly described the church’s missionary nature in terms of the church’s participation in Christ’s mission. It is in the hiddenness of the cross, in which “the church waits expectantly, that it finds the grace to make its self-offering to God in a love which He can use for the world.”

The church-in-mission, therefore, is God’s agent standing under the cross of Jesus Christ.

Willingen considered the cross as “the illuminating centre of the mystery of God’s redemptive purpose.” By the hidden power of the cross, Christ fulfilled his mission and God’s plan of salvation. It is “by way of the cross that we are compelled to see both the necessity for showing forth that redemption and also the manner of the showing.”

That Willingen’s theology of the cross shaped its vision for the church and its mission in the world provided an adequate ground for the broadening of the scope of christological formulation to “the whole work of Christ” at Evanston in 1954.

Taking “Christ – The Hope of the World” as the conference theme, Evanston had stressed that “the unity given to the Church in Christ, and gifts given to the Church to help and enable it to manifest its given unity, are not for the sake of the Church as an historical reality, but for the sake of

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138 “Faith and Order: Our Oneness in Christ and Our Disunity as Churches,” in *Christ – The Hope of the World*, Section Reports, Section I, 82.
The church, as the sign and sharer of the life and work of Jesus Christ, participates in his ministry to the world, bearing witness to the restoration of humanity in Christ through all the aspects of its life. “The being and unity of the church,” in short, “belong to Christ and therefore to His mission.” While Evanston had spoken of the life and mission of the church deriving from the “whole person and work of Jesus Christ,” the WCC assemblies in the following decade led to a radical alternative perspective that Christology and ecclesiology were subsumed under a redefinition of mission.

As explained above, the missio Dei theology underwent a dramatic change in the 1960s. A key reason for this was that the prevailing optimistic view of the Western process of socio-historical progress stimulated a secularized reinterpretation of theology. Some of most affected doctrines were the doctrines of the Trinity and Christology. Since the idea of new humanity as the goal of mission became increasingly dominating in the tenor of ecumenical missionary statements from New Delhi to Uppsala, the task of Christology in this trend was to lay a theological groundwork for humanization to be the central concern of mission. A corresponding emphasis was therefore placed upon the humanity of Christ, rather than his divinity, through which God has revealed the knowledge of his plan for humankind:

Jesus Christ, incarnate, crucified and risen, is the new man. In him was revealed the image of God as he glorified his Father in a perfect obedience. In his total availability for others, his absolute involvement and absolute freedom, his penetrating truth and his triumphant acceptance of suffering and death, we see what man is meant to be. Through that death on the Cross, man’s alienation is overcome by the forgiveness of God and the way is opened for the restoration of all men to their sonship. In the resurrection of Jesus a new creation was born, and the final goal of history was assured, when Christ as head of that new humanity will sum up all things.

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139 Ibid., 85, 98-103.
140 Ibid., 84.
The Uppsala Report had concluded that “it is in Jesus of Nazareth [that] we see the new manhood in a human life”; in Jesus’ life we see “perfect sonship” and also “perfect dominion over nature – exercised as a man, not as a divine visitant.”142 “The new manhood of Jesus Christ” thus not only “opens out to incorporate other men in a new human solidarity” but also “bids us to set out on his mission for the renewal of mankind.”143 In these kinds of christological statements from Uppsala, along with a secular, horizontal view of mission, the church-in-mission was characterized by the process of humanization as a means of advancing and freeing the human condition. The church’s mission was seen as in solidarity with the struggles of liberation and thus becomes a concrete sign of the kingdom of God to the world.

The radical worldliness of this missionary thinking, which peaked at Uppsala and Bangkok, resulted in an overemphasis on the social and political dimension of the demand of the kingdom of God, and led to “a relativizing of the person of Jesus Christ.”144 The humanity of Christ, under the influence of secularization, becomes the measure for social improvement, as God’s kingdom is advanced on earth. This ‘horizontalist’ view of Christology was thoroughly examined by the participants in Melbourne, which, in reconsidering the theme of God’s kingdom, sought to reestablish the kingship and lordship of Jesus Christ.145 Melbourne not only confessed Christ as the center of the royal reign of God, but it also stressed that “as Christ’s kingdom, the royal reign of God begins on earth as the kingdom of the crucified, which places his disciples

142 Ibid., 23.
143 Ibid.
with him under the cross.” It is the significance of Christ’s kenosis as the way of accomplishing his mission and drawing the church into participation in the life of Christ. Along with this emphasis on Christ’s kenotic movement into the world, San Antonio viewed specifically the incarnation event as the emptying of the Son’s divinity in order for him to be totally identified with sinful humanity. It had stated that: “Participating in suffering and struggle is at the heart of God’s mission and God’s will for the world. It is central for our understanding of the incarnation, the most glorious example of participation in suffering and struggle.” Thus, the doctrine of the incarnation at San Antonio affirmed the lordship of the crucified Christ, and understood the church as God’s instrument for divine mission. The conference understood that this principle governed the church’s understanding of its mission in Christ’s way.

To conclude, the articulation of Christology in the context of ecumenical missionary movement is virtually in service to the task of defining mission in a changing world. The process of secularization, as shown, greatly challenged the uniqueness and sovereignty of Christ on account of the church’s mission in the world. The result has been a missiological concentration on strategy and co-operation and a weakening of its christological foundation. In recent discussion of mission theology and ecclesiology, it is the incarnation of Christ, rather than his passion, that has received most attention. The growing consensus now is that the incarnation characteristically exhibits the way that mission is to be carried out. What matters is not necessarily Jesus himself but the pattern of the incarnate life. At the heart of such incarnational Christology lies a missiological

147 “Participating in Suffering and Struggle,” 37. In my view, the San Antonio conference did not clearly develop the incarnational approach to mission or the concept of incarnational mission, as Guder proposes in “Incarnation and the Church’s Evangelistic Mission,” 174.
interpretation of the condescension of the Son of God in ‘functional’ more than ‘ontological’ terms. In the next chapter, we will examine how the incarnation functions as a guiding principle or criterion for mission in the ecclesiological agenda of contemporary missional church movement.

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148 In the Chalcedonian Christology, for instance, the doctrine of the incarnation was formulated by a kind of ontological language, and used to describe the incarnation as God’s great miracle by which the Son was made man when he took to himself the human nature in Mary’s womb, and united to himself that human nature by the hypostatic union. For further discussion, see Webster, “Incarnation,” 145-8.
2.1 Introduction: The Rise of the Missional Church Conversation

What will the future shape of the church look like? When exploring the answer, the missional church movement has been devoted to the task of fostering a missionary encounter with society, and has been moved by a particular concern about how the church is engaged with the surrounding culture in everyday life. The result has been, especially among the churches in North America, a new awareness of certain theological concepts such as “missional” or the “sentness” of the church.\(^1\) Despite an enormous range of meanings given to the word “missional,”\(^2\) the book *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* published in 1998 has something more basic in view. In this book, according to Craig van Gelder, the term “missional” gives penetrating insights into the very nature of “what it means to be the church, and how the being of the church provides the basis for the doing of the church.”\(^3\) This seminal work “seeks to propel the missional movement by reshaping the way we do our theology of the church.”\(^4\) As such, *Missional Church* offers a theological platform upon which recent missional

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\(^1\) For missional reframing of ecclesiology for specific denominations in North America, see Craig van Gelder, ed., *The Missional Church and Denominations: Helping Congregations Develop a Missional Identity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

\(^2\) As Craig van Gelder observes, “Common today is the tendency by some to assume that being missional is just another way of framing the historical understanding of missions in the life of the church – that is, what the church does. Others assume that being missional is simply the latest fad geared to help grow the church.” See Craig van Gelder, “Preface,” in *The Missional Church & Leadership Formation: Helping Congregations Develop Leadership Capacity*, ed. Craig van Gelder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), vii.

\(^3\) Ibid., viii.

trends engender extensive discussion on mission.\(^5\) This work reflects some significant common features with respect to the development of mission theology which are drawn from across the ecclesial spectrum of the missional church movement.

In using the term *missio Dei*, the missional church movement “emphasizes the essential nature and vocation of the church as God’s called and sent people.”\(^6\) Influenced by the theological development over the history of ecumenical missionary conferences, the “called and sent” aspect of the missional church affirms the church as God’s instrument for divine mission.\(^7\) God who as the subject of mission calls the church to participate in mission for all humankind and the church in turn lives out a missional lifestyle in its own social and cultural context. Rather than viewing mission as a task given to the church, a new consensus on mission which emerged within the missional church movement is based on the idea that the essential nature of the church is missionary. From this perspective, mission is “founded on the mission of God in the world.”\(^8\) Mission is not about externally focused programs but about a radically different way of being the church. The focus of the missional church is much less about “church growth” which

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\(^5\) W. Rodman MacIlvaine III sorts out six categories for the recent missional literature: 1) biblical and theological foundations for missions; 2) missional church and denominations; 3) missional church after Christendom; 4) missional leadership; 5) missional transition of the church; 6) interdisciplinary discussion on missional methodology. See W. Rodman MacIlvaine III, “What is the Missional Church Movement?,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 167 (2010): 101-3.


\(^7\) Besides the ecumenical missionary movement, it is in particular the influence of Newbigin and henceforth the Gospel and Our Culture Network (GOCN) in North America that furnish *Missional Church* with three focal points: “(1) a cultural and social analysis of our North America setting; (2) theological reflection on the question, what is the gospel that addresses us un our setting? And (3) the renewal of the church and its missional identity in our setting” (George R. Hunsberger, “Acquiring the Posture of a Missionary Church,” in *The Church between Gospel & Culture: The Emerging Mission in North America*, ed. George R. Hunsberger and Craig van Gelder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 290.) I will discuss Newbigin’s contribution to missional ecclesiology in a later part of this chapter.

\(^8\) “Thus our challenge today is to move from church with mission to missional church” (Guder, *Missional Church*, 6).
often views the church as a social organization that could be planted and managed.\textsuperscript{9} Instead, the missional church is part of the cultural fabric which participates in God’s reconciling work by bearing witness to the redemptive reign as good news. The missional church, therefore, provides a perspective which reorients our thinking about the role of the church with respect to God’s activity in the world as well as the church’s participation in what is God’s missionary movement.

Secondly, the missional church as God’s people gathered is “an alternative or contrast community.”\textsuperscript{10} The church differs from its surrounding world because “it looks for its cues from the One who has sent it out, rather from the powers that appear to run the world.”\textsuperscript{11} Drawn into the center of activity amid God’s reign revealed in the missio Dei, the missional church is called to demonstrate “the culture of God’s new community” with “an alternative set of behaviors, an alternative ethic, [and] an alternative kind of relationships.”\textsuperscript{12} The danger in failing to live as a “contrast society” becomes one of a “cultural imperialism” which assumes that the gospel spreads itself in its Western cultural form and replaces the cultures it conquered.\textsuperscript{13} Missional ecclesiology gives response to the challenge of cultural imperialism by underscoring the church’s missional identity as a form of cultural embodiment. The missional church always “lives in and among a culture or group of cultures” and “this gives an indication of God’s vision for the church’s

\textsuperscript{9} In a certain sense, the rise of the missional church stands in contrast to the evangelical church growth movement which, initiated by Donald McGavran, lays emphasis on the church’s obedience to the Great Commission and on numerical increase. For an evaluation of the church growth movement from the missional church perspective, see Gary L. McIntosh, ed., Evaluating the Church Growth Movement (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004).
\textsuperscript{10} Guder, Missional Church, 9; Frost and Hirsch, The Shaping of Things to Come, 23-8; Roxburgh and Boren, Introducing the Missional Church, 101-11. For an critical assessment of this understanding of the church as alternative community, see Goheen, “The Missional Church,” 483-8.
\textsuperscript{11} Guder, Missional Church, 110.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 114, 119.
\textsuperscript{13} Frost and Hirsch, The Shaping of Things to Come, 38.
transforming impact on its context.” The more faithfully the church lives a distinctively holy life in its place, the in-breaking reign of God is more clearly shown forth for all to see. For this reason, the church is not only to be a peculiar community, but it is to be one which nurtures the social relationships that embody the reconciliation and healing of the world in God’s saving mission.

Thirdly, there is a common appeal to Christology that gives meaning and shape to missional ecclesiology, because God’s presence in Christ defines his mission to the world. The centrality of Jesus Christ in all aspects of the life of the church, including mission, is rooted in the missio Dei which has been unfolded in the sending of the Son into the world for its salvation. This centrality is articulated by Jesus when he said: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (Jn 20:21). Thus, for missional ecclesiology, the word “mission” means “sending.” Missio Dei began with the call of Israel to receive God’s blessings in order that Israel might be a blessing to the nations. God’s mission unfolded in the history of God’s people across the centuries as revealed in Scripture, and it “reached its revelatory climax in the incarnation of God’s work of salvation in Jesus ministering, crucified, and resurrected. … It continues today in the worldwide witness of churches in every culture to the gospel of Jesus Christ.” The missional church thereby sees itself as part of an ongoing process, not as an end in itself. At its core the church is a missionary movement, not an institution. The church’s primary concern is not about maintaining any attractive, institutional form, but about the sending of God’s people into

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14 Guder, Missional Church, 14, 114.
15 Ibid., 146-9; Frost and Hirsch, The Shaping of Things to Come, 83-93; Alan Hirsch, The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006), 182-5; Roxburgh and Boren, Introducing the Missional Church, 106-11.
16 Guder, Missional Church, 13-4, 81-3; Frost and Hirsch, The Shaping of Things to Come, 16, 35-41, 112-5; Roxburgh and Boren, Introducing the Missional Church, 94-110.
17 Guder, Missional Church, 4.
the midst of the world to engage others in their neighborhoods and to demonstrate God’s life in Christ.\textsuperscript{18} In his “enfleshing of God” as a historical person, Christ “represents the principal model for mission, ministry, and discipleship, and the focal point of an authentic New Testament faith.”\textsuperscript{19} Since there is a link between our very actions and the saving purpose of God in and through Christ, the missional church shapes its life and ministry around Jesus Christ, his life, his death, and his resurrected power.

In being drawn into the \textit{missio Dei}, therefore, the missional church lives as a counter-cultural community, in a way that its Lord witnessed and practiced God’s loving power for the world in his mission. The sending of the church is closely linked with the sending of the Son, which reveals that God’s very being is as a sending God.\textsuperscript{20} In this particular respect the church bears a marked resemblance to the incarnation of Christ. The church “continues as an incarnate expression of the life of God,” meaning it “always takes particular form, shaped according to the cultural and historical context in which it lives.”\textsuperscript{21} We see that the doctrine of the incarnation contributes its missional significance to missional ecclesiology. The church’s demonstration of the gospel in its social setting is determined and conditioned by the incarnational model of Christ.\textsuperscript{22} The missional church, in other words, grounds its missional identity and vocation in the incarnation, to the extent that it can continue Christ’s mission through its incarnational witness. The incarnation thus implies “some form of sending” in which we are called into

\textsuperscript{18} For the thrust of missional ecclesiology directed against institutionalism, see Guder, \textit{Missional Church}, 5-7; Hirsch, \textit{The Forgotten Ways}, 185-9; Roxburgh and Boren, \textit{Introducing the Missional Church}, 54-6.
\textsuperscript{19} Frost and Hirsch, \textit{The Shaping of Things to Come}, 112.
\textsuperscript{20} As Bosch claims, “There is church because there is mission, not vice versa. To participate in mission is to participate in the movement of God’s love toward people, since God is a fountain of sending love” (Bosch, \textit{Transforming Mission}, 390).
\textsuperscript{21} Guder, \textit{Missional Church}, 14.
\textsuperscript{22} Guder, \textit{Missional Church}, 12-4; Hirsch, \textit{The Forgotten Ways}, 131-8; Roxburgh and Boren, \textit{Introducing the Missional Church}, 77-8.
“incarnational expression of faith.” In an attempt to incarnate the missio Dei and as the church participates in Christ’s mission, missional ecclesiology considers the incarnation as the guiding norm for the church’s relation to mission, practice and its interaction with other parties and cultures in a “critical, discriminating, and constructive manner.”

It is impossible and unrealistic to highlight one particular version of ecumenical missional ecclesiology as if there were the only version; nevertheless, the following discussion will draw on the missional church model that understands the church’s mission of witness as the continuation of Christ’s work according to the incarnational principle. At the very center of this incarnational approach is the reality that the incarnation is the crux of God’s sending action, i.e., the missio Dei. The incarnation shapes the Christian mission in that it reveals Jesus’ human life as the pattern for mission. In following the pattern and lifestyle of Jesus’ life, the church therefore is regarded as incarnational community. We will examine the highlights of the theological development of missional ecclesiology which gives rise to the incarnational model of the missional church. We will do this through a concise examination of the thoughts of David Bosch, Lesslie Newbigin and Darrell Guder. Since the theological term “incarnational” is often bound up with the theology of missio Dei and its christological concentration, Bosch’s understanding of missio Dei and Newbigin’s pattern of “mission in Christ’s way” will be used to help us to see how this informs the development of incarnational-missional ecclesiology. For our purposes, we will examine Guder’s account of incarnational witness

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25 Alan Roxburgh and M. Scott Boren, for instance, propose a “mystery-memory-mission” model for the missional church. See Roxburgh and Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church*, 39-45. The missional church as such is “about a people of memory being continually formed in practices that shape us as an alternative story in our culture” (ibid., 44).
and its implication for the missional church. As one of the key leaders in the missional church movement, Guder has contributed theological reflections particularly to the ongoing discussion of incarnational theology. Guder’s reflections serve as a basis for an emerging relationship between ecclesiology and missiology.

2.2 Bosch: A Paradigmatic shift of Mission to Missio Dei

Throughout his whole life, David Bosch has offered an unparalleled contribution to the church and mission in all the three aspects – academic, ecumenical and pastoral.\(^{26}\) The book, *Transforming Mission*, will likely always stand as his chief theological legacy. One of his main concerns for mission theology is how the church engages the contemporary crisis of mission which emerged from the Enlightenment to the present.\(^{27}\) There is an urgent need, Bosch observes, for a new paradigm of the theology of mission. This search seeks a way to dissociate mission from the imperial power structure and to redefine and relocate the ecclesial mission in the context of *missio Dei*. Instead of characterizing mission as the church’s missionary enterprise, Bosch primarily understands the *missio Dei* (God’s mission) as God’s self-revelation in the One who loves the world. God’s involvement in and with the world is the very nature and activity of God, which embraces both the church and the world, and it is a mission in which the church is privileged to participate.\(^{28}\) The ecclesial mission is thereby the communication of the good news about the universal and coming reign of the living God. In this section, we

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\(^{27}\) See Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 284-345.

\(^{28}\) Ibid., 10.
will examine Bosch’s paradigmatic understanding of mission and the implications for the relation of the church and mission.

Bosch points out that “mission is today a greater problem and more disputed than ever.”²⁹ According to his analysis of church history, we are now living in the post-Constantinian era, which poses an unprecedented challenge to our understanding of Christian mission. Among the elements of the present crisis in mission such as the loss of a supposed Christian culture context or the rise of the world religions, there is fundamentally “a great deal of uncertainty about what mission really is.”³⁰ Bosch, therefore, seeks to enter the contemporary debate and to find answers that are “consonant with the will of God and relevant to the situation in which we find ourselves.”³¹ In this vein, the theology of mission concerns itself with the relationship of God to the world in the light of the gospel. Mission is solely grounded in God’s overflowing love to and for the world.

At the center of Bosch’s theological reflection on mission, in accord with the discussion above, is his understanding of mission as missio Dei. Mission has its origin in God because “God is a missionary God, a God who crosses frontiers towards the world.”³² Viewed from a trinitarian perspective, “mission is God giving up himself, his becoming man, his laying aside of his divine prerogatives and taking our humanity, his moving into the world, in his Son and Spirit.”³³ With this, Bosch realizes that it was in the aftermath of the Reformation era that the concept of mission “has begun to develop its

³⁰ Ibid., 8.
³¹ Ibid., 9.
³² Ibid., 239.
³³ Ibid.
modern connotation of the church’s being sent into the world,” and that “the relationship
between the original and the modern meaning of missio has for a long time not been
recognized.”

Bosch finds that the doctrine of the Trinity only functions vaguely and
abstractly in church and mission to the end that the concept of mission undergoes
metamorphosis. While Bosch attempts to delineate mission adequately, the basic task for
him is to do justice to the trinitarian foundation of mission and to confirm that it is central
to God himself. For Bosch mission is rooted “in the fatherly heart of God” and signifies
in Christ and Spirit “a new dimension of God’s concern for the world.”

Since mission is God’s work from first to last, “Christian mission is always missio Dei.”

In order to resolve the tension between the perceptions of missio Dei and missio ecclesiae created in
the modern age, Bosch grounds the ecclesial mission in the missio Dei. This move is also
an attempt to bring “Christology, Pneumatology and missiology … into the closest
possible relationship.”

“Jesus as Missionary” not only sets the model for the ecclesial
mission and its foundation but he also continues his mission through the mission of the
Spirit in which disciples are sent into the world (Jn 20:21-22). This implies that, by being
drawn into God’s mission in the world, the church should share in the mission of
transforming the world.

Along these lines, the primary purpose of the church’s mission cannot simply be
the planting of the church or “christianization of peoples.” Rather, the church’s mission
has to be service to the missio Dei, as the church participates in the sending of God. In

34 Ibid. 240. For Bosch, “the classical doctrine on the missio Dei as God the Father sending the Son, and
God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit” should be “expanded to include yet another ‘movement’: Father, Son and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world.” See Bosch, Transforming Mission, 390.
The mission and sending of the church, in Bosch’s view, have to be linked with the doctrine of the Trinity.
35 Bosch, Witness to the World, 240-1.
36 Ibid., 242.
this new image, mission is “not primarily an activity of the church, but an attribute of God.” In Bosch’s understanding mission is a movement from God to the world, and the church is viewed as an instrument for that mission. In other words, mission is something which the church must receive in order to be. Although over the last half a century the theology of missio Dei was used by those who subscribed to mutually exclusive theological positions, Bosch remarks that this concept “has helped to articulate the conviction that neither the church nor any other human agent can ever be considered the author or bearer of mission. Mission is, primarily and ultimately, the work of the Triune God, … a ministry in which the church is privileged to participate.” Thus, the church is derived from mission, and not the other way around. To prevent the church from reverting again to a narrow, ecclesiocentric view of mission, Bosch develops a new paradigm for mission that not only acknowledges God’s central role in mission but also calls forth the church to be transformed in a radical way which is different from the past.

“Just as there have been paradigm shifts with respect to the understanding of the relationship between church and mission,” Bosch further acknowledges: “there have also been shifts in the understanding of the nature of salvation the church had to mediate in its mission.” When the Enlightenment began in the West, the traditional interpretation of salvation which had aimed at saving individuals from eternal damnation was increasingly challenged, so that “the idea of salvation coming from outside, from God, totally out of

39 Ibid., 392.
40 As Bosch says, “The only ultimately effective solution to the widespread missionary malaise today … is a ‘radical transformation of the whole life of the church’” (ibid., 345). “The recognition that mission is God’s mission represents a crucial breakthrough in respect of the preceding centuries” (ibid., 393).
41 Ibid., 393.
reach of human power and capability, became extremely problematic.”

According to Bosch, salvation came to mean “liberation from religious superstition, attention to human welfare and the moral improvement of humanity.” This liberal view came to full flower at the Bangkok conference of CWME (1973) which gathered under the theme “Salvation Today.” The Bangkok conference defined salvation “exclusively in this-worldly terms.”

Bosch doubts if such theology of salvation, submerged in social ethics, actually relativizes the person and work of Jesus Christ. Over and against this modern paradigm for salvation, Bosch does not attempt to return to a more classical position but rather develops a more comprehensive view of salvation. In his view, “salvation in Christ is salvation in the context of human society en route to a whole and healed world.”

The key to understanding a more comprehensive theology of salvation per se is to recognize that each theology of salvation (namely, the Eastern church, the traditional Western church, and the modern church) over the centuries has singled out only one particular aspect of Jesus’ earthly life and ministry. These theologies need to be integrated into a “comprehensive christological framework.” For Bosch, the Christ events – his incarnation, earthly life and ministry, death, resurrection, and parousia – collectively remain central to his understanding on salvation and mission: “All these christological elements taken together constitute the praxis of Jesus, the One who both inaugurated salvation and provided us with a model emulate; the salvation we have been

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42 Ibid., 395.
44 Bosch, Transforming Mission, 396.
46 Ibid., 399.
47 As Bosch argues, “For its understanding of salvation that the first model – that of the Greek Patristic mission – was oriented to the origin and beginning of Jesus’ life – his preexistence and incarnation. The orientation of Western mission was toward the end of Jesus’ life – his death on the church. … The third model, that is, the ethical interpretation of salvation, was oriented to Jesus’ earthly life and ministry” (ibid.).
The integral character of salvation, therefore, demands that the scope of the church’s mission be more comprehensive than has traditionally or recently been the case. The church should, Bosch claims, “minister to people in their total need” and “involve individual as well as society, soul and body present and future in [its] ministry of salvation.” However, Bosch does not reduce salvation to human present work. For Bosch mission has a proleptic focus, meaning that “mission can be understood only when the risen Christ himself has still a future, a universal future for the nations.” This eschatological vision of salvation prevents the church from identifying any specific project with the fullness of the reign of God. Since the eschaton will not be realized in human history, the church-in-mission always lives in a creative tension as an imperfect yet effective witness to the arrival of the kingdom of God.

It follows that, for Bosch, “the church can be missionary only if its being-in-the-world is, at the same time, a being-different-from-the-world.” The church is empirical as well as spiritual. It always lives in the tension between the historical and eschatological. Bosch realizes that this ecclesial tension emerges as two seemingly opposite views of the church: “At one end of the spectrum, the church perceives itself to be the sole bearer of a message of salvation on which it has a monopoly; at the other end, the church views itself,

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48 Bosch, “Salvation: A Missiological Perspective,” 153. In the final chapter of Transforming Mission, Bosch further elaborates this christological framework to understand the nature of mission. See Bosch, Transforming Mission, 512-8.
50 Bosch, Transforming Mission, 517.
51 For Bosch, the creative tension in the church lies in the tension between the “already” and “not yet” aspects of God’s kingdom: “From the tension between the ‘already’ and the ‘not yet’ of the reign of God, from the tension between the salvation indicative (salvation is already a reality!) and the salvation subjunctive (comprehensive salvation is yet to come!) there emerges the salvation imperative - Get involved in the ministry of salvation!” (ibid., 400).
52 Ibid., 386.
as an illustration – in word and deed - of God’s involvement with the world.” 53 While the so-called evangelical position holds a church-centered view of mission, lifting up “church growth” as the final goal of salvation, the ecumenical (i.e. Hoekendijkian) pattern manifests itself in a “churchless mission” paradigm that sets the missionary agenda solely from the needs of the world. 54 Bosch’s new paradigm for the church leads to an integration of the two visions in such a way that the tension between them becomes creative rather than destructive. As “an inseparable union of the divine and the dusty,” the church is “called to hold in ‘redemptive tension’ dual orientation.”55 Its imperfect character, indeed, does not account for discarding the church, but for reforming it. The pilgrim church is itself “an object of the missio Dei, in constant need of repentance and conversion.”56 By its very nature, the church is missionary, yet the church is always “ambiguous in the extreme.” At times it is a true sign and instrument of the kingdom, and at other times it is a most misleading and vulnerable body. It is Bosch’s contention that the new model of the church-in-mission should hold these two extremes together in creative tension.

Bosch stresses that, in taking up its mission in the world, the church should fully and continually be aware of its provisional character. As vanguard of God’s reign and of the new humanity, the church “should neither try to provoke the irruption of the end nor just preserve itself for the end.”57 Rather, the church as a historical reality always points

53 Ibid., 381.
54 Ibid., 381-3.
55 Ibid., 386, 389.
56 Ibid., 387. Bosch then further elaborates the idea of church’s continual repentance within a christological framework: “The missio Dei purifies the church. It sets it under the cross – the only place where it is ever safe. The cross is the place of humiliation and judgment, but it is also the place of refreshment and new birth” (ibid., 519). Bosch’s concept of the pilgrim church thus accords with the important Reformation principle: Ecclesia Reformata, semper reformanda.
57 Ibid., 517-8.
beyond itself rather than at itself. In its mission, the church acknowledges and affirms its own preliminariness and contingency too. As Bosch says of the church, “aware of its provisional character, it lives and ministers as that force within humanity through which the renewal and community of all people is served.”\(^{58}\) Again, the church is only the sign and instrument, but not the kingdom itself. This new understanding of the church, Bosch asserts, leads to a new perception of the relationship between the church and the world.\(^{59}\) The church is no longer considered as “conqueror of the world,” but is in solidarity with the world. Bosch contends that “just as one could not speak of the church without speaking of its mission, it was impossible to think of the church without thinking, in the same breath, of the world to which it is sent.”\(^{60}\) Following the path of its Lord, the pilgrim church orients its life and action towards the world, not away from it. While it looks at the world, however, the church should also look beyond the world. Rather than limiting itself to the world’s agenda, the church anticipates the reign of God in the here and now. Bosch insists that it is “the knowledge of this that gives it confidence to work for the advance of God’s reign in the world, even if it does so with modesty and without claiming to have all the answers.”\(^{61}\)

2.3 Newbigin: Mission in Christ’s Way

Lesslie Newbigin is one of the greatest missionary theologians in the twentieth century.\(^{62}\) He is well-known among a broad spectrum of Christians due to his extensive

\(^{58}\) Ibid., 518.
\(^{59}\) Ibid., 376.
\(^{60}\) Ibid., 377.
\(^{61}\) Ibid., 387.
contributions to missionary work, ecclesial teaching and ecumenical activities. Grounded in his engagement with the theology, missiology, and ecclesiology of the ecumenical movement during the 1950s and 60s, Newbigin’s ecclesiology has emerged into a mature shape after his return to the UK from India. Years of missionary and ecumenical work prompt him to put the church into the centre of his later theological thinking. Like Bosch, Newbigin seeks to reestablish the relationship between the church and mission, thus reconfirming the missionary character of the church in its encounter with the secular world.

For Newbigin, the church cannot be understood merely in terms of its place within a society but must be defined by its relation to God. Likewise, the missionary nature of the church is to be found in its participation in the mission of the triune God. This means that the church’s nature and identity are to be found in continuing the mission of Jesus, who proclaims the Father’s sovereign reign over the world through the power of the Spirit. It is in this trinitarian context that Newbigin develops his idea of “Mission in Christ’s Way”:

What is made possible for us by what Christ is and has done is that we can so live and act that there are created signs of the kingdom, signs and foretastes, enabling people both to enjoy even now a foretaste of the joy and freedom of the kingdom, and also to press forward in confident hope for its full realization.

Weston (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 1-13. For more in-depth study of Newbigin’s theological thought, see George R. Hunsberger, Bearing the Witness of the Spirit: Lesslie Newbigin’s Theology of Cultural Plurality (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); Michael W. Goheen, As the Father has sent me, I am sending you: J.E. Lesslie Newbigin’s Missionary Ecclesiology (Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, 2000).

See Goheen, As the Father has sent me, I am sending you, 102-14. Of course, Newbigin’s early work like The Household of God, One Body, One Gospel, One World and The Relevance of Trinitarian Doctrine for Today’s Mission, are very significant to the formation of his ecclesiology. Our concentration on his later works does not mean to overlook this early development.


Ibid., 30-65.

The “sign” and “foretaste” of the kingdom are commonly used key terms in Newbigin’s work which he employs to express the church’s incompleteness. Arguably, the language of “sign,” “foretaste,” or “instrument” helps Newbigin, and Bosch as well, to get rid of any oversimplified identification between the church and the kingdom, or between the church’s witness and Christ’s mission. Influenced by early ecumenical thinking, Newbigin establishes a robust trinitarian framework for the theology of mission. Despite this, Newbigin never dispenses with his christological emphasis in the development of his missionary ecclesiology. In order to distance himself from a trinitarianism which might downplay the particular role of Christ in the missio Dei, Newbigin starts with the work of God in Jesus Christ and finds in Christ the clue for the church’s mission in the world. In so doing, Newbigin identifies the nature of the church as defined by its call to follow in the way of the Lord. There is no other way in which the church is authorized to carry out its mission.

Basically, Newbigin’s theology of mission refers to an essential connection between the mission of the church and the mission of Jesus Christ. This theology is grounded in the doctrine of election. To be elect in Christ’s church, Newbigin argues, “means to be the bearer of God’s saving purpose for his whole world, to be the firstfruit

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68 A clear example for explaining Newbigin’s insistence on a christocentric position is his debate with Konrad Raiser in the 1990’s. While Raiser considers the “Christocentric-universalist” paradigm for mission in the ecumenical movement to be problematic, Newbigin responds that a trinitarianism without a christological starting point poses greater problems for the mission of the church. See Goheen, As the Father has sent me, I am sending you, 157-62. See further Konrad Raiser, Ecumenism in Transition: A Paradigm Shift in the Ecumenical Movement?, trans. Tony Coates (Geneva: WCC, 1991).
69 As Newbigin says, “Therefore he [the Lamb of God], and he alone, can and does reveal its [the history’s] meaning to those whom he chooses. As they follow the Lamb on the way he went, they bear witness to the true meaning of what is happening in the history of the world” (Newbigin, The Open Secret, 37).
of his blessed kingdom which is for all.”

Therefore, election is God’s selection of those in Christ’s church for missionary responsibility. This responsibility calls for the faithful to bear witness of the salvation of the kingdom and to embody in its corporate life the redemptive purpose of God. Put simply, the church is chosen as “the provisional incorporation of humankind into Christ.”

To be incorporated into the body of Christ, Newbigin stresses, is to be incorporated into his death and resurrection, i.e. to “share his ongoing mission to the world. It is to be baptized into his mission.”

The church, accordingly, living in this paschal mystery, is not an end in itself but always “a movement launched into the world in the same sense in which Jesus is sent into the world by the Father.”

Since the church is only a provisional body, it always looks forward to the fullness of Christ in the whole of humanity. Given its penultimate character, therefore, “mission in Christ’s way” cannot be perfected nor a complete work on earth.

In Newbigin’s understanding, the church as the earthly expression of God’s reign is not an abstract construction removed from its missional identity. Instead, the being of the church is in its being sent into the world to draw all people to Christ. It is “sent, therefore, not only to proclaim the kingdom but to bear in its own life the presence of the kingdom.”

How then does the church fulfill its task in Christ’s way? Newbigin finds that there has been a long tradition in mission theology that roots the mission of the church, not in the gospel and mission of Christ, but in “obedience to a command.”

Since the concept of mission as a mandate given to the church tempts us to see the work of

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71 Weston, *Lesslie Newbigin*, 133.
mission as our good work, Newbigin reminds us that from beginning to end, it remains the mission of God. The mission of the church should be understood in light of the fact that “the meaning of contemporary history is that it is the history of the time between Christ’s ascension and his coming again, … the time in which the full revelation of its power and glory is held back in order that all the nations may have the opportunity to repent and believe in freedom.”

Thus, the ecclesial mission for Newbigin is rooted in the Christ event which reveals and accomplishes the ultimate goal and end of universal history. It is the mission of Christ which “provides both the empowerment and the content of the church’s mission.” In the age “between the times,” therefore, the church makes the kingdom known through its life and deeds as the church proclaims the kingdom’s presence. The church is to bear witness to the truth and the ultimate goal of history by a life “which … by always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus becomes the place where the risen life of Jesus is made available for others (2 Cor. 4:10).”

The blessing and judgment of God’s kingdom is present in the corporate life of the church as in the life of Jesus, according to Newbigin. Yet, it is only in a “secondary,

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76 Ibid., 128.
77 Ibid., 109-11. In his interpretation of Newbigin’s doctrine of election and history, however, Hunsberger seems to overshadow Newbigin’s idea of Christ as the only “clue of history” by the principle of election: “What we are saying is that the event of Christ’s history are not of different order than all others in which God has been present in particular, self-disclosing acts within history. … Christ’s election and that of the people of God before and after him are of the same sort, equally yielding a disclosure of the meaning and end of history, equally sharing the character of ‘one event which bears significance for the whole.’” See Hunsberger, Bearing the Witness of the Spirit, 114-23, here 123.
78 Goheen, As the Father has sent me, I am sending you, 181. In this sketch of the logic of mission, Newbigin reaffirms Christ’s centricity in the church: “the kingdom of God is present in Jesus – incarnate, crucified, risen, and coming in judgment. The life of the church in the midst of the world is to be a sign and foretaste of the kingdom only in so far as its whole life is centered in that reality” (Weston, Lesslie Newbigin, 146).
derivative, but nonetheless real sense” that this reign of God is present in the church.\footnote{Newbigin, \textit{The Open Secret}, 53.} Mission remains “an action of God, putting forth the power of the Spirit to bring the universal work of Christ for the salvation of the world nearer to the completion.”\footnote{Ibid., 60.} The purpose of the church’s mission is thus to bear the witness to and through the Spirit. In its faithfulness to Jesus the church becomes “the place where the Spirit is enabled to complete the Spirit’s work.”\footnote{Newbigin, \textit{Mission in Christ’s Way}, 20.} It is above all the work of the Spirit in the church to continue that which Jesus came to do. Jesus liberates humanity from sin, and advocates a new social order in the secular world.\footnote{Ibid., 29-30.} Because the Spirit as “the active missionary” is sovereign over mission, the church is not so much the agent of mission as it is the locus of mission.

In what sense, then, does Newbigin speak of the presence of the kingdom in the church? Newbigin argues that “the presence of the kingdom, hidden and revealed in the cross of Jesus, is carried through history as it is hidden and revealed in the life of that community which bears in its life the dying and rising of Jesus.”\footnote{Newbigin, \textit{The Open Secret}, 52.} In its hiddenness the kingdom is revealed to those to whom God through his Spirit grants the gift of faith. God’s kingship is surely present in the church, but “it is not the property of the church” \textit{per se}.\footnote{Ibid., 56.} The active agent of mission for Newbigin is always “the free, sovereign, living power of the Spirit of God.”\footnote{Ibid., 56.} The Spirit is “the living, mighty, self-communicating presence of God himself,” who changes both the world and the church and who “always
goes before the church in its missionary journey.” It is thus through the action of the Spirit that the church is launched on its mission. Therefore, it remains the mission of the Spirit. The church, which is not the author of the Spirit’s witness to the kingdom, is where that witness is given and acknowledged. The church’s witness is hence derived from the divine one. The church is witness insofar as “it follows obediently where the Spirit leads.” Living in the power of the Spirit, the church can only be the attentive witnessing servant.

The continuation of Jesus’ mission to the world through the church, therefore, is not simply an enterprise of the church. Rather, it is the work of the living Spirit of God. The church is none other than “the outward form of the continuous work of the Spirit in re-enacting Christ’s coming among men.” As long as the church’s witness is not seen as a separate witness of the Spirit, the church remains a human community which “does not live for itself but is deeply involved in the concerns of its neighborhood.” The church exists for a wider community rather than merely for its own members. This ecclesiological vision, for Newbigin, is always and only designated by reference to two realities. First, God is in Christ and the world. Secondly, the church accordingly is in the world to be the bearer of a revelation of God’s purpose of creation. Just as “Christ on the cross is in one sense totally identified with the world, in another sense totally separated from the world,” so the church engages the world in such a way which “is

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87 Ibid, 56-7.
88 Ibid., 61. Newbigin further stresses that “It is the Spirit who leads the way, opening a door here that the church must then obediently enter, kindling a flame there that the church must lovingly tend” (ibid., 64).
91 Weston, Lesslie Newbigin, 132.
determined by the sense in which Christ is for the world.”92 The church in essence exists “for that place, for that section of the world for which it has been made responsible.”93 Far from being conformed to the world, the church, like Jesus, is sent into the world with a divine call. Since Jesus Christ identified with the created world but overcame the sin that had scarred it by his own cross, so the church “will be recognizable as the bearer of this mission on which the Son sent the church, in so far as the scars of the Passion are recognizable in its body.”94 Through the church which is marked by the “scars of the Passion,” the reign of God challenges the ruling powers of this world.

The task of the church’s witness, for Newbigin, is to bear witness to and through the Spirit of God’s kingdom in Christ. This, however, does not imply a picture of the church triumphant on earth. If the church continues to bear the presence of the kingdom through history, it is “surely not as the community of the righteous in a sinful world.”95 Newbigin’s starting point is always the mission of Christ, and the power of Christ as manifested in a community of sinners. The church represents the presence of God’s reign in the life of the world, not in a triumphalistic sense, but in the sense that “it is the place where the mystery of the kingdom present in the dying and rising of Jesus is made present here and now” for all people.96 In this kingdom now, righteous and unrighteous are enabled to taste and share the love of God. In this sense, the church is the foretaste of the kingdom. The church as the bearer of the kingdom is to experience continually God’s love of reconciliation. On the basis of the mystery of election, Newbigin can conclude that “the reign of God is present in the midst of this sinful, weak, and divided community,

92 Ibid., 134.
93 Ibid.
94 Ibid., 136.
95 Newbigin, The Open Secret, 53.
96 Ibid., 54.
not through any power or goodness of its own, but because God has called and chosen this company of people to be the bearers of his gift on behalf of all people.”

This election and sending of the church also addresses the need for ongoing conversion of the church. Newbigin says, “Mission is not just church extension. It is something more costly and more revolutionary.” Mission for Newbigin is the renewing action of the Spirit, who leads the church towards the fullness of the truth which it has not yet fully grasped. As it lives in the power of the Spirit and shares the “weakness” of Christ, the church “will learn more and more fully what it means that Jesus is the clue to history, its source and its goal.” This sending process is not only part of the church’s missionary journey to the nations, but is also a process of self-purification undertaken by the church itself. The church is “weak” and “under trial,” but the Spirit both assures the church of the coming of the kingdom and gives it hope and makes it anticipate more eagerly its full fruition. The church is therefore a community of hope. We can be steadily to live in confidence because “the witness that confutes the world is not ours; it is that of one greater than ourselves who goes before us.” The task of the church is simply to follow faithfully, and its purpose is that God may be glorified.

2.4 Guder: Mission as Incarnational Witness

Undoubtedly influenced by Bosch and Newbigin, Darrell Guder undertakes the task of overcoming the flaw which separates the gospel benefits that accrue for the

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97 Ibid.
98 Ibid., 59.
100 Newbigin, The Open Secret, 62-3.
101 Ibid., 62.
102 Guder himself mentions their influence on his thinking in The Continuing Conversion of the Church, x-xi.
church’s members from the church’s missional calling to service and witness. In terms of missional church, he seeks to reestablish the basic relationship of the church to its mission. One of his key observations is that, during the centuries of Christendom, Christian mission was understood as “the outward expansion of the Christian culture that was the established religious force in Europe.” The main task of the church in this endeavor was to expand the boundaries of the Christianized world “by diffusion,” in such a way that those gathered into the church could receive the benefits distributed by the church on behalf of God. For Guder, however, the theology of such diffusionist mission that shapes the church’s self-perception as a place where a Christian civilization gathers for individual blessedness is not really missional. The church’s missionary task in this view is not to be understood as that which creates community with respect to missional vocation. Guder points out that beneath this view lies the unquestioned assumption of Western Christians that God wants all people to become westernized Christians. The reality is that, before the early twentieth century, the question of mission virtually did not exist in the major confessional documents of the Western church. Basking in the euphoria of the high optimism of Western culture and civilization, the twentieth century, in turn, “opened with the expectation that soon this magnificent enterprise would realize God’s kingdom on earth.” Thus Guder concludes that, despite the breakdown of historical Christendom, mission by diffusion still remained the way of expanding

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104 Guder, The Continuing Conversion of the Church, 9.
105 Ibid. The term “missional” for Guder is basically considered as “the fundamental, the essential, the centering understanding of the church’s purpose and action,” which perceives the church as God’s sent people giving its true response to God’s missional call. See Guder, “The Church as Missional Community,” 116; idem, Missional Church, 4-5.
106 Guder, The Continuing Conversion of the Church, 10.
107 Ibid., 15.
missionary endeavors in non-Western cultures. The legacy of Christendom continued to influence the contemporary church.\textsuperscript{108} The result of this kind of mission was that invariably Christian communities were formed in the image of the church of the Western-European culture.

This ecclesiocentric understanding of mission, however, “has been replaced during this century by a profoundly theocentric reconceptualization of Christian mission.”\textsuperscript{109} Coupled with the fact that the theology of missio Dei became a focusing theme of missiological discussion in the middle decades of the twentieth century, as Guder puts it, the term “mission” began to be viewed as an essential theological characteristic of God, rather than as merely a strategic expression of a self-expanding church.\textsuperscript{110} As it became increasingly clear that the concept and practice of mission had been mistreated in the past centuries, Guder has argued that the church today should learn to understand God in his act of sending as well as the church’s “sent-outness,” i.e., the fundamental idea of mission.\textsuperscript{111} The church is missional because the God in whom it confesses is a missional God. “The theology of the missio Dei is,” as a consequence, “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.”\textsuperscript{112} This missional reorientation of the definition of the church within the missio Dei emphasizes the vocational being of the church as God’s sent people,\textsuperscript{113} and it is with this theological conviction that Guder develops his missional ecclesiology.

\textsuperscript{109} Guder, \textit{Missional Church}, 4.
\textsuperscript{110} Guder, “The Church as Missional Community,” 121-5.
\textsuperscript{111} Darrell L. Guder, \textit{The Incarnation and the Church’s Witness} (Harrisburg: Trinity Press, 1999), 21-9.
\textsuperscript{112} Guder, “The Church as Missional Community,” 125.
\textsuperscript{113} See Guder, \textit{Missional Church}, 11-2.
Guder, therefore, roots his doctrine of the church in the theology of God and mission. For him, God is a God-in-act, who works in and through human history and becomes knowable in the form of testimony.\(^{114}\) The Bible, as witness to God’s good acts, “testifies to God’s goodness, a goodness which God has made known, has revealed, and which defines God’s purposes.”\(^{115}\) Similar to Bosch, Guder considers God as the subject of mission, who sent his Son into the world as the culmination of his goodness and love, and who continues his mission-in-Christ through the witness of the apostolic community, the church. God’s mission is in this sense historical, proceeding from a certain beginning to a promised conclusion, and thus reaches its climax in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.\(^{116}\) The salvation history that unfolds is therefore “the continuing demonstration of God’s judgment and grace” which always moves towards God’s saving purposes for creation.\(^{117}\) Within the dynamic of this historical context and momentum, the church in mission can look towards the completion of God’s work that was begun in Christ, and the church can move into the world on the way to its eschatological consummation when God fulfills all his promises.\(^{118}\)

\(^{114}\) Guder, The Continuing Conversion of the Church, 28-9.

\(^{115}\) Ibid., 29. Guder finds that “There is a fundamental pattern to God’s self-disclosure throughout all the scriptures.” In order to disregard the distorted assumption that God, understood as a principle or concept, does not intrude in human affairs, Guder specifies an ‘incarnational’ understanding of God’s self-disclosure or self-communication to humanity. In Scripture, “We discover what God is like as we experience God’s love in action. … The plot of God’s salvation history cannot be reduced merely to propositions about God. Rather, the story reveals both what God intends and how God wants his saving purposes accomplished. One way of talking about this essential coherence and congruence of the message and its communication is to describe God’s action as incarnational.” From this, Guder further develops his incarnational model of missional church, and I will explore more his ecclesiology as follows.

\(^{116}\) Ibid., 30-5. Guder, Be My Witnesses, 12-5.

\(^{117}\) Gider, The Continuing Conversion of the Church, 38. Guder summarizes his christological understanding of God’s mission in history that “What makes the gospel truly good news is the fact that the Jesus events are the outcome of God’s loving decision to heal the broken creation. We have described this as God’s mission. To demonstrate divine love, God brought about salvation for all creation in the death of Jesus on the cross. That joyful message is now to be made known to all the world [through the church]. That is how God’s mission now continues” (ibid., 49).

\(^{118}\) Ibid., 46-8.
In Guder’s view of the church as the continuation of Christ’s mission, there are threads of theology and tradition that have been woven together. To articulate his own understanding of missional church, Guder draws on theological insights from his predecessors for his work.119 In accord with Bosch’s emphasis on the *missio Dei* as the basis for the relationship between the church and mission, Guder also takes God’s mission as the point of departure. Yet, Guder in his particular way sees mission as a movement of God throughout history. Mission as God’s movement accordingly “provides the church the content of its witness” and defines how that mission is to be carried out.120 For Guder, as for Newbigin and other ecumenists in 1980s, since this movement shows God’s love towards the world reaching its climax in the person and work of Jesus Christ, a line of connection can be drawn between the pattern of Jesus’ ministry and that of the church’s apostolic mission. “Mission in Christ’s way,” which has been considerably explored in recent mission theology, is hence also a decisive theme and insight that shapes Guder’s missional ecclesiology.121 Through the lens of this christological thinking a new orientation is opened for his incarnational understanding of the church and its mission.

Guder stresses that the mission of the church in following Jesus integrates belief and deed, virtually reflecting the way in which God’s self-communication of his gracious love continually takes shape. By the term “incarnational witness” Guder means that practice of Christian witness is rooted in and shaped by the life and ministry of Jesus.122 The incarnation of Jesus, following this, not only summarizes “the ‘what’ of the gospel,”

119 See ibid., vii-xvi; Guder, *Be My Witnesses*, vii-xiv; and idem, “Incarnation and the Church’s Evangelistic Mission,” 171-84.
120 Guder, “The Church as Missional Community,” 126.
121 Ibid., 126-7; Guder, “Incarnation and the Church’s Evangelistic Mission,” 171-4.
122 Guder, *The Incarnation and the Church’s Witness*, xii.
but also defines “the ‘how’ of the gospel.”\textsuperscript{123} In Christ, “what” God has done for us is intimately connected with “how” God has done it. “This unique incarnation is,” therefore, “at the same time the epitome of God’s way of making himself knowable and experienceable in human history. It is the way of ‘condescension,’ of ‘accommodation’ – it is ‘incarnational.’”\textsuperscript{124} According to Guder, the communication of this good news is now the church’s missional vocation, and “the witness to the unique salvation events of Christ’s incarnation is itself to be incarnational.”\textsuperscript{125} In other words, the church is called into existence in order to “continue to incarnate the presence, the message, and the reality of God in Christ.”\textsuperscript{126} Through the concrete life of the church, God now continues his incarnational mission, as he has carried out the same mission in Christ.

In sum, Guder employs the term “incarnational,” not only to describe God’s act of self-communication, but also to more fully elaborate “Mission in Christ’s way,” which is the church’s way of going about its mission.\textsuperscript{127} At the core of his incarnational approach lies a normative principle or criterion for mission, which is rooted in God’s way of revealing himself supremely in the incarnation of Jesus.\textsuperscript{128} “The humanness of Jesus, and the example of his life,” is accordingly seen as “paradigmatic for the mission activity of

\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., 3.
\textsuperscript{124} Guder, \textit{Be My Witnesses}, 18. Emphasis mine.
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., 20.
\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., 26.
\textsuperscript{127} In other words, Guder’s incarnational approach to mission “defines the way in which we are to do it, modeled upon the way in which Jesus interacted with people during his life” (Guder, “Incarnation and the Church’s Evangelistic Mission,” 179 n31). In his study of incarnational missiology, Ross Langmead comments that “Guder is by far the clearest contributor in the WCC discussion of what it means to engage in mission in Christ’s way.” See Ross Langmead, \textit{The Word Made Flesh: Towards an Incarnational Missiology} (Lanham: University Press of America, 2004), 201.
\textsuperscript{128} In reviewing John’s Mackey’s discussion of the “incarnational principle,” Guder explains that, according to this principle, “the witness must identify oneself ‘in the closest possible manner’ with one’s environment” (Guder, “Incarnation and the Church’s Evangelistic Mission,” 178). Relatedly, he also recognizes that “the enfleshment of the Word is the climax of a long, incarnational process in which God had been entering into the experience and history of his creation in many ways, to disclose himself, his purposes, and his will, to guide as well as to reprove his people” (Guder, \textit{Be My Witnesses}, 18).
the church.”

In effect, Guder’s incarnational approach to mission becomes “an ethic of evangelism, based upon the humanity of Christ, whose life and actions are as much the norm of obedient Christian living as are his words.”

In his humanity Christ is the model for the church’s practice. The ongoing incarnational ministry of the church is to be “the continuation of Christ’s work, not to do what he did not do, but to carry out the meaning of what was accomplished through him.” The ethical dimension of the church’s incarnational witness based on such exemplarist Christology thus constitutes a fundamental concern of Guder’s missional ecclesiology.

The application of the incarnational principle as the church’s service of witness, for Guder, indicates that “God’s incarnational action, especially in its epitome in Christ, must continue – and it must do so incarnationally.”

The formation of the missional community is “God’s strategy for making good news known to the world.” Just as the Father sent the incarnate Son into the world as the supreme form of the gospel’s embodiment, so the Son brings forth the church “to carry out its witness as the continuing and expanding embodying of God’s love for the world.” Based on the ethical implication of Guder’s incarnational approach, witness in all its aspects functions as “the constant presentation, through the life of the faith community, of evidence that points

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130 Ibid. Emphasis mine.
131 Guder, Be My Witnesses, 27.
132 In concluding one of his essays, Guder says, “But that is our work, and it constitutes our witness, and it must be the focus both of our theological efforts and their translation into the structures and practices of our witnessing communities” (Guder, “Worthy Living,” 432).
133 Guder, Be My Witnesses, 25, emphasis mine. In other words, “the word must always become flesh, embodied in the life of the called community.” See idem, The Incarnation and the Church’s Witness, 22.
134 Ibid., 21. The formation of this community, of course, is not an introverted idea, but rather supposes an outwardly ethical response to its call: “God’s intention in revelation is that there be response, that God be recognized and submitted to and served” (Guder, The Continuing Conversion of the Church, 59).
135 Guder, The Incarnation and the Church’s Witness, 39.
people to God and demonstrates the truth of the gospel.”

Through the church’s obedient response to God’s missional calling, God’s love is “enfleshed” in that act and becomes visible to the world. This incarnational reality, now demonstrated by the church’s witness, is rooted in the church’s submission to Jesus Christ. From Christ the church discerns its mission and faithfully learns “what it means and how to do it.” To learn Jesus’ way of living is to make possible the practice of the love of God among us. Thus, the gospel, as a message which is lived out, “is to be incarnated in our relationships.”

The enfleshment of the gospel and God’s love, for Guder, also implies the multicultural character of the incarnational mission. As Jesus initiates his mission opening up opportunities for sharing the good news to all nations, his church will be able to ‘translate’ the gospel in every culture in distinctive and appropriate ways. “Mission is,” thereby, “to be a continuing process of translation and witness.” In this light, every human culture is both honored by the gospel witness as well as challenged by it. The incarnational mission always demonstrates that the presence of Christ not only heals every dimension of human brokenness, but also judges all distorted structures of human power and authority. In reality, however, there are “profound contradictions between the message of the gospel of love and the unloving way in which Christian frequently live as communities.” Guder finds that the church often reduces its essential missionary character or misunderstands mission and evangelization to be merely a method, or in
terms of effectiveness, and manageable tasks. It is precisely in this situation that Guder calls for the continuing conversion of the church towards a deeper obedience to the fullness of the gospel. In the midst of our ambiguous human reality, Guder warns us that the church should encounter again and again the power of the gospel in order to evade any reductionist view of the church and mission. The continuing conversion of the church, therefore, should go forth in repentance and with forgiveness. For as Guder has said, “the community incarnates its witness to love … in its honest admission of its own sin. … In other words, the community enfleshes the gospel of love as it lives out its forgiveness before all the world.” The church undergoes continual conversion “to Christ’s salvation and thus to his mission.”

2.5 Conclusion and Evaluation

We have laid out a theological framework for missional ecclesiology through the works of Bosch, Newbigin, and Guder. The ecumenical reflections within the WCC community establish the foundation for developing a missional ecclesiology which calls for rethinking the basic underlying assumption about the church and its participation in the missio Dei. This ecclesiology affirms the primacy of the missio Dei movement and considers the church as God’s agent of reconciliation through its continuation of what has been done in and by Christ. Just as Christ came to announce and demonstrate the coming kingdom of God, so the missional church, God’s sent people, serves as the sign and witness of the presence of the kingdom. As we examined above, missional ecclesiology,

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143 For Guder’s understanding of the “reduction of the gospel,” see Guder, The Continuing Conversion of the Church, 97-119.
144 Ibid., 150-63.
145 Guder, The Incarnation and the Church’s Witness, 46.
146 Guder, The Continuing Conversion of the Church, 159.
while speaking of the function of the church, also acknowledges human weakness and sinfulness. In its earthly journey, the missional church is continually empowered anew to participate in the *missio Dei*. The church in mission always points beyond itself towards the full realization of God’s kingdom. But what does it mean to be missional, especially in terms of the church’s participation in the *missio Dei* movement? How does the church continue Christ’s mission, or how does Christ send his church into the world? Is there any significant difference between the ecclesial mission and Christ’s mission?

Missional ecclesiology develops a theological construct of the extension of the incarnation to help answer these basic questions. In so doing, the church may be regarded as a dynamic cultural expression of Christ’s followers in any given place. The church’s incarnational witness therefore enfleshes the presence of Christ in the world.¹⁴⁷ This emphasis upon the continuity of Christ and his church implies that Christ fits within another context. This context is the movement of *missio Dei*, which provides the ultimate ground for understanding Christ and his mission.¹⁴⁸ Through the church in mission, the world may see Christ and know his mission, in such a way that the church and its mission could be substituted for Christ without significant loss. Specifically, the church embodies and replaces the missional presence of Christ in and for the world. The danger is that Christology is reduced to ethics and Christ’s mission becomes a call for the people of God gathered to imitate and follow. Since God sends and he reveals the incarnational reality of salvation to the world through his embodied act in Christ and in the church,

¹⁴⁷ In Guder’s words, “Our Lord intended, in preparing his disciples for their ministry, that they proclaim the message so that people might hear, and that they *incarnate* the reality and meaning of that message in their lives individually and corporately, so that their message will be visible and audible” (*Be My Witnesses*, 27, emphasis mine).

¹⁴⁸ Guder puts it in this way: “The gospel is the person and work of Jesus as the salvation event toward which God’s mission has been moving and from which that mission now moves into the entire world [through the church]” (*The Continuing Conversion of the Church*, 49).
Christ and his church are led by the same divine power to the same missional goal. In the person of Jesus Christ, the ‘pattern’ of the incarnate life becomes the determining factor in the church’s missional life. The incomparability of Christ to all others, or the unrepeatable once-and-for-all character of the Christ event, is as such deemphasized. Christ’s saving significance is diminished to the degree that his presence and its impact upon the world have no crucial difference from the witness of the church.

Bosch and Newbigin, indeed, do not reduce missio Dei theology to an incarnational principle. While they never identify the church with the kingdom of God, they emphasize that the primary agency of mission is always divine and that the church’s witness is in turn secondary and derivative. In missio Dei, for them, human work is chosen as God’s instrument but human effort cannot replace the divine work. Seeing the church as the divinely given agent of mission, with a kind of interdependence between human agency and divine mission, Bosch distinguishes his position from the ecclesiocentric missiology in the past. His trinitarian and eschatological perspective attempts to guarantee the ontological difference between the church and the kingdom. Newbigin, on the other hand, illustrates the dependence of the church’s mission upon the power and mission of the Spirit. It is the hidden power of the Spirit that leads the church

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149 In Guder’s understanding of incarnatio continua, “The incarnation, as a once-and-for-all event, continues to be a contemporary reality for us as we discover that Jesus came to show us how to be obedient, how to translate the message into our relationships and action, and how to be a discipling community constantly being discipled by its Master” (Be My Witnesses, 29, emphasis mine). This kind of language suggests a picture in which God’s agency in the incarnation is supplemented and perfected by human agency. The ‘how’ of our obedience takes precedence over the ‘that’ of God’s once for all act. Some recent works about the missional church are highly practical field manuals that give step-by-step instructions for the church to be ‘missional.’ For example, Rick Rouse and Craig Van Gelder, A Field Guide for the Missional Congregation: Embarking on a Journey of Transformation (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2008); Alan Hirsch and Darrellin Altcass, The Forgotten Ways Handbook: A Practical Guide for Developing Missional Churches (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009); Clayton J. Schmit, Sent and Gathered: A Worship Manual for the Missional Church (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009).

into mission. What constitutes the church is therefore invisible, namely, the calling of God, the election in Christ, and the work of the Spirit. Nevertheless the works of Bosch and Newbigin are significant for the development of missional ecclesiology. They stress that the church is missionary by its very nature in a way that it should interact with and impact culture. They reject both the Hoekendijkian world-oriented view of mission and the traditional view which takes mission to be the church’s project or enterprise. In light of this, missional ecclesiology, as already seen in Guder’s account, bears upon the task of giving shape and meaning to the relationship of the church to its mission in a “post-Christian pluralistic era.” We have shown that Guder seeks to justify his claim that God’s mission now continues incarnationally through the church’s witness. The church is accordingly conceived as an incarnational reality which represents God’s distinctive and transformative presence in the world. The term “incarnational” is thus employed to define “God’s way of entering into human history and culture.” In this understanding, as Guder says, the purpose of missional church being sent is “to demonstrate before the world the nature of love and healing that God had made real for all in Christ.”

Through its engagement with society and culture, therefore, the missional church exists in the world with the goal witnessing and showing forth the living divine reality. In other words, the church which serves as the sign and foretaste of the kingdom, reflects the very character of the incarnate God. This theological proposal, as Guder argues, defines

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151 See also, for instance, Guder, *Missional Church*, 3-7.
the distinctiveness of the church from the world in practice.\textsuperscript{156} This kind of incarnationalism, while rightly affirming the significance of ecclesial practice and ethics, may lead to a loss of the ontological distinction and correlation between Christ and the church. It seems that God’s incarnational ways of being in the world that constitute Christian mission are considered more determinative than the incarnation \textit{per se}.\textsuperscript{157} Theologians like Guder who promote “incarnational” as a guiding principle may be rightly concerned with the \textit{embodied} character of the church’s mission and the cultural concreteness of its visibility. However, they seem to pay insufficient attention to the concept of the relation-in-distinction between the invisible and visible aspects of the church.\textsuperscript{158} Their works have not stated very clearly the permanent priority of divine agency and the derivative character of ecclesiology and missiology. As a result, there is a tendency in such ecclesiologies to conflate divine and human agency under the incarnational-missional rubric. While such may not be the intention of these authors, their lack of a robust theology of grace leaves them open to the charge.\textsuperscript{159} At times, missional ecclesiology shows an apparent transference of agency from Christ to church, thus running the risk of absorbing the \textit{missio Dei} into the \textit{missiones ecclesiae} which could lead to a kind of ecclesial activism. Under this kind of theological construction, the ecclesial action is taken to demonstrate “the renewing and healing power of God’s new

\textsuperscript{156} Guder, \textit{The Continuing Conversion of the Church}, 121.
\textsuperscript{157} See, for instance, Guder, \textit{Be My Witnesses}, 18-32.
\textsuperscript{158} For the development of the Reformed view of the invisible-visible church, see Paul D. L. Avis, \textit{The Church in the Theology of the Reformers} (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2002).
\textsuperscript{159} For instance, the incarnational emphasis prompts Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch to view the church’s missional ministry and action as \textit{sacrament}, through which God’s mighty acts in history may be present. For details, see Frost and Hirsch, \textit{The Shaping of Things to Come}, 134-45.
community,” more than a human response to God’s prior action. The reality of God is in turn ecclesially constituted, only by means of the incarnational witness of the church.

We have already explored how, in the missional church, human actions extend the logic of Jesus’ mission. At the heart of missional ecclesiology there is placed an account of incarnational and exemplarist Christology which characterizes the incarnate Christ as the primary model of mission at the expense of an ontological understanding. The missional formulation of the church’s continuation of Christ’s mission, however, requires the critical guidance of a Christology, especially in terms of the church’s being the body of the (unique) Christ, which will help this formulation to achieve greater clarity, as far as its missionary aim and motive are concerned. Bosch and Newbigin, whose works address the invisible aspect of the church, do not explicitly appeal to a robust Christology affirming the church’s existence in Christ as visible and invisible. This deficiency is one of the chief factors which reveal the need for the further development of missional ecclesiology in a theologically convincing way. The missio Dei tends to be dissolved into human activity, and as a consequence merely referring to divine agency is not of itself sufficient. In the midst of this deficiency, we will now turn to two giants in the twentieth century theology, Barth and Balthasar, who ground the church and

161 Of course, missional ecclesiology also has its pneumatological dimension that pave the way for this activist understanding of the church, according to which the Spirit shapes the missional community accordingly through an ongoing process of social cultivation. See, for instance, Guder, *Missional Church*, 142-82. In my opinion, this pneumatological consideration comes very close to the post-liberal approach, such as the ecclesologies of Stanley Hauerwas and Reinhard Hütter. The focal point of this study, however, is Christology, but to do in this way does not mean to underestimate the significance of pneumatology which will be later addressed at certain crucial points such as Barth’s subjective realization of reconciliation and Balthasar’s Marian principle of the church.
162 For an incarnational understanding of the church as the body of Christ, see Guder, *Be My Witnesses*, 27-32.
163 Instead, Newbigin’s ecclesiology seeks to recover “the intrinsic missionary character of the Holy Spirit” and considers the Spirit as the primary agent of mission in the sphere of the church. See further Goheen, *As the Father has sent me, I am sending you*, 181-9.
its mission in Christology and seek to evade any ecclesiocentric implication for the church’s mission. For Barth and Balthasar, a full ecclesiology always describes the dynamic relationship between God and his community, or between divine initiative and human response. This asymmetry determines the way in which the church understands itself and its mission. In the following chapters we will examine the ecclesiologies of these Swiss theologians and show their christological concentrations which may provide an alternative to prevent the danger of confusing the divine with the human. This is the danger which missional ecclesiology has hardly been able to avoid.
CHAPTER 3
BARTH’S DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION AS THE CONTEXT OF ECCLESIOLOGY

3.1 Introduction: Barth as a Missionary Theologian

Karl Barth is a controversial figure in the history of mission theology. For the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ he challenges the church and its theology to account for the utter transcendence of God’s revelation and the pure gratuitousness of divine freedom and grace. Of great importance for the development of *missio Dei* theology is the impact of his tendency to emphasize the relation between the divine prior act and human posterior response as the essential nature of mission. Some works in missiology have reflected an appreciation for his dialectical position, particularly as developed in the 1930s.¹ These works have evidenced Barth’s influence as a corrective for the church in need of a close connection to its mission.² Bosch, for instance, calls Barth “the first clear exponent of a new theological paradigm which broke radically with an Enlightenment approach to theology.”³ More specifically, Johannes Aagaard declares that “practically all aspects of modern Protestant missiology have some relation to the theology of Barth,”

³ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 390. Bosch further says that Barth’s influence on missionary thinking “reached a peak at the Willingen Conference of the IMC (1952)) (ibid.). See also Gary M. Simpson, “A Reformation is a Terrible Thing to Waste: A Promising Theology for an Emerging Missional Church,” in *The Missional Church in Context: Helping Congregations Develop Contextual Ministry*, ed. Craig Van Gelder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 74-76 (especially n29). However, in *The Witness of God*, John Flett argues and shows that there is no textual evidence that Barth interacts with the missiological discussions in the context of the ecumenical missionary conference and as such contributes his insights to the development of *missio Dei* theology: Barth “never articulates something similar to the central *missio Dei* affirmation that ‘God is a missionary God.’ The eventual Trinitarian grounding of mission as articulated at Willingen 1952 affirms creation and culture as central to mission, and it does so in overt opposition to a christological emphasis. Barth’s attempt to dislocate mission from creation is precisely the approach against which *missio Dei* theology reacts.” See Flett, *The Witness of God*, 122.
and notes that Barth’s dialectical theology “has since then been the back-bone of the reorientation in Protestant missiology.” Whether or not the theology of *missio Dei* has “Barthian origins,” the influence of this Protestant theologian continues to be significant in Christian missionary reflection until today.

If one considers Barth’s stress on divine sovereignty negatively, one could read Barth as pointing to “missionary inadequacies.” Critics often accuse Barth of dualism or Christomonism which sees Barth as dislocating human activity or human participation in the story of salvation. Combine this with his categorical rejection of natural theology as well as his “universalistic tendency,” and Barth is, as John Flett puts it, “monotonously depicted as representative of the position one should avoid. Reference to Barth hinders mission.” Another charge that missionary theologians often level against Barth is his seeming lack of direct reference to missions within his voluminous *Church Dogmatics*. Waldron Scott, for example, makes a claim that Barth only devotes just over four pages

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5 See, for instance, Gregory Alan Robertson, *Vivit! Regnat! Triumphat!: The Prophetic Office of Jesus Christ, the Christian life and the Mission of the Church in Karl Barth’s Church Dogmatics IV/3* (Th.D. diss., University of Toronto, 2003); Paul S. Chung, *Christian Mission and a Diakonia of Reconciliation: A Global Reframing of Justification and Justice* (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2008); Wessel Bentley, *The Notion of Mission in Karl Barth’s Ecclesiology* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010). Moreover, the Center for Barth Studies at Princeton Theological Seminary held its fifth annual conference on Barth with the theme “The Church is As Such a Missionary Church: Barth as a ‘Missional Theologian’” in 2010. The presentation papers are in the progress for publication edited by Guder.
8 Based on his view on the universal significance of Christ’s saving death, Barth is often accused of ignoring the need to repent and undercutting the role of human agency. As George Hunsinger comments, one common reason for resisting Barth’s tendency of universalism is “the supposed impact it would have on weakening the church’s mission of evangelism.” See George Hunsinger, *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 12 n16.
of this monumental work to the specific topic of worldwide mission. Admittedly, Barth accomplished his most focused and mature work on theology of Christian witness in the seven years after Willingen. Nowhere, however, did he refer to that particular conference or any other. This seeming ‘disinterest’ in the historical development of mission theology as reflected in the *Church Dogmatics* could threaten to stifle the missionary zeal which has emerged in modern times and therefore lead some commentators to question “whether Barth’s ecclesiology is sufficient to sustain the witness that he thought was intrinsic to Christianity.”

As it relates to our concern, the pressing question is whether Barth’s whole *Church Dogmatics* project, not the least of which his ecclesiology, sufficiently grants legitimacy to the church’s missionary agency. To avoid misunderstanding or misreading, it must be made clear what Barth is trying to achieve. Barth sees his theological task as the re-envisioning of the Christian faith and reorienting the work of theology and ministry in a fashion which breaks with the dominant traditions of ecclesial and academic practice. Instead, Barth repositions the reality of God’s acts within the divine economy and its relationship to human agency. However, Barth’s peculiar rhetoric and methodology, along with his extreme position, may often discourage readers from giving full-scale and honest reflections upon his work. His views on any given topic can hardly be found in a

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12 As John Webster puts it, “Barth’s rhetoric – his overall strategy of communication – makes some particular and very heavy demands on his readers. This is not particularly a matter of vocabulary. … It is more than that many features of Barth’s way of writing – sentence structure, frequent duplication or triplication
linear thread of argument, but one gains a perspective on his arguments in the interplay of a range of articulations of a theme. This theological method of unifying Christian doctrines as a whole, especially in the *Church Dogmatics*, aims to “instruct the reader in the sheer magnitude, worth and surpassing significance of these realities.”\textsuperscript{13} The vigor of his writing thus demands a task of careful and thorough reading in order for the reader to be more alert to the larger context of the dogmatic whole.

From the past, we find that missionary theologians, like Hendrik Kraemer or Willem Visser’t Hooft, retrieved Barth’s thought mainly from his debate with German missiology and liberal theology during 1920s and 1930s.\textsuperscript{14} What seems to be omitted in this treatment of Barth’s ‘earlier’ theology is an attempt to set Barth’s early work in relation to the wider scope of the church’s christological confession.\textsuperscript{15} In the contemporary missional church movement, on the other hand, conversation partners give more attention to Barth’s mature ecclesiology, particularly his discussion of “the sending of the community of the Holy Spirit” in *CD IV/3*.\textsuperscript{16} Rather than building upon a polarity of God and humanity, those in the missional church movement often find in Barth a way of words, modes of address and appeal to the reader, patterns of argument, use of irony, humour or interrogation, adducing of evidence from authorities – all conspire together to position writer and reader in such a way that a particular kind of encounter is generated.” See John Webster, *Karl Barth* (London: Continuum, 2000), 49.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 52.
\textsuperscript{14} For Visser’t Hooft’s critique of Barth, see Ustorf, *Sailing on the Next Tide*, 104-5.
\textsuperscript{15} In *The Theology of Karl Barth*, 86-113, Balthasar explains that the development of Barth’s thought undertakes a “conversion to analogy.” After Balthasar, the idea that the change of Barth’s earlier dialectical and eschatological theology to his Christology of the *Church Dogmatics* is one from “dialectic to analogy” enjoys considerable authority. In order to avoid one-sided reading, however, Webster argues that “a more complex picture of Barth’s early development is required than one which assimilates it to one simple motif (dialectic). … From the beginning Barth says ‘no’ in order to learn how to say ‘yes’” (Webster, *Karl Barth*, 22-4). See further Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectic Theology: Its Genesis and Development, 1909-1936* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995).
\textsuperscript{16} That is, the section “§72 The Holy Spirit and the Sending of the Christian Community” in *CD IV/3*. 
of thinking which is more affirmative or ‘analogical’ and less oppositional. Despite this shift of focus towards Barth’s ecclesiology, very few theologians shed light on Barth’s conception of the church within the larger structure of the *Church Dogmatics* and the doctrine of reconciliation. What becomes evident is that the ecclesiological writings in *CD IV* have yet to receive a thorough examination, particularly with regard to the rise of missional ecclesiology. That is the reason why this section seeks to explain that Barth’s view of the church as witness is profoundly grounded in an ethics of reconciliation which includes the active life of human beings in conjunction with the activity of a sovereign God.

As Barth himself states, the doctrine of reconciliation, *CD IV*, forms the convergent center of his entire *magnus opus*. Far from offering simply an account of salvation, the exposition of this doctrine of reconciliation is interwoven with Christology, soteriology, harmartiology (the doctrine of sin), pneumatology, ecclesiology and a theology of the Christian life. Collectively these theological reflections are assembled in three complementary, similarly structured passages of argument - IV/1, IV/2 and IV/3.

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17 Among them, Flett develops a trinitarian principle from Barth to confirm the missionary nature of the church: “As there is no breach in the being and act of God, so there can be no breach in the being and act of his community. The Christian community is a missionary community, or she is not the Christian community” (Flett, *The Witness of God*, 292-3). See also Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church*, 121-31; Hunsberger, *Bearing the Witness of the Spirit*, 204-215; Chung, *Christian Mission and a Diakonia of Reconciliation*, 180-91.

18 See, for instance, Darrell L. Guder, “Practical Theology in the Service of the Missional Church,” in *Theology in Service of the Church: Essays in Honor of Joseph D. Small 3rd*, ed. Charles A. Wiley et al (Geneva: Geneva Press, 2008), 13-22. Here Guder discusses in *CD IV/3* “the basic forms of service in and through which the community carries out its missional vocation” (ibid., 18-22), but does not really put this in the framework of the doctrine of reconciliation that he has outlined (ibid., 16-7). While he concludes with a reflection on “the continuing formation of the communities and their members” (ibid., 22), Guder’s ethical approach distances himself from Barth’s consistent presentation of God and humanity as agents in a differentiated fellowship as parties to the covenant of grace.

19 Barth says in the foreword of *CD IV*, “I have been very conscious of the very special responsibility laid on the theologian at this centre of all Christian knowledge. To fail here is to fail everywhere. To be on the right track here makes it impossible to be completely mistaken in the whole” (*CD IV/1*: ix).
Together they form “a carefully orchestrated set of repetitions, echoes and variations.”

In this intellectual complex, Barth takes ecclesiology to be one aspect of the subjective realization of Christ’s atonement, and as a result one of the historical consequences of his completed work.

The rest of this chapter will thus lay out Barth’s doctrine of reconciliation as a theological framework within which one may understand the nature and mission of the church. Reconciliation’s objective accomplishment and its subjective realization, for Barth, are specifically characterized as the truth of human existence. After setting forth Barth’s theological and ethical basis for the church in *CD IV*, we will focus in the next chapter on the ecclesiological sections and their missiological implications.

### 3.2 The Objective Accomplishment of Reconciliation in Humanity

Barth’s doctrine of reconciliation is in fact a christological treatise which references the re-establishment of the human world as part of its internal structure. His doctrine seeks to give a vivid sense of Jesus’ gospel as a human reality, since reconciliation is “the fulfillment of the covenant between God and man.”

Reconciliation, therefore, is “the resumption of a fellowship” between God and humanity. For Barth, the history of Jesus is the history of God with us, i.e., the history of covenant. In the one life history of Jesus as fulfilled in his cross, the humiliation of the Son of God has taken place for our justification, and has unified us with the exaltation of the Son of Man for our

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20 Webster, *Karl Barth*, 115.
21 Barth also includes other topics like handling of sin (pride, sloth and falsehood), soteriological treatment (justification, sanctification and vocation) and individual Christian life (faith, love and hope) as the subjective realization of the atonement. These topics, for sure, are not unrelated in Barth’s comprehensive account of atonement (or reconciliation).
23 *CD IV/1*: 22.
sanctification. As the two elements of a single action, humiliation and exaltation are not to be seen as two different stages of his life history, but as “the exaltation which came to man in this unity took place and is always grounded in God’s humiliation.”

In other words, in Jesus’ history it is “the self-humiliated Son of God who is also exalted man. He himself is always the subject of this history.” The exaltation of humanity is ordered by the deity of Christ. It is always in his “high humility” that God speaks and acts as the one who has reconciled the world to himself and who gives humanity a part in his divinity.

For this reason, for Barth, it is essential “to see that this is the character of the self-humiliation of God in Jesus Christ as the presupposition of our reconciliation.”

We will need to explore what has been objectively accomplished in the movement of “God to man,” through the condescension of the Son of God. In Barth’s view, the way of obedience as the incarnation of the holy Son is grounded in the immanent being of God, who is “able and free” to show his love in this way. It is “his sovereign grace that he wills to be and is amongst us in humility, our God, God for us.” Since the self-humiliation of God in his Son is genuine and real, there is no reservation with respect to his solidarity with the world. He humbles himself taking our status in order to be our companion in that status. “God for us” thus means that “God in Jesus Christ has taken our place when we become sinners, when we become his enemies, when we stand as such under his accusation and curse, and bring upon ourselves our own destruction.” To judge the world, the Son of God “became man, one of us, our brother, our fellow in the

24 CD IV/2: 47.
25 Ibid., 71. Emphasis mine.
26 CD IV/1: 159; CD IV/2: 70-1.
27 CD IV/1: 195.
28 Ibid., 192-3.
29 Ibid., 216.
human situation.” He was the judge who was judged in our place. Jesus Christ is a human like us, but his existence is not limited only functioning as archetype. That Jesus is “for us” cannot be reduced to “a ‘with us’ … in which he is simply the author and initiator of what has to be fulfilled in and through us on the same level.” On the contrary, Jesus Christ is “for us in himself, quite independently of how we answer the question which is put to us of our fulfillment with or after him.” What has fully happened in his incarnation - “his activity as our representative and substitute” - excludes any need for completion.

This purely divine action, “the true fulfillment of what God had to do for us in Jesus Christ,” is the very passion of Christ. By taking the place of us sinners, and through his suffering, Christ not only fulfills the divine judgment on humanity, but also reestablishes covenant fellowship between God and humanity. That Christ represents us in his humanity means that in him “we find and see ourselves as we really are.” As our substitute, God in Christ has taken over from us our being in sin, thereby taking responsibility for it and forgiving our own sin in him. In our place,

he himself willed to become [what we are], in order to take and transform it from within, to make of it something new, the being of man reconciled with Himself. Our being in sin is now in his hands: as such in all its reality it is no longer in our own hands. It is no longer the object of our care and anxiety before him as our judge.

The mystery of humanity as such is to be found in the person and mission of the Son because, in his person, “it is the eternal God himself who has given himself in his Son to

30 Ibid., 222.
31 Ibid., 229.
32 Ibid., 229f. Wendell Sanford Dietrich reminds us that “Barth’s understanding of this matter is anticipated in III 2,” in Christ and the Church, according to Barth and Some of his Roman Catholic Critics (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1960), 15-53, here 32 n1.
33 CD IV/1: 244.
34 Ibid., 241f.
be man, and as man to take upon himself this human passion”; it is in his mission because he is “the judge who in this passion takes the place of those who ought to be judged [and] allows himself to be judged in their place.”36 By virtue of this, the passion of Christ is a “unique occurrence.” It is reconciling because it is for us and “we have to do with God’s act for us.”37 This is the divine judgment in which the judge was judged and is therefore “the divine action of atonement” which has taken place for us. For Barth, the christological groundwork of the whole doctrine of reconciliation simply stated is that “the Lord who came to us was and did all this for us,” and this stands as comprehensive of all that follows.38

The telos of the divine judgment in Christ can be only the redemption and exaltation of humanity. It is this “second aspect” of the work of reconciliation to which we now turn our attention.39 The exposition of this aspect, for Barth, is “never more than a repetition and confirmation of its christological starting-point.” It is primarily the man Jesus, who “cannot be only as the object in the event of atonement, but also becomes an active subject.”40 In the event of reconciliation, by no means is this particular human being an unimportant or incidental figure, who could be mentioned only in passing or not at all. He has no independent existence as separate from God. Rather, his true humanity is achieved in a history, namely, the history of the exaltation of human beings to God. In fact, “it is completed in its occurrence as the act of God – a being which does not cease as

36 Ibid., 246.
37 Ibid., 247-55.
38 Ibid., 273.
39 In CD IV/2: 4-6, Barth says, on the first aspect “the whole work of reconciliation has shown itself to be a mighty movement from above to below, i.e., from God to man,” and on the second aspect “the atonement is wholly and utterly a movement from below to above, the movement of reconciled man to God.”
40 Ibid., 19-20.
such to be a becoming: *et homo factus est.*"\(^{41}\) In other words, the true man Jesus is present in the concrete coexistence of God and humanity in one and the same history. This does not involve “an alteration of the human nature, but it means that this nature experiences the additional development of participating directly in the majesty of God, and of enjoying in its creatureliness every perfection of the uncreated essence of God.”\(^{42}\) In the humanity of Christ, “the Godhead present could directly reveal itself as a new and divine element of life entering the world of men, directly accomplishing its reconciliation with God and directly imparting to it its new and eternal life.”\(^{43}\) Thus, as Paul says,

> if any anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us (2 Cor 5:17-9).

This determination of humanity is grounded in the direct and effective “confrontation of the totality of the divine with the human in the one Jesus Christ” where “the divine rules and reveals and gives that the human serves and attests and mediates.”\(^{44}\)

Thus we may say that: on the basis of his doctrine of the incarnation, or the doctrine of the hypostatic union, Barth asserts that, because Jesus as the God-man embraces both sides of the covenant relationship, the unconditionedness of divine grace and our exaltation to the full humanity are both integral to the same movement of his irreplaceable history. As the “definitive and indestructible fulfillment of being,” Jesus’ history has not only provided a common ontological basis for all human beings but has

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\(^{41}\) Ibid., 46.
\(^{42}\) Ibid., 77.
\(^{43}\) Ibid.
\(^{44}\) Ibid., 86, 116.
also determined the future of all humanity. Barth’s reconsideration of classical incarnational Christology, in this way is striking in terms of his overall structure as it centers on God involving human beings in partnership with him:

in the man Jesus even sinful man is confronted by the one in whom the divine decision has been made concerning him, in whom there is already resolved and accomplished his deliverance from sin, his elevation, his restoration as a true covenant-partner of God.\(^{45}\)

Since Jesus’ historical progress is no mere contingent event, but God’s self-positing act, it grounds and frames all other histories as their ratio essendi. As Barth says, “there is no sinful man who is not affected and determined with and by his existence.”\(^{46}\) In him, we are “forced to understand what has to be said about the connexion between the man Jesus and all other men in ontological and for this very reason in dynamic terms.”\(^{47}\) Thus, for Barth, the ontological determination of humanity in Christ opens the way for every human being to freely and fully participate in the covenant with God, in the service of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:19).

Barth uses the unity of God and humanity in Christ as a measure, according to which “divinity is said to exercise its power in founding rather than suppressing created being, and created being is said to maintain and fulfill self, not independently of such agency, but in essential dependence upon it.”\(^{48}\) As John Webster correctly observes, this proposal seeks to “state how God is the ground, not the abolition, of our human

\(^{45}\) Ibid., 281. “Thus the exaltation of man means union with God, primarily and fundamentally in the uniqueness of the hypostatic union, but also derivatively in the fellowship of all men with God. But all this is effected in such a fashion that the differences between creature and Creator is not blurred, but maintained and established” (Dietrich, Christ and the Church, 44).

\(^{46}\) CD IV/2: 281.

\(^{47}\) Ibid., 282. Emphasis mine.

\(^{48}\) Kathryn Tanner, God and Creation in Christian Theology: Tyranny or Empowerment? (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 85.
Within the covenant of grace, we see that humanity has no independent existence in abstraction from Christ. The history of Jesus, rather, is “viewed as included in that of every human being.” The being of the human agent is therefore “not self-given but is ontologically dependent on and derivative from the election of [the] humanity in Jesus Christ.” Human agency can only draw its substance from the human reality of Christ. This does not imply a denial of the reality of human acts, for there remain two subjects. In the ontology of covenant, Barth underscores, “there is not merely safeguarded the sovereignty of God, of Jesus Christ and of the Holy Spirit, but also the freedom of the human partner is preserved from dissolution.”

This leads us to discuss the ‘effectiveness’ of reconciliation. How does Jesus’ history affect our own histories? How can the reconciliation accomplished in Christ be exactly our own reconciliation with God? Far from inventing a theory of human knowledge or fulfillment, Barth retains his christological focus in order to dispel any misconception that the subjective realization of reconciliation can be made an independent theme. In fact, the objective accomplishment of reconciliation in Christ is not something which comes to be possessed by virtue of our existence and acts. We should rather “hold fast not only to the objectivity of reconciliation as such and its

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49 Webster, *Barth’s Moral Theology*, 89.
50 George Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of his Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 109. Barth further asks and explains: “What would we know of the covenant of grace, and of man as God’s partner in its history, if we knew nothing of Jesus Christ? In him the history begins and proceeds. He, or God through him, makes man a partner in this covenant. Together with him, as one whom God has set at his side and exalted to be his brother, man is this partner of God. … So each man as such … has a part in his history and without it would have no history of his own. He could not know his own history as human (in distinction from purely natural) history apart from his share in the history of Jesus Christ” (Chrl, 20). See also Paul T. Nimmo, *Being in Action: The Theological Shape of Barth’s Ethical Vision* (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 92-7.
52 Thus Webster is not incorrect to conceive this as “the ‘enhypostatic’ character of our agency” in *Barth’s Moral Theology*, 89ff.
53 *CD* IV/3: 540.
occurrence in the world, but also to the objectivity of its character as revelation, to the *a priori* nature of its light in face of all human illumination and knowledge."\(^{54}\) As "the light of life," Jesus Christ is "his own authentic witness."\(^{55}\) He not only speaks for himself but he also grounds, summons and creates our knowledge of himself and his life. In line with his exposition of the self-revealing character of the Trinity in *CD I*, Barth moves from there into reflection on the prophetic office of Jesus:

The fact that reconciliation is also revelation and Jesus Christ lives and works as Prophet means that objectively we can no longer be remote from him in a private sphere, but that we are drawn into his sphere, into what takes place in him. This occurrence becomes objectively *our own experience*. … That man’s here is truly there; that the there of that history is here in reality man’s own history – this is what is disclosed as reconciliation is also revelation and Jesus Christ acts also as Prophet.\(^{56}\)

As such, Jesus’ history is “the history in which *our* history is comprised and by which it is marked and determined.”\(^{57}\) It is also “self-multiplying history” inasmuch as it evokes “its own reflection in the world and among men in the form of Christian knowledge of what has taken place in Jesus Christ.”\(^{58}\) By the power of his resurrection and prophecy, the outpouring of the Spirit, “as the history which overlaps all others, that of Jesus takes place primarily, but in the particular history of Christian knowledge it also takes place again and again secondarily. As that which took place *illic et tunc*, it also takes place *hic et nunc*, in the present of our time.”\(^{59}\) Barth wants to show by this that Jesus the prophet, living in this way, is always the active subject of our apprehension of him.

\(^{54}\) Ibid., 11.

\(^{55}\) Ibid., 46.

\(^{56}\) Ibid., 182. Emphasis mine.

\(^{57}\) Ibid., 193. Emphasis mine.

\(^{58}\) Ibid., 212.

\(^{59}\) Ibid., 224.
We conclude our examination of Barth’s christological foundation with Barth’s own words in which he says, “everything that can be said of the relevance of Christ’s being and activity in our sphere is already included and anticipated.”

This does not mean that human beings do not really share in God’s life at all. In CD IV, on the contrary, Barth attempts to illuminate a personal, self-involving character of the knowledge of God. For Barth, as Joseph Mangina puts it, our knowledge of God “functions as a means of displaying the intelligibility of human life as an active response to God’s grace.” It entails and evokes our agential participation in the eternal history of covenant enacted in Jesus Christ. In this context, Barth locates the basis and power of the transition of God’s objective accomplishment of reconciliation to our subjective appropriation in the event of resurrection and the work of the Holy Spirit. Thus we can see that Barth firmly resorts to a christological and indeed trinitarian grounding for Christian existence, knowledge and action.

### 3.3 The Subjective Fulfillment of Reconciliation in Humanity

Barth does not deploy any general anthropological analysis as a starting point to understand who we are. Rather, he seeks to extend the doctrine of the presence of Christ and trace its anthropological “effects and consequences.” Since the sphere of our life...
and activity is “reached and affected by the Son of Man Jesus Christ,” it has existence and meaning only as it is responsible to this christological sphere in which God’s mighty acts determine the shape of human living. How can we then experience and perceive ourselves as God’s partner under such divine intervention? Barth’s doctrine of justification affirms the new existence of the justified, as our new lives are grounded in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, which is “the effective self-substitution of God for us.” For Barth, *iustitia aliena* (the righteousness of Jesus Christ) corresponds to our justification by faith alone, to the degree that this faith “is not a matter of subjective experience and understanding.” In Barth’s treatment of the logic of substitution, alien righteousness and the passivity of faith seem to cut out the human agency and participation which must be preserved in a covenant relationship.

Yet this would be a misreading of Barth. To avoid misunderstanding, we should be mindful of what Barth consistently emphasizes throughout the doctrine of reconciliation. For Barth, “grace and partnership, receiving and doing, are not contradictory, but complementary.” The *telos* of grace is always the evocation in its human recipients of a new way of life. Put in a dogmatic context, especially in the tripartite structure of *CD IV*, Barth’s view of the Christian life in terms of justification cannot be treated independently of his anthropological understandings in the accounts of sanctification and vocation that stress the renewal of the human agent. The event of vocation, as well as the event of sanctification, if seen as God’s act towards us, is

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64 *CD IV/1*: 550.

65 Ibid., 549.

66 Webster, *Karl Barth*, 128.

67 Note that Barth talks about in parallel the anthropological entailments of justification (§61), sanctification (§66) and vocation (§71) in *CD IV/1*, *IV/2* and *IV/3* respectively.
“exactly the one act of God in Jesus Christ in a different dimension, significance and power.”68 As we have noted with respect to justification above, the objective realization of sanctification and vocation takes place in the life of Jesus Christ before it ever takes place at the level of our subjective participation. In other words, our justification and sanctification accomplished once and for all in Jesus Christ will in turn “find continual confirmation in [our] life-history as it is set under this sign by [our] vocation.”69 What has already happened in Jesus also concretely applies to our lives.

In turning, now, to an analysis of our subjective participation in sanctification and vocation realized in Jesus Christ, we cannot set aside Barth’s account of Christ’s living presence upon our life-history. The unrepeatable once-and-for-all character of the Christ event always provides the basis for Barth to articulate the subjective appropriation of the divine grace of reconciliation. It is in the action of the Spirit that we meet and experience the power of the resurrection, and the personal and active presence of the crucified Christ:

[T]he being and work of Jesus Christ must now be understood as the being and work of his Holy Spirit, or his own spiritual being and work. The appropriation of the grace of Jesus Christ ascribed to us, the subjective apprehension of the reconciliation of the world with God made in him, the existence of Christians, presupposes and includes within itself the presence, the gift and the reception, the work and accomplishment of his Holy Spirit.70

Hence, “the sanctification of man as the work of the Holy Spirit has to be described as the giving and receiving of direction.”71 In this way the Spirit shares with us “his own holiness,” i.e., “man’s new form of existence as the true covenant-partner of God.”72 As the recipients of this gift, we fulfill a life-movement in which our being “becomes and is

68 CD IV/3: 482.
69 Ibid., 483.
70 CD IV/1: 147-8. Thus Barth goes on: “And naturally they do not know their justification, sanctification and calling as they have already taken place in Jesus Christ. But the hand of God has touched and seized Christians in this way – which means the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit” (ibid., 148).
71 CD IV/2: 523.
72 Ibid.
conformable to his being, the being of our Lord,” by “lifting up” ourselves in obedience to the call which comes to us. The call issued by Jesus is the call of discipleship, and it is “the particular form of the summons by which Jesus discloses and reveals himself to a man in order to claim and sanctify him as his own, and as his witness in the world.”

Over against this call, when it confronts us in the direction of the Spirit, there is “no legitimate objection to it,” nor any “question of self-selection” on our part. Thus it is “grace which commands. Jesus is seeking men to serve him.” To follow him means to take a new path which leads us out of conformity with the world and to bear witness to God’s victory against all other “authorities and deities.”

Barth is very careful to specify the qualification that the calling of discipleship, the calling to do good works, and the calling to take up our cross, is invariably connected with “the history of the covenant, and impressed into the service of the work of God and used to declare it.” This is what undergirds his choice of “witness” and “service” as key terms for discussing the active life of the Christian and its provisional and subordinate character as well. Despite the provisionality of their witness, however, a genuine freedom is given to those called in order for them to be “free to lift themselves up and look to [Christ], and therefore freed from the compulsion to sin.” They are made free to accept and bear their own cross. Under the themes of sanctification and discipleship, Barth is largely concerned with a shared and ordered way of life appropriate to the master and

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73 Ibid., 528-9.
74 Ibid., 534.
75 Ibid., 535.
76 Ibid., 544-6.
77 Ibid., 594. Barth further explains: “if their elevation consists in the fact that they have to take up their cross, this is not a re-enactment of his crucifixion. It takes place in correspondence to it; with the similarity proper to a disciple following his master; but not in any sense in likeness, let alone identity” (ibid., 600).
78 Ibid., 532.
disciple relationship. In fact he sheds more light on the active role of human agency while talking about vocation as the place of responsibility within the capacity of freedom:

It is to the fact that every man, as he co-exists with Jesus, stands in the light of life, that the Word of God is directed to him too, that it comes to him, that he is to be called and that he is thus made responsible to the one who calls him. … He is made responsible by this one. To be responsible means to be ordained to see the light of life, to hear and receive the Word of God. He is able and under obligation to do this. He is free to do it. 79

Through the prophetic work of his Lord, therefore, “he does acquire and take and have his own share, to be responsibly fulfilled.” 80 The calling of every Christian to act responsibly is not a matter of self-creation or fulfillment, but activates “free action” in which the Christian “accompanies his sovereign Lord in his action, assisting, seconding and helping him.” 81 Barth’s notion of human responsibility seems to dispense from absorption of human agency into the work of God, so as to safeguard the integrity of truly responsible human agency.

The question then becomes, if Barth’s “God for us” motif in CD IV/1 resists any possibility of synergism or “any co-operation on our part,” does this mean that later in CD IV/3 Barth is allowing for a larger space for considering the Christian as “a co-operating subject” in human vocation? 82 Does Barth really undertake a shift in his theological method in order to set forth an analogical, and thus complementary, relationship between divine and human agency? Far from abandoning dialectic thinking in CD IV/3, Barth insists that the work of free divine grace in Christ’s prophetic office is “free from any need or necessity of a human co-operation or assistance without which it

79 CD IV/3: 494.
80 Ibid., 602.
81 Ibid.
82 See, for instance, CD IV/1: 230; IV/3: 599.
could not occur or reach its goal.”\textsuperscript{83} In fact the “free action of Christ” includes a specific human co-operation but does not need it. This christological concentration prevents the perception that human beings appeal to any ‘higher’ principle in which Christ, the church and its service simply become a continuum of God’s embodied saving activity. Instead, Barth demonstrates that Christ’s singular identity guards the boundary and distinction between God’s work and human work, thereby opening up a space for free human response to and co-operation with the divine action. From here, three important implications for an ecclesial ethics of reconciliation follow.

First, Barth’s thinking on this matter appropriately avoids the misleading assumption that there is a competitive or polarized view of divine and human action. In an indeclinable and asymmetrical order the latter is “validated and honored” to serve the former. The human person always plays a servant role. Given the fact that Jesus’ history is not a “dead history,” and vocation is “the action of Jesus Christ who is active as a prophet” among us in his Word and by his Spirit, the doctrine of reconciliation as a whole does not involve any retraction of the primacy of grace in Christ. Barth, while he speaks of Jesus as prophet, stays focused on Jesus himself, who is the agent of his own realization in our anthropological sphere but who at the same time does not make us “a mere spectator, let alone a puppet”:\textsuperscript{84}

As the resurrected, he lives in every age as the Lord of all time. He lives in every to-day as the one in and by whom there took place yesterday, in his time, the reconciliation of the world to God. As such, however, he does not live in idleness, but actively in the enlightening power of his Holy Spirit as the revealer of which took place in and by him alone. … He alone is competent and authorized to

\textsuperscript{83} CD IV/3: 607. Hence Paul Nimmo uses the term “christocentric actualism” to describe in Barth an actualistic conception of justification, sanctification and vocation, in \textit{Being in Action}, 161-8.

\textsuperscript{84} CD IV/3: 528. Rather, any of us “is a living and … active subject, wholly occupied in the cause of his Lord, wholly concentrated upon it, according to his own deliberation, resolve and responsibility” (ibid., 602).
perform it. He alone is the speaker of the Word of God as well as the doer of his work. But in exercise of this prophetic office of his, even though it is he alone who controls it, *he does not will to be alone*. Controlling and exercising it, he calls certain men to his side and commissions them to be his disciples, i.e., Christians.  

Thus this passage also draws out the second of three implications. It is through “the gift of vocation” that our true humanity can be faithfully actualized. Just as Jesus Christ is the true witness, so God makes us his witnesses as our true being and existence, “witnesses of his being in his past, present and future action in the world and in history, of his being in his acts among and upon men.”  

In other words, God summons and equips us to declare what he has given us to know in Christ. It is quite clear now that “the self-giving of Christ to the Christian and the Christian to Christ is the goal of vocation, the true-being of the Christian.” This goal is achieved, not by our human effort, but through the life-act of Jesus in his prophecy history, in his fellowship with us. Along these lines, the work of Christ is not understood simply as substitutionary, but also evocative, in such a way as to secure our position in this dependent partnership. To be a responsible witness, instead of a mere spectator of God’s redeeming work, for Barth, should thereby involve a deep and full commitment to Jesus Christ. “Called, illumined and awakened by his prophetic word,” the Christians can do no other than “to give themselves to him, to exist as his, and therefore continually to seek and find their life in him, in whom it is their truest life.”  

This corresponding life ‘in Christ’ frees the Christian to be God’s covenant partner. It is also the life-work of gratitude and joy which grace evokes.

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85 Ibid., 605-6. Emphasis mine.
86 Ibid., 575-6.
87 Ibid., 594.
88 Ibid., 545.
The third implication for us is thus that to be truly human is to be a person in union with Christ. What is taking shape and meaning in Barth’s view of the fellowship between Christ and the Christian is “an encounter in time between two personal partners who do not lose but keep their identity and particularity in this encounter.” Barth gives a twofold explication of this relationship in which Christ is in us, and we are in Christ.

That Christ is in the Christian means … that in his prophetic work, in the calling of his disciples and Christians, with no self-surrender but in supreme expression of himself, he also exists eccentrically, i.e. in and with the realization of the existence of these men, as the ruling principle of the history lived by them in their own freedom.

… That the Christian is in Christ means … that, without detriment to his humanity, awakened rather to genuine humanity, he also exists eccentrically, in and with the realization of his own existence, being received and adopted as an integral element in the life and history of Christ.

This mutually self-offering relationship lies at the heart of their fellowship. In this unity Christ rules as Lord, and Christians gratefully accept this lordship. To participate in such fellowship with Christ, is, in effect, to “live only for their commission,” for Christ “involves himself by commissioning them.” Far from obliterating the distinction between the Lord and his servant or their respective functions, therefore, Christian vocation for Barth “certainly means a removing of the distance which separates the caller and the called and an establishment of full communion and concord between the being and action of the former and those of the latter” insofar as it is his “being with and in Christ.”

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89 Ibid., 547.
90 Ibid., 548.
91 “In this self-giving Christ and the Christian become and are a single totality, a fluid and differentiated but genuine and solid unity” (ibid., 540).
92 Ibid., 574.
93 Ibid., 651.
from and corresponds to their common being.”\textsuperscript{94} Again, this “community of action” is a “differentiated fellowship … in which Christ is always superior and the Christian subordinate.”\textsuperscript{95} It is in such “definite and irreversible order” that Barth identifies that a proper and free action on the part of the Christian, the human agent, exists.

In this “fellowship of life,” in union with Christ, the Christian shares the same goal of vocation with Christ. One “has no option but to confirm in [Christ’s] action the living relationship in which God and the world are held together in the work of Christ, the self-determination of all men for God.”\textsuperscript{96} The Christian seeks first only the kingdom of God, rather than “his personal beatitude or damnation,” because “the cause of Christ, the relation of God to the world and the world to God, quite naturally and self-evidently takes precedence in his life over all other concerns.”\textsuperscript{97} Through such “personal participation in the salvation addressed to the world in Jesus Christ,” one enters into “the history of his own liberation.”\textsuperscript{98} Barth particularly stresses that “a personal status gratiae et salutis of the Christian” is included in the order of this vocation.\textsuperscript{99} While Barth broadens the concept of vocation to describe the history of the Christian in connection with that of Jesus Christ himself as engaged in his prophetic work, what is crucial for this relationship is that Jesus is present where the Christian is, “not merely alongside, but in exactly the same spot.”\textsuperscript{100} In this way Christ “takes possession of his free human heart” and transforms the life of the person from within. Christ is present by virtue of his action, as he spans across the “spatial distance” between himself and the Christians, and as he

\begin{footnotes}
\item[94] Ibid.
\item[95] Ibid., 597-8.
\item[96] Ibid., 598.
\item[97] Ibid., 599.
\item[98] Ibid., 654.
\item[99] Ibid., 655, 663.
\item[100] Ibid., 547.
\end{footnotes}
encounters them by the self-presentation in the Spirit. This spiritual but real presence of Christ is “the secret of their existence” among others. Christ’s action is “the hidden but powerful sustaining basis and impelling motive of theirs.”

Through his hidden and compelling power, Jesus Christ strides across the divide of broken fellowship and renews human life with God. By virtue of this, the goal of vocation for humanity is its fulfillment in terms of participation in the ‘all-embracing’ history of Jesus Christ, which is the culmination of God’s covenant with humanity, and of the perfect fellowship between God and creatures. In the ‘here and now,’ that is, “the time between the times,” our sphere of life and activity is “surrounded and affected” by the presence and action of Jesus Christ, in order that we can freely serve him as his witnesses. Therefore, the subjective fulfillment of reconciliation is not merely something for which we only focus upon ourselves, such as our own existential saving experience. Rather, we look to Christ, in whom we are set in the specific freedom of true correspondence to the objective reality of salvation. In such a way we live daily in the Spirit and in a “free fulfillment” corresponding to Jesus’ own historical prophetic work:

The recipients, bearers and possessors of the promise given by the Holy Spirit are Christians, men for whom Jesus Christ … is present and active not merely in fact and objectively, but who also know him as the one he is, who know his presence and work in subjective correspondence with his objective reality, who believe in him and love him as they know him, … and who in knowing him know themselves as men reconciled, justified and sanctified in him, and may thus make use of the freedom indicated to them in him.

101 Ibid., 574. See further Adam Neder, Participation in Christ: An Entry into Karl Barth’s Church Dogmatics (Louisville: WJK Press, 2009), 74-80.
102 Ibid., 352. Emphasis mine.
3.4 Conclusion: Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation as the Basis of Ecclesiology

At the heart of Barth’s doctrine of reconciliation is the being and action of God in Jesus Christ, in the event of passion and resurrection. Distinctive of Barth’s christological dogmatic content is his depiction of the ontological and existential weight of the divine-human life-history of Jesus Christ “from Bethlehem to Golgotha.” And it is in his ethics of reconciliation in which addresses the question of the reality of human being and action in face of this all-encompassing reality of Jesus’ history. Barth’s approach is quite different from the mainline styles of modern theology and ethics of his contemporaries. Such modern theology generally “emphasizes the coinherence of the divine work of reconciliation and the church’s moral action,” in such a way that the work of the ecclesial community could only be considered “an extension of the gospel of God’s reconciling act.” Barth’s work is quite the opposite. He finds and insists that there are impassible differences between Jesus and all of those who aspire to be his followers. Because it is Christ’s exclusive task to save us and deliver us from sin, nothing we accomplish can stand infallibly but must be scrutinized. In this light we can only follow Jesus “at a distance” but we cannot reproduce his work for our work is not perfect. Still, for Barth, our following must nevertheless be discernibly patterned after Jesus. We have been made as God’s covenant partner, acting freely and responsibly in genuine correspondence to God’s own perfect work. For our concern, Barth’s consistency in his dogmatics as such makes it possible to assemble some of his leading ideas into an explanatory shape which will serve as the basis for understanding his ecclesiology in the next chapter.

103 Webster, “Christ, Church and Reconciliation,” in Word and Church, 212. Webster also gives a concise bibliography for this kind of theological ethics in ibid., n2.
104 On the difference between the works of Jesus and his followers, see the suggestive essay by Gene Outka, “Following at a Distance: Ethics and the Identity of Jesus,” in Scriptural Authority and Narrative Interpretation, ed. Garrett Green (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 144-60.
First and foremost, Barth thinks that reconciliation never occurs without a miracle of grace. By the grace of God, reconciliation points to the reestablished relationship of God with human beings. The grace of God revealed in the coming of God to all humanity “is grounded only in itself and can be known only by itself.”¹⁰⁵ Thus, Barth’s theology of grace is neither concerned with any abstract principle of “triumph of grace” nor a doctrine of gratia habitualis, but remains with “the living person of Jesus Christ.”¹⁰⁶ Through and in the history of Jesus Christ, “the covenant is fulfilled; in him reconciliation is effected; in him is everything which shines out into the world around.”¹⁰⁷ In other words, God’s grace of reconciliation entails the entire event and effects of his own self-fulfilling action towards and in the human agent. Since the self-bestowing grace does not fail but persists with humanity, this grace really accomplishes “God’s triumph in the antithesis, in the opposition of man to himself.”¹⁰⁸ As Paul said, “Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more” (Rom 5:20). Therefore Barth could say that it is “the nature and power of grace of God” that “shows itself and acts as his free grace to the undeserving, as grace for lost sinners.”¹⁰⁹ Living in this sphere of God’s gracious presence, we as Christians are always recipients of divine grace.

Secondly, Barth asserts that, in this free grace, God has elected to dignify human beings by consecrating them for his service of reconciliation. As Jesus is the “royal man” in whom God’s covenant with humanity is fulfilled, we cannot be God’s true partner in the covenant of grace apart from our share in the history of Jesus Christ. God’s grace is therefore his covenant-establishing grace in Christ. Through Christ “the covenant has its

¹⁰⁵ CD IV/1: 83.
¹⁰⁶ See CD IV/2: 89-90; IV/3: 173.
¹⁰⁷ CD IV/3: 173.
¹⁰⁸ CD IV/1: 82.
¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 69.
irrevocable basis. In him it cannot be broken.”¹¹⁰ To avoid falling prey to Christomonism Barth carefully delineates the basic form in which the covenant partners encounter each other. He appeals to the unity in differentiation of divinity and humanity in Jesus Christ in order to elucidate the relationship of our acts to the act of God in Christ. With respect to this unity-in-distinction motif, Barth makes a twofold claim. There is unity, because, in the grounding of humanity in Christ’s fulfillment of the covenant, human acts “mysteriously co-inhere in God’s own act in Jesus Christ.”¹¹¹ Yet this is distinction, because this is always a differentiated unity in which the human person under grace remains a free yet secondary agent. In the covenant of grace, it is “a matter of the commanding of God and the responsibility of man in this particular encounter.”¹¹² Despite their distinction, the humanity and divinity are “partners who are inseparably bound to one another.”¹¹³ Rather than being considered as an obligation to maintain the covenant, human action in this relationship is the work of gratitude and obedience corresponding to the grace of God bestowed.

Thirdly, in terms of correspondence, Barth’s ethics of reconciliation is “an exploration of the shape of existence in analogy to Jesus.”¹¹⁴ Insomuch as the history of Jesus is our condition of the actuality and possibility, God’s grace in Christ is manifest in a form of reality, to which there is a corresponding visible form of human life, in which there is “the shaping of our lives as Christians.”¹¹⁵ The trajectory of grace maintains that there should be a human witness, a new way of life in accord with the truth of human

¹¹⁰ ChrL, 29.
¹¹¹ John Webster, Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 107.
¹¹² ChrL, 12.
¹¹³ Ibid., 28.
¹¹⁴ Webster, Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation, 92.
¹¹⁵ ChrL, 12, quoted in ibid., 112.
existence. Barth’s concept of correspondence allows him to avoid the confusion of divine and human works, and instead to ascribe a unique role to the latter. Correspondence is far from repetition or continuation, because: “The being and activity of Jesus Christ needs no repetition. It is present and active in its own truth and power.” Further it is in the being and activity of Jesus “in which we acquire and have and use the freedom to become and be Christians, not second Christs.” In this light, our human action which follows the divine power receives the character of a self-determination corresponding to divine act, not a subjection to an alien control. We act humanly and in no way divinely, and in so doing our life-act is “similar, parallel and analogous” to the act of God himself. Barth’s use of such correspondence language, on the one hand, avoids the danger of a solely divine causality. At the same time, our self-determination is within the history of God’s covenant to which we belong through God’s election in Christ which precedes our self-determination. On the other hand, Barth avoids the perception of the possibility of an independent human autonomy, by virtue of the fact that the condition for our self-determination is found not at all in human nature itself, but is entirely God’s election of divine grace.

The last point we highlight in this chapter is Barth’s view of human acts of reconciliation. Within Barth’s theme of ‘God with us,’ God’s act ad extra always stands in a relationship to our own being and our life and acts. We are liberated and summoned

116 CD IV/1: 769.
117 CD IV/2: 305.
118 ChrL, 175. “This is the limit which is set for the Christian especially, and as a sign of which he comes to bear the cross, not in identity but in similarity with the cross of Jesus. His cross … points to God himself, to his will for the world, to the future revelation of his majesty, to the glory in which his Lord already lives and reigns” (CD IV/2: 606).
119 Whereas Luther sees God as the sole causal agent in the work of salvation and therefore human beings as totally passive recipients, Barth argues that God’s gracious action constitutes them as active agents. For accessible discussions of the difference between Barth’s and Luther’s understandings of human agency in this context, see Webster, Barth’s Moral Theology, 151-78; Jüngel, Karl Barth, 105-26.
in and by Christ to make the corresponding and ensuing human decision. By virtue of this, our service is not constitutive of the event of reconciliation. Rather it is “this self-contained and completed event” which “makes necessary the ministry of reconciliation, giving to it a weight and a power to arouse and edify which no other ministry and indeed no other human activity can ever emulate.”

Human acts of reconciliation, since their ratio essendi lies outside human faculty or capacity, do not stand alone, but should be in concert with the structure of the reconciled reality of the world. The apostle would remind us that such reconciliation is what Christ has sets up through the cross by breaking the dividing wall of hostility in humanity (Eph 2:14-6). We live in that sphere of reality insofar as we have been reconciled with God in Christ. Accordingly, what we can do is to testify to reconciliation and to confess the truth and existence of this new creation. Christologically speaking, our moral action of reconciliation would be groundless if it did not always refer to the infallible reconciling work of Christ. In fact Christ does not need any representatives or vicars which predetermine his action and limits. However, he is the free Lord of present as of the past and future. In its entirety, Barth’s ethics of reconciliation follows his discussion on Christology as in turn his ethics of reconciliation is shaped by Christology but not possibly the other way around. For Barth, this ordering proves critical.

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120 CD IV/1: 76-7.  
121 For this, Barth stresses that: “Jesus Christ cannot be absorbed and dissolved in practice into the Christian kerygma, Christian faith and the Christian community. He cannot be replaced by Christianity. He remains sovereign even in this respect” (CD IV/3: 349).
CHAPTER 4
BARTH AND THE MISSIONAL CHURCH

4.1 Introduction: Is Barth’s Ecclesiology Not Sufficient?

Barth’s mature ecclesiology is rooted in the doctrine of reconciliation. There are three ecclesiological sections, namely, “The Holy Spirit and the Gathering of the Christian community,” “The Holy Spirit and the Upbuilding of the Christian Community” and “The Holy Spirit and the Sending of the Christian Community.” Each takes its pivotal role in the exposition of the subjective realization of reconciliation in CD IV. For Barth, the active participation of humanity in the divine act of reconciliation should come to expression in the communal and public life of the Christian community. The church is the sphere in which God justifies and sanctifies the mortal and sinful community and makes that community a faithful witness. In the interweaving tripartite structure of CD IV, just as vocation cannot be considered apart from justification and sanctification, so too, the treatise on the “sending” of the church, presupposes and illuminates the “gathering” and “upbuilding” of the faithful. If the miracle of grace in which the church is called into vocation were to be pushed aside from consideration, the sending or mission of ecclesia would become mere human business in the world. Yet, the church does not exist nor build up itself by its human power. It is impossible for the church to exist for a single moment outside the divine election and calling in Christ.

1 According to Kimlyn Bender, Barth’s doctrine of the church “weaves together multiple strands of thought into an elegant tapestry that, upon careful inspection, reveals deep christological patterns that govern the whole, patterns that bear witness both to the consistency of Barth’s central theological convictions across time, as well as to the remarkable innovation in his mature thought.” See Kimlyn J. Bender, Karl Barth’s Christological Ecclesiology (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 270.
2 In CD IV/1, IV/2 and IV/3 respectively, Barth puts his ecclesiological writings (§ 62, 67 and 72) in between the sections on God’s redemptive act upon the Christian life (§61 Justification, §66 Sanctification and §71 Vocation) and the sections on the subjective manifestation of the Christian life (§63 Faith, §68 Love and §73 Hope).
Drawn into the dynamic of the movement of reconciliation, in Barth’s view, the church thereby comes into its missionary existence for the world.

Within the contemporary ecclesiological context, however, Barth’s position is not immune from criticism. A common charge leveled against Barth comes from what is often perceived as a docetic tendency which fails to acknowledge the church’s true identity as a concrete, historical reality.³ Reinhard Hütter, for instance, points out that, “precisely because Barth renders Christ’s particularity as an essential over-against-ness to all ecclesial acts of witness to him, the church only ‘is’ in its distinct acts. And these acts can only be accounted for by describing their possibility and its guiding principle, in other words, by a transcendental account.”⁴ In his analysis of Barth’s understanding of ecclesial mediation, John Yocum concludes that Barth’s radical distinction “severs the inner connection between the object of witness and the form of the witness itself.”⁵ These kinds of arguments often have contended that Barth’s approach cannot avoid dehistoricizing the church, to the extent that its empirical and concrete practices are relativized.⁶ Does Barth’s motif of “transcendental distinctiveness” keep him from noticing the ‘concreteness’ or ‘visibility’ of the church and its practice of witness?

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³ Some examples are shown as follows. Mark Weedman comments that, in Barth’s approach, “the internal movement precedes the external gathering” and “to understand the church, we must work our way back to Christ because, in a sense, the church is a ‘general’ abstraction of the particular experience of Christ.” See Mark Weedman, “The Spirit in the Church: The Universal Christ, Particular Spirit and Christian Unity,” LIST 11 (2009): 347-64, here 350-1. Another similar critique of Barth’s ecclesiology comes from Nicholas M. Healy, who argues that Barth has “a strong tendency towards an abstract and reductionistic ecclesiology” in “The Logic of Karl Barth’s Ecclesiology: Analysis, Assessment, and Proposed Modifications,” Modern Theology 10 (1994): 253-70, here 263. Barth’s account also troubles Balthasar: “The greatest doubts surround what Barth means by church. … Does this space, considered as a concrete reality in the world, suffer to bear witness to the presence of faith and revelation in the world?” See Balthasar, The Theology of Karl Barth, 245f.


⁵ John Yocum, Ecclesial Mediation in Karl Barth (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2004), 174.

Arguably, Barth, while he seeks the true identity of the church, does not lose sight of the church’s visible and historical character, to the extent that his ecclesiology could rule out any and all possibility of ecclesiological docetism. For a deeper examination, we will return to Barth’s conception of the visibility of the church in the next section.

Some critics have charged that Barth’s ecclesiology contains a pneumatological deficit. These critics have complained that Barth’s trinitarianism is reduced to a binitarianism that would inevitably depersonalize the hypostatic identity and agency of the Holy Spirit. His emphasis on the completed act of reconciliation by Christ alone, for them, results in a failure to provide an adequate place for the work of the Spirit and correspondently to ecclesial agency. Since this deficiency has roots and effects in ecclesiology, Robert Jenson, among others, levels his accusation against Barth:

[Perhaps a reason] for the whole web of Spirit-avoidance in the Kirchliche Dogmatik is avoidance of the church. For if the Pentecostal creation of a structured continuing community were identified as the ‘objectivity’ of the gospel’s truth pro nobis, then this community itself, in its structured temporal and spatial extension, would be seen as the Bedingung der Möglichkeit of faith. Or … if the Community between the Father and Son were himself an agent of their love, immanently and economically, then the church, as the community inspirted by this Agent, would be the active mediatrix of faith.

This objection may, however, have stemmed from a misconstrual of Barth’s discussion of the Spirit’s deity in terms of the subjective realization of Christ’s revelation upon the church. Barth’s pneumatology thematizes “the aporia of the transition” from the history of the man Jesus Christ to the history of the Christian community. The real problem is

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that Barth’s dialectical and rhetorical grammar of pneumatology is often misinterpreted.\(^9\)

Indeed for Barth, the crucified Christ as the living one reveals the act of reconciliation accomplished on the cross. This is a revelation which presses itself as a work of the Spirit into the life of humanity as a dynamic event that concerns all people at all times and in all places.\(^10\) In light of this ‘pneumatological logic,’\(^11\) as well as Barth’s nuanced notions of correspondence and witness, we can see that Barth does not render the earthly church insignificant in the economy of salvation, but he does establish the human activity and agency, in terms of correspondent witness rather than mediation or extension. We will go into more details and specific for Barth’s treatment of ecclesial witness in the third section.

As we discussed in the last chapter, Barth’s ethics of reconciliation guarantees the differentiated unity of the divine and human action. In Barth’s work, this unity-in-distinction paradigm also applies to the dynamic relationship of the divine and human agency and freedom in the sphere of the church. On the one hand, Barth rejects any one-sided view of divine monergism that underplays the historical concreteness of the church such as its freedom, brokenness or limitation. On the other hand, by virtue of the fact that


\(^10\) \textit{CD I/2}: 270-1.

\(^11\) As the subjective reality of revelation always presupposes the objective reality, Barth says that one “can never more mistake the work of the Holy Spirit than by making it the object of an independent investigation” (\textit{CD I/2}, 248). For him, the Holy Spirit is always the Spirit of Christ and the power of his living presence. Thus the bond which Barth maintains between the work of the Spirit and the work of Christ in the sphere of the church helps us to know “where the Spirit went.” John McIntyope’s subtle analysis of Barth’s Christ-centered pneumatology in \textit{The Shape of Pneumatology: Studies in the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit} (London: T&T Clark, 1997), 155-7, also supports the argument here being made.
the church “has to attest the gospel,” Barth resists reducing the church to a merely
social and political entity in terms of general human institution. What Barth attempts to
address at the core of the church is an irreversible relationship of covenant between the
initiative and lordship of Christ and the correspondence and servanthood of the church.
Barth’s ethics of reconciliation is grounded in the objective reality of Christ’s revelation
characterizing the ecclesial life as a response to that which Christ alone is or does. As a
result, the church “lives by the fact that Jesus lives.” Therefore, the church in essence is
a teleological movement in world history which declares and testifies to the reconciling
truth and power of God towards the world. For Barth, as we will see in more detail below,
the church exists and gives its genuine response to Christ in the event of personal
encounter, in order that the church itself might partake in its mission for the world. Put
dogmatically, Barth treats ecclesiology and missiology as derivative doctrines, for which
a christological foundation must be provided.

What then does the church as a witnessing community for Barth look like? The
rest of this chapter will examine the three ecclesiological paragraphs in CD IV in which
Barth spells out an account of the relation of the being of the church and the being of
Christ. This relation of being is that upon which the mission of the church for the world is
set forth. With respect to this order of grace, we will first explore the relation between
Christ and his church as the basis of ecclesial mission. For Barth, the new reality of world
history is revealed in Christ and made known to the church in faith through a relationship

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12 CD IV/2: 646. In this context, Barth designates “the church exceeding the limit within which alone it can
be the church of Jesus Christ” as “the church in excess” and “the church that neglects and denies that its
Lord – he is its determination – is the living Lord” as “the church in defect.” For a fuller discussion, see
Barth, ChrL, 135-140, and here 136, 138.
13 CD IV/1: 347.
14 Barth explicitly states that “All ecclesiology is grounded, critically limited, but also positively
determined by Christology” (CD IV/3: 786).
which God has established. This does not mean a reduction of the church to pure passivity, but rather refers to the calling of humanity to the ongoing service of God. On this basis, we will discuss how the church engages in the task of witnessing to Christ in the broken reality of the world. As the term “missional” is now commonly used to express the notion of the church’s participation in God’s mission, in this chapter I will argue that Barth’s mature ecclesiology, with a christological focus, is missional, to the degree that the distinction between the divine and human work is fairly maintained.15

4.2 Christ and the Church

In CD IV, Barth posits that the doctrine of the church is an aspect of the subjective realization of Christ’s atonement in the awakening, quickening and enlightening power of the Holy Spirit. Since the history of reconciliation in Christ involves “both a divine act and offer and also an active human participation in it,” the church “not only has a history, but … it exists only as a definite history takes place, that is to say, only as it is gathered and lets itself be gathered and gathers itself by the living Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.”16 It is in such a living history that the church itself has a twofold nature that comprises a single reality. The church is both divinely established and historically constituted. By virtue of this, Barth understands the church as the earthly-historical form of Christ’s existence in order to stress that its sociological

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15 In the conclusion of his monograph on Barth’s ecclesiology, Karl Barth’s Christological Ecclesiology, 279-80, Bender admits that “Barth’s strength is preserving the distinction and irreversibility between the divine and human agency, as well as that between the work of Christ and the church. He is less successful in describing their relation and inseparability. Especially in the final volumes of the Church Dogmatics, Barth often speaks of a parallelism of action, rather than an embodied action, so that divine and human activity are portrayed as in conjunction, rather than in terms of the divine acting in and through the human, Christ acting in and through the church.” Bender is quite right that Barth seldom speaks of “embodied action” because of his firm rejection of synergism, but, in my view, Barth would say that Bender’s idea of the divine acting through the human is problematic too, and argue that this idea also opens a door to a synergistic construal of the relationship between divine and human action.

16 CD IV/1: 643, 650.
historical existence and spiritual existence in Christ and his Spirit cannot be separated. In short, the church is both visible and invisible. While the distinction between the visible and invisible church must be maintained, as one unity “always and everywhere the church exists in these two dimensions.”

By taking very seriously the horizontal, visible aspect of the church, Barth gives full attention to the enduring ecclesial shape and its active forms as a human, historical reality. However, the church cannot be merely understood as a religious order within human society beside other organizations because, “what it is, the character, the truth of its existence in time and space, is not a matter of a general but a very special visibility.”

Far from seeking help from social and cultural theory, Barth defines and predicates the “true visibility” of the church upon the hidden work of God. What then is instead for the church is that “the visible lives wholly by the invisible” and should attest the latter. “In its visible being,” the church should be “the witness of its invisible being.” For the invisible aspect is “the secret of the visible.” Thus ecclesiological statements can neither merely focus on nor speak of the visible church, at the expense of the invisible. Statements and confessions by no means suggest a starting point in the midst of the ecclesial practices or activities. Rather, such pronouncements should articulate that “it is

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17 Ibid., 669.
18 Ibid., 654.
19 Ibid., 658, 669.
20 Ibid., 657
21 Ibid., 654.
22 This is because for Barth the church’s visible being “does not exist only ad extra and in likeness with all the other elements in world-occurrence, but also from within and in complete unlikeness” (CD IV/3: 727). By way of contrast, Barth’s theological axiom counters those of post-liberal ecclesiology by its christological concentration. For post-liberal ecclesiology, see, for example, Buckley and Yeago, “Introduction: A Catholic and Evangelical Theology?,” in Knowing the Triune God, 18-9.
in the totally visible being of the community that the totally invisible lives and moves as its secret.”

To put this more precisely, according to Barth, the basic knowledge of the church is “a christologico-ecclesiological concept of the community.” It cannot be derived primarily from human decisions or undertakings, but rather emanates from a new reality and meaning of humanity in Christ’s reconciliation. With Christ as the Lord, what actually takes place in the historical movement of the church is therefore “not visible to all; it is visible to Christians only.” The true being of the church can only be perceived through faith, by which we see the church as “the living community of the living Lord Jesus Christ … in virtue of the reconciling and self-revealing grace of God, in virtue of the mission and work of the Holy Spirit, and therefore in the power of Jesus Christ himself.” In this light, the gathering, upbuilding and sending of the community is God’s own work. Such work is a spiritual reality and event, for which a specific dogmatic account of the church’s visibility is required to ensure that it is demonstrably coherent with the church’s confession of Christ. This specification also entails an account of the church’s visible acts as attestations of the work and Word of God.

Crucially, here and elsewhere, Barth spells out an asymmetrical and irreversible order of the divine grace as the legitimating basis for the church’s existence and mission. In other words, “there should be maintained the true relationship between the primary and secondary subjects in the concept ‘community’.” This means that above all, Christ its

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23 CD IV/3: 726. Thus Webster is correct to point out that “for Barth the Christian community is most appropriately understood not as a natural state of affairs, a contingent social, cultural and linguistic entity, but as a spiritual reality, wholly referred to Jesus Christ” (Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation, 219-20).
24 CD IV/2: 679.
25 CD IV/1: 655.
26 Ibid., 656.
27 CD IV/2: 678.
Lord is the true and proper subject of the church, and “the being of the community is a predicate of his being.” Christ does not live because his church lives, but instead it is the church which lives, only as and because he lives. As the living Christ chooses to belong together with the church so that its existence is the earthly-historical form of his existence, the “basis and truth and continuance” of its decision and activity are already “in the decision, the work and the living Word of Jesus Christ himself.” Put another way, the church lives by his Spirit and under his judgment, in a sense that the church can acknowledge its identity as the body of Christ and confess that Christ its head is “always the subject, the Lord, the giver of the holiness of its action”:  

Thus in the particular activity which distinguishes it as his community in the world it does not belong to itself, but to him; it does not live of itself, but can only follow the movement of his life; it has not to present and maintain and carry through to success its own cause, but … can reflect and illustrate and in that way attest in its own activity his activity.  

Coupled with this “particular visibility,” which manifests the power of God’s calling from within, the church exists and lives concretely in faith and obedience by the active presence of Jesus Christ and his Spirit. If the church truly attests its invisible “spiritual character,” it “can and should act confidently on the level of its phenomenal being.”

Along these lines, there are two implications for how Barth understands the church which should be noted. The first concerns the concept of ecclesial work or practice which has been recently quite commonly adapted as a guiding norm for the shaping of the church’s life. The effect of this turn to ‘practice’ is to suggest that the

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28 Ibid., 655.
29 *CD* IV/1: 662.
30 Ibid., 694.
31 Ibid., 662.
32 Ibid., 660.
church is constituted by its concrete practices, and that through these forms and patterns of human action it may embody the gospel publicly and visibly. Barth, however, takes the church’s visible act of witness as a consequence of divine reconciliation, and denies that this account of given objectivity is characterized by human possession instead of the event of gift. Making such a clarification leads Barth to consider the “true actuality” of ecclesial action as an establishment within the sphere of Christ’s lordship prior to all human undertakings. In fact, the church cannot live apart from the mighty work of Christ. As its Lord is a living lord, it can only move towards him. As Barth has said, “Even in its human being and action and operation it is from him and by him. It cannot recognize and take itself seriously in anything that is not from him.”

For this reason, the church “can never be satisfied with what it can be and do as such,” but should faithfully point beyond itself to the wondrous work of Christ.

The second implication relates to the question of the church’s self-determination. Many modern theologians promote a kind of “moralist Christology” in which Christ functions as archetype, and human moral action “threatens to become the real centre of gravity.”

In contrast, Barth simply grounds his christological dogma on the

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34 CD IV/2: 654.
35 Ibid., 724.
irreducibility of Christ’s personal will and activity, not on the historicity of the person of faith. In this way Barth’s christological ecclesiology avoids simply becoming humanism and moralism. It is this self-communicative presence of Christ that impels the church “from within outwards, from invisibility to visibility.”

Whereas moralist Christology is to a certain extent predicated on the disjunction between Jesus and the contemporary world, in which Jesus was past and the church is present, Barth’s doctrine of reconciliation bridges the gap between the objective ‘there and then’ of Jesus Christ and the subjective ‘here and now.’ This does not lead Barth to claim the church merely as a predicate of the divine action, but rather there is an open space for the church to build up itself in the hearing of the divine Word. In its limited yet real, human sphere, the church exists as such “in the resoluteness of definite decisions in world-occurrence.”

For Barth, the “hidden distinction” of divine and human action is undertaken, not in order to disqualify human agency, but in order to explicate a proper place for it with regard to its limitedness and weakness. The church “stands always in supreme need of assurance.”

It cannot pretend to be “author, dispenser, nor mediator of grace and its revelation.” Such a deep awareness indeed helps the church to become genuinely bold with “the provisio of humility, i.e., that it has still to receive better instruction, that it will achieve a fuller obedience in the future, and that it will have to revise, not just to-morrow, but even to-day

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*Explanation of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996). What matters in these Christologies is not that Jesus *is*, but that he *was*, or that what he taught.

37 *CD IV/3*: 728. It is also at this point that Barth stresses that “there is an ecclesiological as well as a christological Docetism which we must carefully avoid” (ibid., 723).

38 Ibid., 720. Nimmo’s exposition of Barth’s doctrine of the *concursus Dei* mainly in *CD III/3* comes to a similar conclusion and implication as we draw here. See Nimmo, *Being in Action*, 118-30.

39 *CD IV/3*: 839

40 *CD IV/4*: 32. It is thus no surprise that Webster speaks of Barth’s “negative ecclesiology” in *Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation*, 166.
the work which it did yesterday; but also the proviso of freedom, i.e., that it has the power to do this.”

With these anthropological concerns, Barth by no means explains away the problem of sin; rather, on the pneumatological basis, he takes into deep consideration our sin that always leads to death:

In his risen body the sinful, fleshly humanity which had fallen a prey to death and had been destroyed in him is awakened to being in a new right and life. “The body without the spirit is dead” (Jas. 2:26). Without the Holy Spirit the body of Jesus Christ and in it all humanity can only be dead. But the body of Jesus Christ was not a body abandoned by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has shown himself to it as the life-giving Spirit.

In spite of the church’s sinfulness and its actual failings, the Spirit “makes use of the human and sinful action of the community but does not proceed from it and cannot be understood in terms of it.” Therefore, the church as the earthly-historical form of existence of Jesus Christ is precisely the historical form of the work of the Holy Spirit. In all its weakness and fallibility, as the body of Christ the church cannot perish because the authority and power of God behind it never fails.

In summary, we can say that Barth goes so far as to argue that the church has its basis in God’s acting grace, and in no secondary principle which is not from God. It is only on this “hidden basis” that the visible being and specific form of the church can be truly understood. By his hidden yet effective power, in other words, God has elected and called out his community in its very being ad extra, i.e. in its visibility and worldliness. That is why for Barth the church’s occurrence is always a dynamic reality. One cannot only acknowledge the divine power in the event of the gathering, upbuilding and sending

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41 CD IV/2: 715-6.
42 CD IV/1: 664. Emphasis mine.
43 CD IV/2: 618.
44 CD IV/1: 691.
of the church but one needs to recognize the living and concrete relationship between Christ and the church. How then does Barth draw out the relation of the being of Christ and the being of the church? If the church is essentially a happening that occurs “between the times,” between the first coming and the parousia of Christ, how does Christ’s living presence come to us without swallowing up our historicity and human autonomy? For Barth, the true and invisible being comes to the church “in the event of his living Word and work by the Holy Spirit, in its visitation by and encounter with him.”45 And in this personal encounter, the church is not merely passive but it is called to give response to Christ in its disposition and action.

Barth’s argument in CD IV/3 therefore yields a rich interpretation. On the one hand, the essence of the church is a dimension of the being of Jesus Christ himself, for “it belongs to him and is his property.”46 On the other hand, since Christ “does not exist abstractly in heaven, as a head without a body, but is also with the community on earth, the heavenly head of this earthly body,” he unites himself with his community and he as the primarily active subject is “present within it not merely as its recollected and expected but also as its present life.”47 Christ gives himself personally for it in its totality. This unity and encounter of the being of the church with the being of Christ, the basis and secret of its existence, hinges on the free event of grace:

As God is gracious to humanity, he creates, upholds and governs within it this particular people of witnesses, causing it to come to be and to exist as such, to exist as Jesus Christ exists, giving it a share in his being, endowing it with the power, freedom and capacity to do its human work, to bear the witness entrusted to it. … It is thus also the free grace of God that it may exist as witness of this grace to all humanity and serve it with its human action.48

45 Ibid., 710.
46 CD IV/3: 754.
47 Ibid., 757.
48 Ibid., 759-60.
The event in which this takes place is the work of the Spirit which brings and holds together that “which is different and … disruptive in the relationship of Jesus Christ to his community, namely, the divine working, being and action on the one side and the human on the other.”49 His work is “to bring them into harmony and therefore to bind them into a true unity,” but “not to intermingle nor confound them.”50 In virtue of this gracious act, it is always true that “the head does not live without his body nor the body without its head, but that the head, Jesus Christ, lives with and in his community, and the body, his community, with and in him.”51 In being united with Christ its head, the church “finds itself summoned to give its own corresponding, and to that extent appropriate and obedient answer to the Word of God spoken to and reasonably received by it.”52 This is its grateful and free response to its Lord who “wills to be specifically present with it, to dwell within it, and to speak and act by it, … and in the sense that he actually does these things … in an intimate and necessary connexion in which he is its Lord and it is the body inspired and directed by him.”53 Driven by this relationship of covenant, the church is “sent in the same direction as he is, i.e. into the world, in order that it may exist, not for itself, but for the world as he did.”54

For Barth, the church’s given orientation of its mission is grounded in its true knowledge of Jesus Christ. It is the life-history of Christ that draws into itself the world of contingent reality, granting it new life and meaning and, above all, its reconciliation with God. In light of this divine knowledge, the church gets involved in Christ’s

49 Ibid., 761.
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid., 762.
52 Ibid., 786.
53 Ibid., 790.
54 Ibid., 791.
prophetic action, in which the reconciliation that has taken place once-and-for-all in and as him is now effective through the human witness. This does not mean that the ecclesial work is the continuation of Christ’s mission on earth. Instead, in his enactment of the munus propheticum through the Spirit over the world, the church’s visible existence is consecrated as “the earthly-historical form of his own.”\(^{55}\) Its existence and sharing in Christ’s mission is always and remains an event of grace, solely based on the fact that “he does not will to be alone.” Its response as hearing and obedience to Christ is “set alongside his light in the world as a created and indirect light wholly dependent upon and nourished by him, yet nevertheless a true light.”\(^{56}\) For this reason, the church as the earthly body corresponding to Christ, must not be understood in a way that obscures the essential distinction even in the inseparable unity. In fact, what the church can do and accomplish of itself in union with Christ is its confession of him as Lord.

To conclude this section, the event of personal encounter between Christ and the church holds the two together in an active unity that preserves their proper order and distinction. This asymmetrical relation presupposes that the church is “created and ordained to be his likeness.”\(^{57}\) In a particular sense, it “has itself a prophetic character.”\(^{58}\) Just as Christ the prophet has inaugurated the calling of the world to the service of God, so the church is chosen and commissioned to be the subsequent and provisional representation of the calling of all humanity in him. It is indeed “given it for its own supreme joy … in this ongoing calling of the world, and therefore in the progress of the

\(^{55}\) Ibid., 790.
\(^{56}\) Ibid., 787.
\(^{57}\) Ibid., 793.
\(^{58}\) Ibid., 794.
mission of its Lord and hence of its own mission to the world.”\(^{59}\) Barth’s line of thought here brings us to a sense of the church’s existence for the world, which we will explore as the main theme in the next section.

### 4.3 The Church and the World

*CD IV/3* shows Barth’s insistence upon Christ’s mighty presence in “the time of the community” as the risen one not only enacts the event of the world’s reconciliation but testifies and proclaims his own victory. Moreover, Barth explains that it is in Christ’s self-declaration that the church finds its basis and purpose for its existence for the world and its task of serving in it. In this respect, we find that the missionary character of the church is not incidental, but is instead essential to its very being as God’s community in the world.\(^{60}\) The church has no option but a prophetic mission in which it is to serve God and the world. This does not mean that the church “can understand itself of itself,” but rather should know itself only as a likeness of Christ, and a reflection of his prophecy with its own in a provisional, secondary sense. To the degree that Christ makes use of the church’s active witness, this witness does not occur apart from his, but is a witness by a miracle of grace. It is the prophetic ministry of Christ which “redounds agentially for the community he creates.”\(^{61}\) Thus, as sent by Christ the church has its centre outside itself. Its sending is by no means a “repetition, extension or continuation” of Christ’s own commission, because:

> His own sending does not cease as he sends it. It does not disappear in its sending. It remains its free and independent presupposition. Its sending is simply ordered

\(^{59}\) Ibid., 795.

\(^{60}\) Thus Barth says, “as the people created by Jesus Christ and obedient to him, it is not subsequently and incidentally but originally, essentially and *per definitionem* summoned and impelled to exist for God and therefore the world and men” (ibid., 763).

\(^{61}\) Robertson, *Vivit! Regnat! Triumphant!* , 315.
on its own lower level in relation to his. … He is sent to precede it on the way into the world. It is sent to follow him on the same way. These are two things. But the two sendings are comparable because they have the same origin. The one God who sends him as the Father also sends them through him the Son. … He and they are both sent into the world, which means very generally that they are directed to the world and exist for it.⁶²

It is this unity-in-distinction motif in Barth’s account that designates the way of the church’s ecstatic movement towards the world. Since the church knows Christ as the savior of the world, it “exists as it is pledged to the one Jesus Christ and therefore basically and without reservation to the world.”⁶³ From the outset the church cannot lose this distinctness in its commitment to the world. It stands out from the world within the world.⁶⁴ In fact, its distinction from the world does not rest on an absolute dichotomy between sacred and profane but rather on its invisible being, the ontological fact that it is elected and called to be a people alongside and with Jesus Christ and with a share in his self-declaration, that it is given to it to be appointed his witness, to be set in the service of the eternal Word of God spoken in him, to be ordained to follow the Son of God incarnate in him.⁶⁵

The existence of the church thus corresponds to the existence of Christ. The church does this to the extent that Christ’s peculiar life and his relation to the world becomes the pattern that “his community follows as it must understand and therefore express its own being as one which is wholly worldly and yet also as a being in encounter with world-occurrence.”⁶⁶ It is precisely because Christ is the Lord of the church, and is himself the

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⁶² CD IV/3: 768.
⁶³ Ibid., 789.
⁶⁴ CD IV/2: 697. Barth further says in CD IV/3, “Called out of the world, the community is genuinely called into it. And the reality of its calling out depends upon there being no gap between it and the calling into which ineluctably follows, upon the separation from and the turning to the world taking place in a single movement” (ibid., 764).
⁶⁵ CD IV/3: 729.
⁶⁶ Ibid., 728. Barth further argues that the church’s distinction from the world sustains for nothing but a true solidarity with the world: “there can be no doubt that in the discharge of its mission to men the community has in a sense to keep its distance, and even to contradict and oppose them. Without saying No it cannot really say Yes to them” (ibid., 773). Emphasis mine.
one and living Lord, that the relation of the church to the world cannot be one of lordship but of witness and service. The church as event is thereby the church as witness. The church as witness must be the church in the world. The church as that which is in solidarity with the world is grounded in its hidden calling in which it gives its obedient response to its Lord.

Barth’s concern here is to establish a christological grounding for the church’s mission of witness. Since the church as the body of Christ, ought always to refer to a reality beyond itself, who is Christ its head, the missionary task of the church is understood as one of bearing witness to his accomplished work and of attesting to its inherent effectiveness. To fulfill this task is to confirm and attest Jesus Christ as the Lord of all humanity. Christ is the “real and true goodness of God” directed to the whole world. Although the church, unlike its Lord, often fails in its task of witness, it should go on to “impart to the man of the world … what it actually knows.” At the heart of this commission lies the church’s co-existence with the world. The church’s existence “finds not merely its meaning but its very basis and possibility only in its mission, its ministry, its witness, its task and therefore its positive relation to those who are without. It stands or falls with this relation.”

To guard the primary importance of this ontological relationship between the church and the world, Barth resists two temptations. First, Barth opposes an ecclesiological sectarianism that seeks to flee the world and withdraw from its transgression and corruption, thereby fleeing the love of God. Barth has warned that, in order to get rid of “this pharisaical conformity to the world,” the church should “approach

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67 Ibid., 804.  
68 Ibid., 826.  
69 Ibid.  
70 Ibid., 773-5. “In this attempt,” the church “necessarily becomes unfaithful to its sending, not to a place alongside or above the world, but to the world itself, before it has even taken the very first step” (773).
the world in a sincerely worldly character, making it obvious that in good and ill alike it belongs to it.” The world is nevertheless marked by wickedness, chaos, nothingness and, above all, sin against God. Under God’s providence, however, its history is also “the ongoing history of the good creation of God which cannot be destroyed by any confusion of man.” Despite its blindness to its own reality, the world may know itself in truth and reality through the church, “the point in the world where its eyes are opened to itself and an end is put to its ignorance about itself.”

Secondly, Barth distances himself from the pitfall of ecclesiological triumphalism. This is a “complementary temptation” to possess a patronizing superiority over the world that falsifies the task of the church. If the church renders itself “as the owner and proper disposer of higher and indeed the very highest goods, with superior knowledge and will,” then it will lose sight of its true testimony. This true testimony is that the gospel alone “is absolutely superior both to the man of the world and itself.” For Barth, the church should instead perform its task “with no concern to assure or create results, but leaving it to him whom it attests to make of it what he wills.” It can represent the cause of Christ “only with decided selflessness and therefore the firm renunciation of any self-assertion or self-promotion.” Far from a bearer of God’s grace, the church as recipient of the knowledge of the world’s reconciliation with God is led into the world to be the faithful witness of this good news. Its fulfillment as faithful witness is that which is solely

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71 Ibid., 776.
72 Ibid., 698.
73 Ibid., 769.
74 Ibid., 827f.
75 Ibid., 829. As Webster paraphrases, “this means, crucially, that the church is not responsible for putting an end to the régime of vacillation in human history, but must simply and freely live out of the fact that an end has already been set to vacillation, bearing joyful witness to that fact” (John Webster, “Eloquent and Radiant: the Prophet office of Christ and the Mission of the Church,” in Barth’s Moral Theology, 145).
76 CD IV/3: 830.
determined by the “free power of God.” The church in its relation to the world, humbles itself “to see and understand the world, to accept solidarity with it and to be committed to it,” a true humility “which has to be expressed in personal responsibilities and decisions” in accordance with this promise.\(^\text{77}\)

It has been already shown that the missionary task has its limit which the church can neither ignore nor transgress. The church is by its own provisional nature not an end in itself. In its solidarity with the world lies the church’s sinfulness and weakness, which unceasingly threatens to the purity of its task. There is yet another temptation. Some might be led to deduce the meaning of Christ’s presence from a deficiency in the contemporary experience of the church. Is it the case that Christ has already resigned his prophetic office and transferred it to the missionary community? Barth answers that, while it is true that the church is engaged in its task “within the appointed limits,” it has no control over the ministerium Verbi.\(^\text{78}\) By contrast, as herald, the church should always point to “the prevenient reality of Jesus in his triumphant progress through the history of creation.”\(^\text{79}\) In this sense, its definite, yet limited, task is not that of making effective this “hidden power” but of declaring the living self-witness of the risen Christ. The church “has to attest him to the world as the work of God accomplished for it and the Word of God going out to it.”\(^\text{80}\)

Without this self-revealing reality, the church’s prophetic work will be empty of substance. The church cannot be independent and separated from Christ’s self-proclamation unto the world. While Christ “goes on his way in the performance of his

\(^{77}\) Ibid., 781.  
\(^{78}\) Ibid., 736, 777.  
\(^{79}\) Webster, “Eloquent and Radiant,” 149.  
\(^{80}\) CD IV/3: 835.
prophetic work,” the church is brought into this continuing self-manifestation of God, as a sign in the world. The church in no way replaces Christ its Lord. For Barth, the dynamic of such differentiated unity is rooted in the relation of divine command and human obedience. Barth recognizes:

[The church] is not commanded to represent, introduce, bring into play or even in a sense accomplish again in its being, speech and action either reconciliation, the covenant, the kingdom or the new world reality. … It lives as true prophecy by the fact that it remains distinct from his, that it is subject to it, that it does not try to replace it, but that with supreme power and yet with the deepest humility it points to the work accomplished in him and the Word of God spoken in him, inviting to gratitude for this work and the hearing of this Word.  

If the church does not overrate its human potential, nor undervalue God’s “hidden but very real power,” it “need not be ashamed of its weakness.” Confessing its weakness in its witnessing mission goes with a deep self-understanding of the church as a basic form of being in freedom, humility and gratitude without bearing the responsibility for mediating God’s salvation to the world. That is why, in his mature ecclesiology, Barth unhesitatingly rejects a mediatory or sacramental understanding of the church. His major point of concern at issue is not to burden the church with “the commitment and responsibility which God has assumed and carries towards the world” but to liberate the church for its own appointed work. From this there is a real correspondence between God’s own action for the world in Christ, and the action of the church. In its own way, the church has to represent God’s action “ provisionally, for the full and definitive representation of this alteration of the human situation is not its affair but can only be that

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81 Ibid., 836.  
82 Ibid., 749.  
83 For this correspondence, Barth says, “As God exists for it in his divine way, and Jesus Christ in his divine-human, so the Christian community exists for it in its own purely human” (ibid., 786).
of its Lord in his manifestation to which here and now it moves with the world.”

Set in the lowliness of Christ’s service, the church exists “eccentrically with reference to the world around,” and more profoundly, the center around which the church resolves is “not simply the world as such, but the world for which God is.” In Christ, “God has given himself to and for the world to reconcile it to himself. In him God … has become man. This decides the orientation, meaning and purpose of his community.”

It is within this christological framework alone that we can understand Barth’s view of the missionary task of the church. Of crucial importance for his conception of ecclesial mission is that Christ continually sends his church anew in the fulfillment of this task. Hence, the church has no independent existence apart from its task, which could be executed in various forms of its ministry or service of witness. As the church moves outwardly in the same direction of Christ, its ministry of witness is “ordered in relation to that of Jesus Christ.” The church is in no sense an extension of the ministry of Christ but in a human way “both a ministry to God and a ministry to man.” Witness is a ministry to God, because the church should actively subordinate itself to Christ’s ministry of self-witness. Yet, witness is a ministry to human beings, because the church should declare and explain the gospel to the people in the world. However faithfully discharged the ministry of the church may be, it is nevertheless “the unequivocally human speech and

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84 CD IV/2: 719. For his concern of the church’s task, Barth continues: “Provisionally to represent this determination, the humanity sanctified in him, is … the task, the determination, the clear commission, which the community cannot evade in the time between his resurrection and return which is its time.”
85 CD IV/3: 762.
86 Ibid., 763.
87 Ibid., 795f.
88 Ibid., 831.
89 A particular aspect of “explaining the gospel” in Barth’s view is “to do all this, according to the measure of God’s Word, in the constantly changing forms of human consideration, thought and expression” and therefore “to cause it to be told in human terms” (ibid., 849).
action of a people like others.”\textsuperscript{90} From the outset, the church needs and receives “the promise and assurance of the living Jesus Christ coming to it in all its incommensurability as the work and Word of God.”\textsuperscript{91} This is a “fulfilled promise,” with which the church should take its own responsibility seriously in the work of its specific ministry. The church is responsible for being a sign, a “likeness of the kingdom of God,” which it has to represent to the world, or otherwise it would not be the Christian community. The church can, in short, “serve him only wholeheartedly or not at all.”\textsuperscript{92} By virtue of the fact that “its Lord rules” and “its own task is to serve him,” the church “need have no anxiety concerning the success of its witness.”\textsuperscript{93} What is demanded is that the church simply assists with its own word and its witness, not in terms of a meticulous imitation of Jesus’ peculiar service, but as an active and visible response to him, the one who is always the acting subject in the manifestation of the kingdom of God.

4.4 Conclusion: Missional God, Missional Church

A major task of contemporary missional ecclesiology is to retrieve the primary meaning of mission from God’s definitive engagement with the world. Through his missional activity, God demonstrates his commitment to the world in his overflowing love which has eternally existed within the Godhead towards his creation. On this basis, to engage in the study of the church means primarily to explore the nature and goal of the ecclesial mission within the missio Dei. Christian mission is, as such premised on the theological conviction that God is missional by nature. Consequently the church is an

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., 839.
\textsuperscript{91} Ibid., 840. Barth further says, “the promise which marks its ministry guarantees that, no matter how threateningly they may open up on every hand, the gates of hell (Mt 16:18) shall not swallow it up.”
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., 838.
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., 845.
instrument of God’s mission. It is God who sends forth his people to accomplish the task as part of his universal mission in the world. In this understanding, mission is derived from the very nature of God and is not primarily an activity of the church but is instead a gracious movement from God to the world. Mission precedes the church to the extent that it “embraces all of creation.”

On the other hand, mission continuously unfolds through the church’s ministry of witness in every culture around the world. The church is in this vein, perceived as the historically and socially embodied witness to the gospel of Christ, and the tangible expression of the mission of God. The church bears witness to a different way of life. This way of life is one which is modeled and shaped by God. In other words, the extension of God’s mission is in the sending of church into the world to reenact the mission pattern which has reached its revelatory climax in the life of Jesus Christ.

The idea of a missional God in such a fresh proposal is fascinating. It compels the church to realize that God is always the primary subject of mission, for it is God who calls and equips the church to be his witness in the world and to lead a life worthy of its vocational calling. In shifting the paradigm of mission from a reductionist conception to a radically God-centered worldview, this exposition of the missional God, and therefore of the missional church, proposes characteristics which seem related clearly to central emphases of Barth’s missionary vision of the church. As discussed above, however, Barth’s approach is rather christocentric. Barth stresses the dogmatic task which specifies the covenant relation between God in Christ and the church, and which in turn provides the basis for ecclesiology and mission theology. At the heart of his theology of

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94 Guder, *Missional Church*, 11
95 Thus it seems inappropriate to suggest with Gelder and Zscheile that “[Barth’s] return to a trinitarian view of God’s mission and an understanding of the church being sent into the world contributed to the conception of the church as missionary by nature. This view of the church meant that ecclesiology should
revelation is the event of God’s reconciliation with the world in Christ. This reconciliation demonstrates God’s triumph over the contradiction in which humanity is found in relation to him, and which contains within itself both the possibility and actuality of the ecclesial mission of witness. Christ is the agent of his own reconciliation, and it is his “intrinsically perfect and insurpassable action” which has a distinct character. “No matter what the result may be or what may be achieved or effected,” Barth asserts, “it displays and proclaims itself as truth, and indeed as the truth.” Barth does not set aside here or elsewhere is the ‘givenness’ of this event, which would mean that God’s work is never convertible into some worldly state of affairs, nor identifiable with the missional practice of the church. The Christ event “takes place in its perfection, and with no need of supplement.” Barth’s christological ecclesiology hinges on a single statement: the church as the historical form of Christ’s existence is a miracle of grace.

In this sense, Barth grounds his missiological thinking in God’s mission in Christ. How, then, does Christ ‘extend’ his mission “from his own particular sphere to our surrounding, anthropological sphere”? Barth draws his answer from the reality of Christ’s prophetic office. Thus, it is God who bears the primary responsibility to complete the work of reconciliation in the realm of human subjectivity, not by the implementation of any given theological principle, but through the self-declaration of Christ the prophet. God’s mission for the world is the living presence of the crucified Christ in the Spirit, who self-proclaims the true and radical alteration of the dark world, and sends forth his community, i.e. the church, with the ministry of reconciliation. In

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96 CD IV/3: 7f.
97 Ibid., 8.
98 Ibid., 279.

be understood as derived from missiology. Mission precedes the church …” (*The Missional Church in Perspective*, 32).
other words, Christ’s saving mission as a single divine action cannot be resolvable into the church’s mission, which is inseparable from his. His mission is not a repeatable event, but its perfect singularity radiates its own power and glory throughout human history. Barth’s stress on the unique and irreplaceable character of this divine work, however, does not prompt him to explain away the role of human agency in mission. Rather, Barth gives a subtle account on the ecclesial mission based on Jesus’ unrepeatable history. This thus raises the question, to what degree is the church supposed to take part in the history of Christ’s prophecy in which the saving mission of God is realized?

In order to rightly identify the church’s mission, Barth proposes the ecclesial task of witness, which “responds to the action of Christ, but which is not be equated with it.”

This ecclesial action sets before people “the act of the love of God in which he has already changed them.” Where the church fulfills its ministry, it “makes this impact in their lives and in world-occurrence, and excites a readiness which as such implies a small and provisional but real change in their being and action. … The work of the community is … thus to set them on the way to the goal.” In this respect, Barth’s use of the concept of witness not only rules out any idea that the church’s work is an enterprise that has its own end, but also secures the unity of God’s self-actualizing work and correspondingly human’s act of confession. As a dependent but active partner in Christ’s mission, the church is given its task to bear witness to Christ and “to take a ministering part in his prophetic work.” Mission stands or falls with him, but Christ’s work is “free from any need or necessity of a human co-operation or assistance,” and Christ’s mission

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100 *CD IV/3*: 852.
101 Ibid., 791.
is certainly not bound to the herald ministry of the church.\textsuperscript{102} It is only by God’s free grace of calling that the church is drawn into this unity of word and work present to the world. In light of its sheer gratuitous character, the church is called to serve its Lord without reserve. It is “sent to do this. As it does it, it lives by its root, existing and knowing itself in its reality.”\textsuperscript{103}

This does not mean that its true existence is abstractly separated from the concrete life-world. On the contrary, the church in its visible form of witness establishes a public and social sphere in which it “realizes its existence concretely, not shunning the world but entering it and dealing with it as required.”\textsuperscript{104} It is for the church “to give to the divine call … the human response of taking it up with the human means at its disposal and passing it on to other men.” The church casts its full confidence upon God, for he alone will “show them that they are in the sphere of lordship of his grace and … translate them into the state of faith and obedience.”\textsuperscript{105} In this sense, the church’s personal response to Christ its Lord is brought into the dynamic of the movement of reconciliation in which “God catches the church up into his own self-declaration and fashions it into an instrument which can testify to his self-testimony.”\textsuperscript{106} It is important to remember that Barth’s understanding of mission is grounded in his ethics of reconciliation in which the personal confrontation between Christ and the church can never be smoothed out. What is

\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., 607.
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., 788.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., 853. This stress on the church’s active role in the world history defends Barth against Hauerwas’ charge that Barth has “his overly cautious account of the role of the church in the economy of God’s salvation” and “Because the church cannot trust in its calling to be God’s witness, Barth seems far too willing to leave the world alone” (Hauerwas, \textit{With the Grain of the Universe}, 202).
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid.
constitutive of Barth’s account of this relationship is a specification of the personal will and action of each of both.

We have explored how Barth perceives God as the primary subject of mission and consequently the church is God’s instrument in the ministry of reconciliation. The dynamic of the church’s witness always derives from the differentiated unity of the divine and human agency. In order to maintain this specific ordering, Barth draws from the indissoluble distinction between God and the church. This distinction undergirds the existence of the church as God’s covenant partner, as well as the correspondence between human and divine action in their dependent partnership. For Barth, this distinction is far from destroying the unity of the covenant relation between God and his church. He avoids any danger of separation or opposition by giving a christological foundation upon which the church’s missionary existence in relation to God and to the world rests. In other words, Barth’s affirmation of this distinction-in-unity is a christological statement whereby ontological basis and continuity are given to the church. Therefore, the church-in-mission is at the same time a provisional representation of all humanity justified and reconciled to God. Bearing in mind the significance of Barth’s theological insights explicated here, we will explore more deeply in the last chapter, Barth’s relevance and challenge to the construal of missional ecclesiology. In doing so, the full potential of Barth’s ecclesiological vision for the Christian life and witness today will be also correspondingly reaffirmed.
CHAPTER 5
BALTHASAR’S THEO-DRAMATICS AS THE CONTEXT OF ECCLESIOLOGY

5.1 Introduction: Reading Balthasar in the Post-Conciliar Era

Hans Urs von Balthasar is constantly in dialogue with non-Catholics. Throughout his academic life he engages other theological and philosophical traditions in a respectful and critical way. While his scholarly interests and publishing activities are wide-ranging, Balthasar touches upon the primary task of seeking the true meaning of the catholicity of the church. The central motif of his theological analysis is to envisage a kind of reformation of the Catholic Church and of Catholic theology from within. As he says, “The more the Church has to keep herself Catholic, open to all, dialogical, dramatic, in the modern world, the more profoundly she must comprehend and live her intimate essence as Body and Bride of Christ.” The crucial reality of the church is this sacramental reality as the continuation on earth of Christ’s own incarnate witness. Many

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1 In particular, Balthasar made a good friendship with Barth when he was student chaplain at the University of Basel. He wrote a great masterpiece of ecumenical theology, The Theology of Karl Barth, in which he described himself as a ‘Barthian’ (ibid., 400). As Christoph Schönborn puts it, there is “a profound reception of the ‘inspiration’ of the Reformation” in Balthasar’s work (Christoph Schönborn, “Forward,” in Razing the Bastions, 13). For further discussion, see Rodney A. Howsare, Hans Urs von Balthasar and Protestantism: The Ecumenical Implications of his Theological Style (London: T&T Clark, 2005).

2 Mark McIntosh points out that Balthasar has undertaken “an almost continuous project of translating, editing, and anthologizing Europe's cultural heritage and its Christian roots. Until his death, [he] remained involved in various series of such publications, always seeking to make available to the present the best of the great tradition in literature, drama, poetry, philosophy, and religions thought.” See Mark McIntosh, “Von Balthasar,” in The Blackwell Companion to the Modern Theology, ed. Gareth Jones (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 388.

3 In retrospect, Balthasar says, “my efforts in these last few years have been deliberately concerned with this premise for ecumenical dialogue and for the dialogues with all the non-Christian visions of the world. In this context my efforts are chiefly a discourse ad intra, within the Church.” See Balthasar, My Work, 103. See further idem, “The Claim to Catholicity,” in ET IV: 65-121; In the Fullness of Faith: On the Centrality of the Distinctively Catholic, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988).

4 Balthasar, My Work, 107. To explore Balthasar’s ecclesiology, chapters 5 and 6, unlike the rest, use the feminine pronoun in reference to the church. The feminine language is chosen for two reasons: first, the word “church” (die Kirche) is usually translated as feminine gender in the English edition of Balthasar’s works, such as his masterpiece Theo-Drama; second, it seems appropriate to use the feminine language to express Balthasar’s idea of the church as Marian, feminine and bridal.
of Balthasar’s early ecclesiological insights comport with the teachings of the Second Vatican Council.\(^5\) This Council was a watershed event in modern Catholic history which responded to the call for reform and revival within Catholic tradition. “While Vatican II brought about most of what Balthasar wanted, in terms of a new openness of the church to the world, a reaffirmation of the place of the laity, and so on,” Fergus Kerr notes, “it was not the retrieval of a fuller experience of Catholic tradition, as he had hoped.”\(^6\) In fact, as Walter Kasper puts it, Vatican II presented only the indispensable ‘frame of reference’ for further synthesis and explanation.\(^7\) Balthasar by no means renounces the Council’s achievements nor does he set himself against the important ecclesiological innovations and developments brought forth in the Council’s documents such as *Lumen Gentium*,\(^8\) but he rather seeks a deeper understanding and experience of the church in light of the paschal mystery of Christ. In his quest, Balthasar establishes himself as one of the leading theologians who protest against certain post-conciliar ‘trends’ in Catholic life.

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\(^5\) See especially his small book published in 1952, *Razing the Bastions*, where Balthasar set up some important themes, such as the role of laity in the church’s mission and the church’s intimate relationship with the world, which were also highlighted by the Council. It should be noted, however, that after his departure from the Jesuits Balthasar suffered a period of extreme isolation, was never offered a chair of theology and was not called to participate in Vatican II. He was at last recognized by his co-religionists in 1969, when Pope Paul VI appointed him to the International Theological Commission.

\(^6\) Fergus Kerr, *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 123-4. Balthasar addresses the tension between different schools of thought during the Council as such: “There are the polarizations in the wake of the Second Vatican Council: left versus right, progressive versus conservative. Some people dissolve allegedly rigid forms until nothing is left but formlessness, while others hold fast to these forms until they actually ossify” (Balthasar, *In the Fullness of Faith*, 17). Soon after the conclusion of the Council, Balthasar grew anxious about the direction progressive forces wanted to take the church, and he sought to counter the majority trend in theology, especially as advocated in the post-conciliar journal *Concilium*, by founding his own anti-accommodationist journal *Communio*.


and thought. Here we will highlight only two ecclesiological aspects which Balthasar develops concerning the retrieval of authentic Catholic tradition in the post-Vatican II era.

In the next chapter we will discuss his dramatic ecclesiology in more detail.

First, in order to move beyond “the limits of the Council’s Mariology,” Balthasar advocates a fuller intelligibility of the Marian *fiat* and receptivity to the incarnation of the Word. Reflecting upon Mary’s consent to the divine will, Balthasar revisits the doctrine of Mary as the Mother of Christ and the Bride of Christ. Through this ‘new start’ Balthasar reveals Mary as having a genuinely dramatic role in the theo-drama, in her unique relation to Christ and the church. While the Swiss priest finds the Council’s reflection on Mary to be a significant step towards understanding Mariology and ecclesiology as closely intertwined, his focus is set on the dramatic dimension of Mariology and ecclesiology, which is “seen as functionally dependent on Christology.” In this view, faithful to the orientation recalled by the Council’s fathers, Balthasar accords significant weight to the bridal imagery of the Christ-Mary relationship, in which Mary takes a role in bringing to birth and shaping the church. In terms of the grace of

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9 One of the theological positions that Balthasar opposes is liberation theology, whose “greatest danger lies in its tendency to link together the relationships of the first and the Second Adam, earthly action and the kingdom that comes down from God, within a single system or overview” (*TD* IV: 482ff.). In short, Balthasar complains that liberation theology lacks a genuine understanding of vertical transcendence and human relative freedom. We cannot here evaluate Balthasar’s critique of liberation theology, but only mention it as an illustration of his fundamental concerns after Vatican II.

10 Particularly in Mary’s relation to Christ, Balthasar comments that “the Council echoes the Fathers in describing the virginal-maternal Church as the Bride of Christ, but Mary herself, the Church’s prototype and goal, is only referred to as his Mother; only once is she called his ‘associate’. While the relationship between Christ and Mary is seen as going beyond the Son-Mother relationship in the direction of the paradisal man-woman relationship, it is by no means clear how this relationship is ultimately realized (on the basis of the Last Adam)” (*TD* III: 317f.).

11 Ibid., 318-39. In his discussion of Mariology in *TD* III, Balthasar concludes the subsection “Distortions and a New Start” by remarking that the questions that the Council’s Mariology raise but leave unanswered spur him to take “a new and deeper approach” to Mariology (ibid., 318).

12 Ibid., 290. As will be shown, Balthasar’s approach sheds light on Mary’s relationship with Christ and his church in a way that “overcomes the false alternatives of a ‘christotypical’ picture of Mary, standing one-sidedly with Christ over against the Church, and an ‘ecclesiotypical’ picture of Mary, where she is seen as ‘Church’, in solidarity with all the redeemed, over against Christ” (ibid., 304).
participation in Christ, Balthasar draws upon a key point in Mariology, namely, the sacramental dimension of the church which continues, and which echoes Mary’s yes to Christ throughout the ages. This opens up a new condition in human freedom, which for Balthasar affirms the ecclesial involvement in the economy of salvation, without threatening in any way the irreplaceable and unrepeatable character of Christ’s mission. Below we will return to these themes.

Second, Balthasar considers as an important development the Council’s stress on the dual reality of the church, in which the church is to be understood as both the people of God and mystery. Yet, he contends that the church is first and foremost a mystery of faith and “only by being this mysterium does she become the People of God.”¹³ Hence, the church cannot be a reality separate from Christ, and thus ecclesiology should be treated not as an independent doctrine which is disconnected from Christology.¹⁴ For this reason, Balthasar is wary of the image of the church as the people of God. Wanting to avoid the post-conciliar danger of reducing the church to the level of a socio-political party, he prefers the language of Christ’s body and Christ’s bride through which he is describing an intrinsic relationship between Christ and the church. These two images are employed to affirm that “the church owes everything to Christ and possesses no autonomous form of her own.”¹⁵ While the body image presents the church as partaking in the personality of Christ, according to Balthasar, the bride image guarantees the human

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¹³ Balthasar, The Office of Peter, 18. Balthasar launches a polemic against the seemingly overarching category of the ‘People of God’: “If the Second Vatican Council tried to replace a certainly insufficient concept of the Church (as that of the ‘perfect society’, or ‘societas completa’, a society that was completely separated between hierarchy and laity) with the concept of the People of God, it is nonetheless a concept that hides within itself – when taken abstractly and absolutely – opposite danger. Concepts are our fate. One cannot emphasize enough that Vatican II’s Decree on the Church Lumen Gentium introduces the concept of the People of God only after it has treated the Church as Mystery” (ET IV: 139).

¹⁴ ET IV: 139-41.

response of love for Christ. These images avoid the risk of too close an identification between Christ and the church. In short, the essence of the church in such spiritual union-in-distinction is the very being of Christ himself, and yet the church herself cannot be monistically reduced to Christ or vice versa.

As Balthasar seeks a renewal in the understanding of the relationship of Christology, Mariology and ecclesiology within his own tradition, he enters into the discussion of significant issues surrounding his theo-dramatic theory. This discussion provides new insights into the seemingly paradoxical nature of the church.16 The governing assumption in Balthasar’s treatment is God’s self-communication in Christ as the ground of the church. Through the Son’s economic mission the whole Trinity opens up and is involved in the world. Such a divine openness creates the space in which the church is called to share in the life of the Trinity. This dramatic dimension of God’s revelation not only brings the church into existence but also shapes the life and mission of the church. As a result, the church is not to see her anchor to be self-grounding in her own, but will only see herself as the outflowing love of God. In this view the church is seen “as the love flowing out over the world for its redemption.”17 In manifesting this love, the church is conjoined with Christ as a unity, entering into Christ’s kenotic movement into the world. Yet this conjoining means that the church is a part of a unity in which she does not lose her validity of humanity and creaturely freedom. As a result, the church’s connection to Christ in the theo-drama is “a relation at once of dependency and freedom for which there is no analogy in the created sphere but only in the Trinity.”18

16 See especially TD III: 339-360.
17 ET II: 22.
18 Ibid., 21. Here I translate the German term Abhängigkeit as ‘dependency.’ By rendering Abhängigkeit as ‘independence,’ the translators of ET II give the opposite meaning of the original.
Arguably, for Balthasar, the church cannot be understood apart from her positioning within a christological and trinitarian framework. We will now turn to examining the nature and meaning of this theological structure, which should also help to shed light on the relationship between the divine mission and the church’s mission.

The rest of this chapter will therefore address Balthasar’s trinitarian and christological perspective of the theo-drama, from which this divine drama is understood as a drama of the divine and human freedom. In the next section, we will focus on the theme of kenosis as the life of the Trinity ad intra and ad extra. For Balthasar, it is the trinitarian mystery which undergirds all things in the world. On this basis, we will then explore the identity between the person and mission of Christ which is the epitome of the trinitarian love and mission to the world. The incarnation of Christ is understood as “the concrete way in which God has resolved to open up and (keep open) the acting area between him and man.”19 This “total involvement” of God in the world also involves our participation in the movement of Christ’s mission.20 In our response to the mighty acts of God, we come to be most truly ourselves. Here we see Balthasar’s conception of ‘person in Christ.’ It is his retrieval of christological and trinitarian reflection which gives the foundation for anthropology and ecclesiology. Before proceeding to the next chapter, we will lead our argument into Balthasar’s presentation of Mary’s faith as the exemplar for the church and all humanity.

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19 TD III: 47.
20 See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Engagement with God: The Drama of Christian Discipleship*, trans. R.J. Halliburton (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2008), in which Balthasar sets out to explain that the church “shares with God in his work of sharing himself in Christ with the world” (ibid., 33), actualized as the body of Christ “at the very place where Christ shares himself with those who share with him in the sacrificial meal (see 1 Cor 10:16ff.) and charges those who receive him to imitate his own disposition and willingness to share and to give (see 2 Cor 8-9)” (ibid., 34).
5.2 **Theo-drama from a Trinitarian Perspective**

One of the goals identified in *Theo-Drama* is to draw from dramatic categories so as to set forth a theology of redemption in history which is essentially trinitarian.\(^{21}\) What lies at the heart of God’s drama is not just the enrapturing power of the divine splendor, as explained in Balthasar’s first part of the trilogy, but “an eternal Trinity in motion and interaction.”\(^ {22}\) Far from a kind of static and impersonal stillness, God’s inner nature consists of the dynamic of the eternal relations among the divine persons of the Father, Son and Spirit, which also gives rise to God’s free self-giving love to the world. Through God’s triune economic manifestation, we can see the glory and love of God’s inner life. A significant implication of this trinitarian vision is that Balthasar delineates the history of creation and redemption as the trinitarian movement *ad extra* and therefore grounds the world’s drama in the dramatic character of God’s very being.\(^ {23}\) For the moment we will focus our discussion on the unfolding of the theo-drama as a trinitarian kenotic movement within God towards his beloved world.

The point of departure for Balthasar’s trinitarian theology is his reflection on the depth of God’s being. God the Father begets the Son through kenosis in which the Father shares all that he has and is with the Son. For God is in essence love and self-giving, “he will not be God for himself alone”:

> [The Father] lets go of his divinity and, in this sense, manifests a (divine) Godlessness (of love, of course). … The Son’s answer to the gift of Godhead … can only be eternal thanksgiving (*eucharistia*) to the Father, the Source – a

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\(^{21}\) It should be noted that Balthasar always considers the kenosis or self-giving of Christ as an event within the Trinity itself. See, for instance, *TD* II: 256ff.

\(^{22}\) *TD* V: 72.

\(^{23}\) In contrast with “those who do so imagine that the divine drama only acquires its dynamism and its many hues by going through a created, temporal world and only acquires its seriousness and depth by going through sin, the Cross and hell,” Balthasar asserts that “it is the drama of the ‘emptying’ of the Father’s heart, in the generation of the Son, that contains and surpasses all possible drama between God and a world” (*TD* IV: 326-7).
thanksgiving as selfless and unreserved as the Father’s original self-surrender. Proceeding from both, as their subsistent ‘We’, there breathes the ‘Spirit’ who is common to both: as the essence of love, he maintains the infinite difference between them, seals it and, since he is the one Spirit of them both, bridges it.\(^\text{24}\)

Thus the Son receives himself from the Father and responds perfectly to the Father’s initiative of love in the Spirit who is the manifestation and communication of love between both. They share the same divine nature in the sense that “their ‘We’, that is, the Spirit, must also be God if he is to be the ‘personal’ seal of that self-expropriation that is identical in Father and Son.”\(^\text{25}\) For Balthasar, it is this primary kenosis within the Trinity that makes possible other kenotic movements of God into the world. The primary goal for Balthasar’s renewed sense of kenosis is to make clear the way in which all subsequent events of salvation history are preconditioned by the immanent Trinity.\(^\text{26}\) In order to include all possible human responses to God’s grace of salvation within the theo-drama, Balthasar argues that the Father’s generation of the Son “involves the positing of an absolute, infinite ‘distance’ that can contain and embrace all the other distances that are possible within the world of finitude, including the distance of sin.”\(^\text{27}\) In other words, the triune God can “overcome even what is hostile to God within his eternal relations.”\(^\text{28}\)

Since the holy distance between Father and Son contains and surpasses all possible drama

\(^{24}\) Ibid., 324.

\(^{25}\) Ibid., 331.

\(^{26}\) In his understanding of the relationship between the immanent and economic Trinity, Balthasar distances himself from Karl Rahner and Jürgen Moltmann, who “seem to lay such weight on the latter that the immanent Trinity … becomes merely a kind of precondition for God’s true, earnest self-revelation and self-giving.” See ibid., 320-2. To evaluate the legitimacy of Balthasar’s critique of these two theologians is however beyond the scope of the discussion here.

\(^{27}\) Ibid., 323. Balthasar does not overlook the role of the Spirit here: “For any world only has its place within that distinction between Father and Son that is maintained and bridged by the Holy Spirit” (ibid., 327). In this sense, the Spirit is the eternal, personal distinction and union between Father and Son. Even in Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, the Spirit, as the bond of the same kenotic love, perfectly unites the Son to the Father in the Trinity: “the God-forsakenness of the Son during his Passion was just as much a mode of his profound bond with the Father in the Holy Spirit as his death was a mode of his life and his suffering a mode of his bliss” (\textit{TD V:} 257, emphasis mine).

\(^{28}\) \textit{TD III:} 530.
between God and the world, the apparent abandonment of one divine person by another in the economy of salvation is to be seen as an economic form of the personal relationship within the immanent Trinity. We will explore thoroughly the experience of the Son’s forsakenness by the Father on the cross in the next section.

In his account of trinitarian kenosis, Balthasar is very careful to avoid identifying God’s being with an intra-worldly process, the possibility of which must be grounded in God. Rather than employing any notion that God stands in need of the world, Balthasar highlights God’s perfect freedom out of which the Father loves and redeems the world through the Son in the Spirit. As the infinite free self-giving of the persons, the divine life chooses to share its love and fullness of life with creatures by drawing them into the infinite space opened by God. Does this suggest that Balthasar is saying all this to diminish the significance of creaturely freedom in the world-drama? We must consider that for Balthasar, while God is under no compulsion to enter into the world, his divine sovereignty is in no way in contradiction to the operation and fulfillment of creaturely freedom. Our hypothetical question points us to the deepest mystery of the Trinity in its salvation-historical reality. In Balthasar’s view, the purpose of God’s free dramatic action is to set free the creature from within:

Thus … it becomes clear why finite freedom can really fulfill itself in infinite freedom and in no other way. If letting be belongs to the nature of infinite freedom – the Father lets the Son be consubstantial God, and so forth – there is no danger of finite freedom, which cannot fulfill itself on its own account (because it can neither go back and take possession of its origins nor can it attain its absolute goal by its own power), becoming alienated from itself in the realm of the Infinite.

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29 Christologically speaking, “because in this God (and God is God only as eternal and living) reveals himself as love, he cannot have become love merely by virtue of the emancipation of the creature; he has no need of the world and its ways in order to become himself; but manifests himself, precisely in the cross of Christ, in his abandonment by God and descent into hell, as the one he always was: everlasting love.” See Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Why I Am Still a Christian,” in Two Say Why, trans. John Griffiths (London: Search Press, 1973), 52-3.
It can only be what it is, that is, an image of infinite freedom, imbued with a freedom of its own, by getting in tune with the (trinitarian) ‘law’ of absolute freedom (of self-surrender).  

In this way finite freedom can truly participate in infinite freedom. Its indebtedness to God and orientation to him evidences that it is grace that makes possible this capacity of finite being. On the other hand, the drama between infinite and finite freedom implies that there is a real exchange in which God allows himself to be ‘affected,’ though only on the basis of his own prior and gracious initiative. This is possible only because of the nature of the trinitarian kenosis. The theo-drama is real drama: that is, it is enacted in the sphere of finite freedom, involving a real interplay between God and human agents. God respects finite freedom and grants it a capacity to make decisions, to the extent that he bears the risk of the free creature choosing contrary to the divine will. Thus we see that Balthasar’s understanding of finite freedom as a gift from infinite freedom entails “the possibility of going astray.” His ‘logic’ of the “absolute and real separation of Father and Son” corresponds to all we mean by alienation, pain and sin in the world:

[God] has endowed man with a freedom that, in responding to the divine freedom, depends on nothing but itself. Like the ultimate ground that cannot have some further rationale beyond it and is hence ground-less – that is, the Father’s self-surrender to the Son and their relationship in the Spirit (which grounds everything) – human freedom participates in the divine autonomy, both when it says Yes and when it says No. … Man’s refusal is possible because of the trinitarian ‘recklessness’ of divine love, which, in its self-giving, observes no limits and has no regard for itself.

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30 TD II: 259.
31 “It is by looking toward infinite freedom that finite freedom sees how it can and should realize itself in its finitude, its natural state” (ibid., 397).
32 It is important to note that for Balthasar the movement of God’s kenosis toward the creation is rooted in God’s self-offering within the triune life. This kenotic movement does not result in loss but overflows to the act of redemption, thus constituting the precondition for human participation in God’s saving drama in Christ. See TD IV: 331ff.
33 TD II: 275.
34 TD IV: 328-9.
The trinitarian drama is a divine drama into which human persons are invited, and in which God’s all-embracing power does no violence to human resolution and decision, even in the case of misuse or perversion of this created freedom. Within the Trinity, “God’s all-powerful love is also powerlessness, not only giving the Son an equal, divine freedom but also giving the creature itself a genuine power of freedom and taking it utterly seriously.”

Therefore, God’s creation of human freedom emerges from a divine form of ‘powerlessness’ which already foresees “the confrontation between ground-less divine love and ground-less human sin.” In his dealings with the sinful humankind, God does not threaten to overwhelm human freedom by a power from outside. Yet by the Son’s self-surrender he restores the proper relationship between finite and infinite freedom as well as the former’s authenticity from within finite freedom itself:

This barrier, this lack of reciprocity, is broken down in Jesus Christ. … In his being ‘made to be sin’ and bearing the ‘curse’, infinite freedom shows its ultimate, most extreme capability for the first time: it can be itself even in the finitude that ‘loses itself’. … Yet only here, where ‘God’s love is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us’, is finite freedom driven out of its last refuge and set on the path toward infinite freedom; thus the abyss that has opened up in the Christian fact is clearly visible to post-Christian reflection.

Human freedom and all its possibilities are not undermined by this. But in Christ humanity is no longer alone. It is God, with his own divine choice, who “accompanies man into the most extreme situation of his (negative) choice.” The mystery of the incarnation involves God’s sharing in the exercise of human freedom and his entry into our lostness and desolation. Our brief examination of the trinitarian drama moves us in the next section to deal with Balthasar’s interpretation of Christ’s person and mission.

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36 Ibid., 332.
37 TD II: 244-5.
38 ET IV: 421.
5.3 Christ, the Climax of the Drama

Balthasar addresses the dilemma of freedom in the context of theo-drama, where human freedom can find fulfillment in the drama enacted by Jesus Christ. By locating the foundation of all finite freedom, all possibilities of human dramatic action, in the Son, Balthasar explains that it is in the identity between person and mission in Christ that we find the true meaning of personhood. In this true meaning is found the most perfect realization of human freedom and identity. Just as the laws of the economic Trinity arise from the immanent Trinity, so Christ’s missio is rooted in the eternal processio of the Son from the Father. In this light, Christ is understood as the “concrete universal” in which all of history is summed up and given its ultimate meaning. As the God-man, Jesus Christ is both the visible manifestation of the invisible God and “the divine-human pattern of true humanity in God’s eyes.” There is no disparity between what he is and that for which he has been sent. His whole being is, in full possession of himself, his free obedience to the Father who sends him. By virtue of this, he is person par excellence. In his concrete historical life,

[Christ] maintains his identity; and so, as the matrix of all possible dramas, he embodies the absolute drama in his own person, in his personal mission. Here it becomes clear that this person, in order to preserve his identity, must be trinitarian: in order to be himself, he needs the Father and the Spirit. On the other hand, he makes room within himself, that is, an acting area for dramas of theological moment, involving other, created persons.

40 See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *A Theology of History* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1994), here 24. This unique personal identity also distinguishes him, as the Son, from the Father and the Spirit: “The Son’s form of existence, which makes him the Son from all eternity, is the uninterrupted reception of everything that he is, of his very self, from the Father. It is indeed this receiving of himself which gives him his ‘I’, his own inner dimension, his spontaneity, that sonship with which he can answer the Father in a reciprocal giving” (ibid., 26). Such a response to the Father is the personalizing consummation of his human nature.
41 *TD* III: 162.
There are two things which we should note concerning these christological statements. First, Balthasar’s understanding of person, whether divine or human, is rooted in the concept of mission. In Jesus’ case, his enactment of sonship and fulfillment of mission go hand in hand, within a trinitarian context. Only in his own person as Son, and in the power of the Spirit, can Jesus fulfill his human mission and obey the Father’s will. Balthasar thus links the earthly life of Jesus inseparably with the eternal life of the Trinity. Secondly, Balthasar brings to light the bond between the reality of Christ and the reality of humankind. While Christ’s mission is personal and unique, it is “also capable of ‘imitation’ by those who are called, in him, to participate in his drama.”42 Christ, who is the principal subject in the theo-drama, creates a space and offers a role to others as co-actors. We will discuss in more detail how Balthasar relates Christology to theological anthropology in the next section.

What, then, may we say that the cross reveals to us about the Trinity? On the basis of God’s kenosis Balthasar sees that Christ’s life and death is revelatory of the trinitarian life and love. The center of God’s saving drama lies in the fulfillment of the task which has been given to the Son by the Father. This task calls for total obedience and self-abandonment, even to the point of death (Phil 2:6-8). At the heart of the drama, the Son accepts his mission. It is not a mission imposed upon him from outside. It is grounded in the immanent Trinity, and his will is “to carry out the Father’s will – his mission – into ultimate darkness.”43 Christ’s willingness to enter into the darkness of human freedom’s ‘No’ and to bear the sins of humankind, springs from his mission, “which is rooted in his

42 Ibid.
43 TD IV: 335.
coming-forth from the Father.” More profoundly, “in the ‘economy’ of the incarnation, the divine intimacy of Father and Son in the Holy Spirit assumes only another modality, occasioned by the absorption of human, sinful alienation in this intimacy, as a new expression of their selfless, surrendering love.” Here we see the paradox of abandonment that Balthasar attributes to God’s love for the sinful humankind. The Son’s self-giving to the Father plunges him into the experience of God-forsakenness (i.e. his death in the passion), where the God-man drama reaches its climax as Balthasar describes it,

Perverse finite freedom casts all its guilt onto God, making him the sole accused, the scapegoat, while God allows himself to be thoroughly affected by this, not only in the humanity of Christ but also in Christ’s trinitarian mission. The omnipotent powerlessness of God’s love shines forth in the mystery of darkness and alienation between God and the sin-bearing Son; this is where Christ ‘represents’ us, takes our place: what is ‘experienced’ is the opposite of what the facts indicate.

In other words the Son’s experience of opposition in the God-forsakenness of his own death remains a modality of his loving relationship to the Father in the Spirit. The Son, sent by the Father into the self-abandonment of the cross, emanating out of love, freely takes upon himself the sin of the world. In the utter powerlessness of absolute love - the descent into hell, he enters into solidarity with the dead and sinners in the experience of death, through which his love reaches the depths of this hell and offers salvation to the dead. Christ’s death and descent is, accordingly, a substitutionary experience of the

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44 Ibid., 334.
45 ET IV: 436.
46 TD IV: 335-6.
47 Balthasar explains this ‘exploration’ of hell as a trinitarian event: “Holy Saturday is a kind of suspension, as it were, of the Incarnation, whose result is given back to the hands of the Father and which the Father will renew and definitively confirm by the Easter Resurrection. That the death of Jesus, like his Incarnation, was a function of his living, eternal love makes it that special death that ‘shatters to pieces the terrifying gates of hell’. It thus lifts off its hinges the whole law of ‘death, followed closely by Hades’ (Rev 6:8) as the consequence of sin (Rom 5:12; James 1:15). … So at the same time, in the apparent boundarilessness of
fullness of death due to sin. As a result, in Christ, there remains no depth of sin for which his sacrifice cannot atone. In his “solidarity, from within, with those who refuse all solidarity,” the Son presents himself as the High Priest to “give to each freedom created by him the gift of love that breaks out of every dungeon and dissolves every constriction.” Thus redemption is rooted in the reconciliation of relationships which takes place as humankind is drawn into this divine love of the Trinity. It is in the Son that the Trinity reaches out to restore alienated humanity and freedom to communion in the trinitarian embrace.

From the discussion above, we have seen that the trinitarian foundation from which the gift of finite freedom is granted is crucial to Balthasar’s theo-dramatic theory. His task is thereafter to ground the possibility, reality and fulfillment of finite freedom within infinite freedom, in such a way that the integrity of both is truly preserved. Finite freedom is totally dependent on infinite freedom: “every act it performs in the direction of transcendence can only be performed because the realm of infinite freedom has

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48 Thus it is essential for Balthasar to maintain that Christ “does not bear the burden as something external: he in no way distances himself from those who by rights should have to bear it” (TD IV: 337). Here we see that Balthasar tightly holds the two themes – vicarious atonement and solidarity - together in his understanding of Christ’s descent into hell.

49 ET IV: 422. See also TD IV: 348-9.

50 Thus it seems misplaced for Alyssa Lyra Pitstick to complain that, in Balthasar’s account, “The Trinity is experienced as destroyed, at least by the Father and Son” (Light in Darkness, 119). A major failure of Pitstick’s analysis of Balthasar is her treatment of all christological discourses as univocal but this is precisely what Balthasar’s theology is not. Balthasar’s Christology operates in several registers sometimes overlapping to the extent that it is difficult to distinguish where analogy and metaphor shade off into the other. I am indebted to Professor Gill Goulding, Regis College, Toronto, for this observation. For further discussion of Balthasar’s kenotic Christology, see Mark A. McIntosh, Christology from Within: Spirituality and the Incarnation in Hans Urs von Balthasar (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000).
disclosed itself.” 51 It can only become more itself through a graced participation in the life of the Trinity. This asymmetry between finite and infinite freedom does not lead Balthasar to cancel out created autonomy and responsibility. Rather it brings him to the insight that finite freedom is drawn beyond itself by the divine initiative to attain its *telos*. 52 It is only in and through the Son that finite freedom is offered a real space of giving and receiving. It is in this giving and receiving where it can reach its goal and fulfillment. This is a totally new space for the interaction of God and humanity. This space opens up in the event of Christ’s resurrection in which “the extreme distance between Father and Son, which is endured as a result of the Son’s taking on of sin, changes into the most profound intimacy.” 53 What the risen Christ reveals in the forty days between his resurrection and ascension is “what was already in full reality present, but concealed.” 54 Balthasar here underscores the trinitarian and dramatic dimension of the resurrection: “the Father, in exalting his Son, also brings the Son’s mission to its conclusion, and makes the Son visible to the world, spreading abroad there the Spirit which is common to them both.” 55 By the grace of the resurrection, and through the bestowal of the Spirit, human persons can enter into an entirely new, dramatic way of life.

51 *TD* II: 314.
52 Balthasar here sides with Gregory of Nyssa and points out that “the element of infinity that indwells finite freedom comes from the free gift of infinite freedom: the latter not only ‘frees’ finite freedom and gives it room to operate but actually opens itself to it as the context of its self-fulfillment” (*ibid.*, 238). See also *ibid.*, 312-6.
53 *TD* IV: 361-2.
54 Balthasar, *A Theology of History*, 83-93, here 92. Balthasar emphasizes that, within the Son’s absolute, loving obedience, the Father and Son are always one in a reciprocal relationship in the Spirit: “All the same, Good Friday is not just the same as Easter: the economic Trinity objectively acts out the drama of the world’s alienation. … [But] we should say that God, desiring to reconcile the world to himself (and hence himself to the world), acts dramatically in the Son’s Cross and Resurrection” (*TD* IV: 362).
In this new life there is “the soteriological liberation of finite freedom,” which establishes the conditions for their inner participation in the divine sonship of Christ.\textsuperscript{56}

The trinitarian structure of the resurrection event thus allows Balthasar to conclude that: “It is only when, first of all, we grant this event its Trinitarian dimension that we can go on to speak appropriately of its being \textit{pro nobis} and \textit{pro mundo.”}\textsuperscript{57}

Balthasar describes the resurrection as the Son’s “return to the Father,” which also opens the way back to the Father for the redeemed humanity with whom Christ shares solidarity in their experience of dying and rising again in baptism and their new life (Rom 6:4; Col 3:3).\textsuperscript{58} In this sense, “our dying-with-Christ is something that happens retroactively, so to speak, in virtue of and sustained by the grace of the Resurrection.”\textsuperscript{59} Drawn by the Spirit into Christ’s sonship, we are “initiated into the sphere of Christ” and called the children of God, as attested by Scripture (Rom 8:14-17; 1 Jn 3:1). For Balthasar, the “sphere” in which the Christian lives is summed up by the term \textit{en Christōi}, in whom “God opens up that personal sphere of freedom within which the particular (individual or collective) characters are given their ultimate human face, their mission or ‘role.’”\textsuperscript{60} While affirming that Christ gives the believers a share in his drama by communicating the Spirit to them, Balthasar rejects any notion of pure passivity on the part of the human person. Rather

\textsuperscript{56} \textit{TD} IV: 366-7. Balthasar’s consistent emphasis on the integrity of finite freedom prevents his soteriology from operating in a “mechanical manner” that, as Pitstick puts it, “the change in the sinner’s reality does not occur at the moment of repentance (or sacramental absolution) but at the point in time when Christ took these sins upon Himself on the cross and buried them with Himself in Sheol” (\textit{Light in Darkness}, 304). As to Balthasar, it is clear that the sacramental reality of faith is fully linked to this event.

\textsuperscript{57} Balthasar, \textit{Mysterium Paschale}, 203. About the role of the Spirit in the resurrection, see ibid., 210-4.

\textsuperscript{58} \textit{TD} IV: 383-8.

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 367.

\textsuperscript{60} \textit{TD} III: 38. In respect of the presence of Christ, Balthasar stresses that the sphere of Christ “embraces both the historical Jesus and equally the Risen Christ, the Christ of faith, who recapitulates in himself everything earthly” (\textit{TD} IV: 385).
Balthasar develops his theological anthropology in light of the person of Christ and his mission. Below we will further elaborate upon the relationship of both of these.

5.4 Human Participation in Christ

Balthasar’s understanding of the human person, far from a general theory of individuality, suggests that the human subject becomes a person “through the unique way in which he is addressed by God and taken into his service, which always takes place within the christological framework.”

We can “claim to be persons only in virtue of a relationship with [Christ] and in dependence on him.” In terms of mission, every human person is invited to share in Christ’s mission that characterizes a unique existence and vocation for each person. Sharing in the mission of Christ involves a personal, human response to God’s call, which constitutes the reality of human freedom. As Mark McIntosh puts it, “Balthasar’s Christology re-situates [the] human being within its true acting space, upon a stage whose structures and rhythms have been purified and reconfigured by Christ.” The way which Balthasar proposes, and in which Christ’s mission opens up the acting area to the characters who share the action, however, does not mean that Christ does not appear on the world stage as the central character.

We turn now examining this idea in a fuller sense.

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62 *TD* III: 207.

63 In other words, for Balthasar, participation in Christ’s mission leads to the full realization of human identity: “if man freely affirms and accepts the election, vocation and mission which God … offers him, he has the greatest possible chance of … grasping the most intimate idea of his own self” (ibid., 263-71, here 263). See also Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Christian State of Life,* trans. Mary Frances McCarthy (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1983), 72-83.

64 Mark A. McIntosh, “Christology,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar,* 35. In Balthasar’s own words, “the presence of Christ irradiated, as it were, the inner form of anthropology” (*TD* III: 33).

65 *TD* III: 249.
Balthasar’s argument is that “it is only when ‘the Word became flesh’ that a concrete area comes into being for the interaction of God and man.”\(^{66}\) In effect humanity is drawn into dialogue with God as his partner. The acting area thus created through the incarnation and defined by the person and work of Christ is a “personal and personalizing area” in which other characters can find their part and play their role as fully human beings, i.e. as true dramatic characters who by carrying out their role and mission attain or disclose their true self.\(^{67}\) This personal mission can be nothing other than “a participation in the once-and-for-all, all-embracing mission of Christ” which grounds all forms of Christian life, action and mission.\(^{68}\) That is why Balthasar insists upon the christological basis of Christian mission. God’s openness and deep involvement with humanity in Christ not only establishes the proper communication between God and his created humanity, but also makes sufficient room “for his human co-protagonist” (*dem Mitspieler Mensch seinen*).\(^{69}\) This does not mean that human beings can demand that God should open up the inner realm of the acting space so that its finite freedom may attain fulfillment.\(^{70}\) Human beings can only play their part in the divine drama, not in their own right, but in the graced possibility of doing so. In the theo-drama, the individual’s own participation can only be recognized as a genuine dramatic action within the dramatic action of Christ.

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\(^{66}\) Ibid., 41.

\(^{67}\) In the case of Jesus, Balthasar stresses, what is found “in the terms of real life” is “the utter and total identification of the character as a result of his utter and total performance of his mission” (ibid., 201).

\(^{68}\) *TD* IV: 406.


\(^{70}\) *TD* III: 47.
In this light, we can see that one who is drawn into the acting area opened up by Christ is called into a life shaped by the life and personality of Christ. Christ is the living framework within which every human destiny is fulfilled. As Balthasar says,

*En Christōi*, in the acting area Christ opens up as the fruit of his Resurrection, each individual is given a personal commission; he is entrusted both with something unique to do and with the freedom to do it. Bound up with this commission is his own, inalienable, personal name; here – and only here – role and person coincide.  

“For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life” (Eph 2:10). The letter to the Ephesians inspires Balthasar to assert that what God has prepared for us is “a personal path for each one of us to follow freely, a path along which our freedom can realize itself.” Balthasar suggests that in the precondition of our “personal commission” it is God who “takes the first step, in surpassing love and utterly free grace, by enabling man to act authentically in Christ’s acting area and so respond to God’s prior action.” Hence the acting area is also the “together-with-Christ.” Since we have been raised up together with Christ by the power of grace, our “good works” also arise together with his self-offering to the Father. God needs no human partner for his fulfillment, but he desires our free response and receives this response into his own abundance in eternity.

What Balthasar assumes as the presupposition for his dramatic anthropology is “the universal validity of the particular historical acts of God in Jesus Christ.” But how does he derive the universality of Christ’s work from its singular position, without

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71 Ibid., 51.
72 Ibid., 52.
73 Ibid.
74 Ibid., 52-3.
reducing it to an abstract principle? While not denying Christ’s concrete existence, Balthasar views Christ’s mission as both universal and personal in scope and effect. By the power of the Spirit, the mission of Christ extends to the sphere of all humanity in such a way that every human subject is to be personified through participation in it.76 Christ’s irreducible particularity, for Balthasar, hinges on his unique yet sharable mission which makes others enter into a living co-involvement in it. Thus, for Balthasar, we find in Christ the criterion for what it means to be human. Christ is the source and the personal norm of every human life and mission. Because Christ’s mission involves “his coworking and cosuffering with those who are estranged from God,” human beings are invited to have a share in his salvific work and suffering for the world.77 In short, “en becomes syn, a participation in Christ’s dying and rising and in his work (synergoi).”78 ‘Being-in-Christ’ is an event that characterizes “Christ’s personal realm of influence.” For Balthasar this means that “objectively it implies a response to Christ on the part of the Christian; subjectively it demands such a response.”79 It is then true of all believers that they acquire their personality through being in Christ, as they give their personal and unique response to him. As this stands, the call to them to find their true self as persons in Christ is at the same time an invitation to share in his mission, in which is given the pattern and archetype of their new vocation.80

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76 Balthasar describe this as “the relationship of the incarnate Word to human nature as a whole, which is as such the field of the mission of Jesus” (TD III: 231).
77 Ibid., 241.
78 Ibid., 247.
79 Ibid., 246.
80 Ibid., 248-9. Thus Balthasar develops a christological understanding of vocation: “Read from the model of Christ, vocation in the biblical sense is the expropriation of a private existence into a function of universal salvation: handing oneself over to God, in order to be surrendered by him to the world that is to be redeemed, and to be used and spent in the event of the redemption.” See Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Retrieving the Tradition: Vocation,” CICR 37 (2010): 114.
Therefore, those who are chosen and sent forth in Christ are “no longer private, empirical subjects but persons of social and theological significance.”\textsuperscript{81} True personhood does not lie in what they think themselves to be but in what God appoints them to be. Since the transformation of the individual always implies the inner dramatic dimension of theological personhood in Christ, and the social dimension of service for others, it is precisely by “forgetting his private subjectivity and becoming one with his function that he grows into what is most distinctive and personal to him.”\textsuperscript{82} As theological persons, we can attain our own identity that is both personal and social. Our identity is personal, because we are “to assimilate our own ‘I’ more and more completely to our God-given mission”; our identity is social, because we discover “our fellow men by serving them, and ourselves, whom we only encounter in such service and obedience.”\textsuperscript{83} Being invited to share in Christ’s universal mission, we are endowed with a unique, personal power to open up “an area where others can receive freedom to act.”\textsuperscript{84} Here is the decisive point of Balthasar’s definition of vocation in the christological context: a vocation which depends essentially upon the freedom of the one who calls makes a space for the authentic individual freedom of the called. Those who belong to Christ are “destined to share his freedom” and “act according to his mind.”\textsuperscript{85} Accordingly, “the special vocation of Christians is explicitly to adopt his standpoint (Mk 3:14) and to receive the fullness of his power so that they can continue his work in the world.”\textsuperscript{86} While they are obedient to the vocation which they receive, they are enabled to see the true light of the world.

\textsuperscript{81} TD III: 267.
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., 271.
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., 272.
\textsuperscript{86} TD III: 282.
In summary, thus far we may say that to participate in Christ, human beings find their unique calling and identity as they are drawn into a journey towards full personhood by following Christ into relationship with the Father, into the encounter of the finite with the infinite. Rooted in the perfect coincidence of person and mission in Christ, vocation entails not an option but the teleological orientation that draws human life and action into the intra-divine self-giving of mission. In the person of Christ, God allows finite freedom to be, with the result that the “full scope is granted to infinite freedom as the sphere of fulfillment of created freedom.”87 This finding establishes the theological ground upon which Balthasar gives an account of the relationship between God and humanity and which describes the latter as “secondary, responsive, ‘feminine’ vis-à-vis God.”88 Accordingly, Balthasar is insistent that the attitude of active receptivity towards God is always the work of grace through the dramatic encounter between divine and human freedom. This takes place in accordance with the self-surrender of faith by which the person totally trusts in Christ. In faith, the whole person is open to the mystery of God who is ever greater. Here Balthasar turns to Mary and to the feminine dimension of faith. Mary’s perfect act of faith is seen as the ground for each individual act of faith.89

5.5 Mary’s Relation to Christ

Balthasar’s approach to Mariology distances itself from any theory that draws some abstract and impersonal Marian principle, and instead shares his understanding of

87 TD IV: 62.
88 TD III: 287.
89 Instead of delineating all the contours of Balthasar’s Mariology, I will seek to focus on the significance of Mary’s freedom in Christ’s drama: “The figure of Mary exhibits an utterly exuberant form of creaturely freedom …; as such she is the prototype who fulfills everything … concerning the relationship between finite and infinite freedom” (TD III: 299). As a Catholic theologian, Balthasar also revisits the traditional Marian dogma such as Mary’s Immaculate Conception, her Co-Redemption and her Assumption into heaven, but within the demands of theo-drama. For a relevant discussion, see Lucy Gardner, “Balthasar and the Figure of Mary,” in The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar, 64-78.
Mary as a real person in relation to her divine Son and hence to the church, his body.\textsuperscript{90}

Far from assigning Mary a quasi-independent role in Catholic theology, Balthasar does not emphasize the role of Mary except in relation to her Son through whom she is also saved. To capture her unique significance, Balthasar gives this portrait of Mary:

At the beginning, at the center of the event of the Incarnation stands Mary, the perfect handmaid, who ‘let it be’ (\textit{die es geschehen läßt}), who consents to become physically and spiritually the mother of her Son as well as of his work. This maternal relationship changes to some extent with Jesus’ maturing to an independent personality (\textit{Persönlichkeit}), but it can never cease to exist. Even the election of the Twelve, with Peter at the head, cannot be wholly independent of this primary, all-embracing relationship. This is its context.\textsuperscript{91}

The life of Mary opens up the mystery of graced co-operation of human freedom with divine freedom. She is “not the Word but the adequate response awaited by God from the created sphere and produced in it by his grace through the Word.”\textsuperscript{92} Through grace her consent is perfectly free, the expression of her total openness and receptivity to God.

Mary’s faith, though dependent on the grace of Christ, is none the less a genuine response of her own namely, from her yes at the annunciation to her yes at the foot of the cross.

Thus, “Mary’s life is the pre- eminent example of a prayerful obedience, an existence wholly conformed to Christ, utterly directly to God and to the salvation of the world, perfectly receptive to, accepting of, and compliant with God’s will.”\textsuperscript{93} Her personal and

\textsuperscript{90} For the truth is that “the more personal and unique Mary’s relationship with Christ is understood to be, the more she represents the concrete epitome of what we mean by ‘Church’” (\textit{TD} III: 304-5).

\textsuperscript{91} Balthasar, \textit{The Office of Peter}, 145. Here I retranslate from the original text the German words included in parentheses. See idem, \textit{Der antirömische Affekt: Wie läßt sich das Papsttum in der Gesamtkirche integrieren?}, 2. erw. Aufl. (Trier: Johannes Verlag, 1989), 116f.

\textsuperscript{92} \textit{ET} II: 161. Balthasar also elucidates this point in \textit{TD} III: “it was essential … if God’s Word willed to become incarnate in the womb of a woman, to elicit the latter’s agreement and obedient consent. … God could not violate his creature’s freedom. But where did the grace that made this consent possible come from – a consent that is adequate and therefore genuinely unlimited – if not from the work of reconciliation itself, that is, from the Cross? (And the Cross itself is rendered possibly only through Mary’s consent.) Here we have a circle – in which the effect is the cause of the cause – that has taken centuries to appreciate and formulate, resulting in the dogma of the Immaculate Conception and exact reasoning behind it” (296f.).

\textsuperscript{93} Gardner, “Balthasar and the Figure of Mary,” 65. That is why for Balthasar Mary’s \textit{fiat} summarizes and carries forward the whole faith of Israel in the Old Testament. For details, see \textit{TD} III: 318-39.
unique relationship with Christ makes her the full manifestation of the feminine reality of Christian mission.

In the context of theo-drama, Mary fulfills her personal mission by surrendering her Son. What is of essential importance is that “Mary, in giving her firm and abiding ‘Yes’ to the Incarnation and all its consequences, of which the greatest is the Cross, has done so ‘in the name of the entire human race’.”\(^{94}\) It is the prevenience of God’s grace that makes possible this capacity of finite being and freedom. Mary receives the outpoured life and overflowing grace of her Son, truly cooperating in the work of redemption and bringing forth “redeemed creation’s answer to this silence Word.”\(^{95}\) Just as Mary’s yes is expropriated from the outset, having been uttered on behalf of the whole human race, so at the cross “she brings forth this response in the name, too, of all those who refuse to respond.”\(^{96}\) It is her \textit{fiat} beneath the cross that constitutes ‘part’ of her Son’s sacrifice. As Balthasar notes, Jesus “makes room for his Mother’s part, so different and so painful, which is simply to let his suffering happen and to accept all the pain that must happen to her too.”\(^{97}\) Through her co-suffering with the redeemer, and in solidarity with sinners by saying yes on their behalf, Mary “becomes the equally virginal Bride of

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\(^{94}\) \textit{TD} IV: 354-5.

\(^{95}\) In other words, “her co-operation, the work of her who serves both as a woman \textit{and} as a creature, is not forgotten: it is integrated into his. Both redemption and pre-redemption spring from the same Cross but in such a way that she who is preredeemed is used in the Church’s coming to be” (\textit{TD} III: 351). In this respect, Balthasar accepts the belief in Mary’s ‘perpetual virginity,’ more than the term ‘coredemptrix,’ which is usually associated with misunderstandings. See \textit{TD} III: 311, 333-4; \textit{TD} IV: 359-60.

\(^{96}\) \textit{TD} IV: 360. Thus, in Balthasar’s interpretation, the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, far from endangering Mary’s solidarity with sinful humankind, makes that solidarity possible. Her ‘original state’ is “not something closed and sealed; rather it enables her to share in the suffering of all the other children of Adam: so she can become a genuine citadel of compassion” (\textit{TD} III: 319-24, here 323); See further Gardner, “Balthasar and the Figure of Mary,” 74-5.

\(^{97}\) \textit{TD} IV: 395.
the Son of God himself, who gives himself away eucharistically." Thus Mary has a twofold mission:

As a Mother, she has to mediate – in the requisite purity – everything human that her Child needs; as her Son’s ‘companion’ and ‘bride’, she must be able to share his sufferings in a way appropriate to her, and what most fits her for this task is her utter purity, which means that she is profoundly exposed and vulnerable. … In both regards – in her mission as Mother and as Companion-Bride – Mary stands in a unique relation to the Redeemer but also to the redeemed, among whom she is first.

In this sense, Mary’s mission is chosen and sanctified as an integral part of God’s saving plan and decision. As his ‘companion,’ Mary is the true helpmate for Christ’s saving work. She complements Christ by the active receptivity of her fiat. By grace, Mary is raised to union with Christ in “a nuptial relationship that begins in the utter forsakenness and darkness they both experience.” Thus we can see here, Mary’s obedient faith is a key feature in Balthasar’s dramatic Mariology. Her finite freedom entrusts itself to the sphere of infinite freedom and attains its perfection, with the result that she has her share in the dereliction of the cross. Her fiat is so pure, unconditioned and definitive that, as a precondition of the possibility of the incarnation, it includes all the destiny of the Son. Balthasar’s appreciation of Mary’s import is, however, far from threatening the uniqueness of Christ’s salvific role. Her bridal faith is archetypal and

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98 Ibid., 359.
99 TD III: 323.
100 TD IV: 358. Just as woman is the vessel of man’s fruitfulness, according to Balthasar, so Mary is now the Bride of Christ, the fruitful vessel of the grace of his self-offering. This feminine fecundity also makes Mary “the womb of the Church.” Specifically, Balthasar uses the nuptial metaphor to describe the relationship of Christ and the Marian church, and hence that of the masculine and feminine dimensions of the church. For an overview of Balthasar’s understanding of masculine-feminine relationship, see Corinne Crammer, “One Sex or Two? Balthasar’s Theology of the Sexes,” in The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar, 93-112.
101 TD IV: 359.
102 Ibid., 352-3. Balthasar’s emphasis on the purity of Mary’s faith allows him to claim that “No one but she … belonged entirely (yet invisibly) to the New Covenant, … and [she is the one] to whom Jesus owed his whole humanity” (TD III: 330).
exemplary but it does not in any way exert “any ‘moral determining influence’ on the redemptive acts of Jesus”:

It was not her ‘yearning’ for redemption that moved the Son of God to become man, nor did it give the new Adam ‘the courage to accept death on the Cross’. Nor can we speak of the Mother having any ‘rights over her Son’, rights that she renounced … so that the redemptive sacrifice could take place. 103

Rather, Christ alone is the one and unique mediator and redeemer. Through his self-offering, all others are dependent. It is always and only in the grace of participation that Mary can share in the life and mission of Christ. 104 By virtue of the fact that “she comes from him and is oriented to him,” every Mariology “is bound to be incomplete unless at the same time it remains linked to Christology.” 105

According to Balthasar, Mary’s perfect act of faith is also essential to her archetypal fecundity. It is a faith “destined to bear the fruit that is not only Christ’s body but also himself as Head.” 106 This spiritual fruitfulness thus associates Mary intimately with Christ such that her theological personality acquires a universality which embraces the whole life of the church. As Balthasar puts it,

Mary’s dramatic role emerges both from her center – as Christ’s virginal Mother – and from the whole range of her being, which … embraces fallen and redeemed humanity and comprehends the eschatological status of mankind. Her role is universal and in a certain sense … coextensive with Christ’s: Christ, as a human being, needs the feminine complement just as much as the first man did. … The Woman … who comes forth from the Man as he slumbers on the Cross is not so much a gift to him in his need as the product of his own fullness. 107

103 TD IV: 354. Cf. n77 above.
106 ET II: 161.
107 TD III: 338.
By the universalizing power of the Spirit, Mary’s response of faith is elevated to “the status of principle and exemplar of the response of the entire Church.” This response of faith is coextensive with other ecclesial principles in bearing the fruit of Christ for the world. Here the Marian principle which for Balthasar is essential in the church comes into play. We will examine this principle in more detail in the next chapter.

5.6 Concluding Reflections on Participation in Christ’s Mission

Balthasar employs “mission” (Sendung) as the basic concept with which to explore Christology and theological anthropology. It is also the key to understanding the relationship between Christ and our humanity. As has been shown, for Balthasar, the mission which has been assigned to us is only made possible in the mission that Christ has from the Father. The root of our mission is neither in our human capacity nor in the need of the world, but it is in the mission of Christ. For this reason, Balthasar endeavors to explain his christological understanding of mission. Christ’s mission is a “sending” from within the very essence of the trinitarian life. As Balthasar puts it, “the sending (missio) has its roots in a primordial proceeding (processio) from God. … This in turn presupposes that he was always, and had always been, ‘with’ God (Jn 1:1, 18).”

“Sending” is thus neither a merely formal character nor a theological principle generated from the Godhead’s reality. Instead, mission is the manifestation of divine life itself. The movement of the Son’s sending from and return to the Father opens to the world the

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108 ET II: 161.
109 Balthasar speaks of a basic fourfold structure of principles in the church – Petrine, Pauline, Johannine and Marian – in GL I: 350-65. He also employs the phrase ‘christological constellation’ to spell out the significance of these archetypal experiences of faith in The Office of Peter, 142-53.
110 Balthasar also explains this formative influence on the church in terms of Mary’s all-embracing maternity. Thus, Mary as Bride is always the Mother of the church. For our concern, we will only concentrate on Mary’s bridal role as “partner” or “helpmate” in the theo-drama. For a more detailed discussion of the “Mother Church,” see The Office of Peter, 199-218; TD III: 334-9.
111 TD III: 154.
richness of the kenotic yet perichoretic relationship within the Trinity. In other words, Christ’s economic mission is precisely the outward expression of the eternal procession of the Son from the Father in the Spirit.

On the one hand, Balthasar always speaks of the reality of finite freedom in its response to the initiative of divine freedom. On the other hand, he expresses the goal of our mission as sharing in God’s reconciliation through our participation in Christ’s mission. In Balthasar’s theology, the idea of participation means primarily “the insertion of human liberty … into God’s engagement, that is, into the Christ sent into the world.” Participation, then, never refers to a purely human activity. Without the divine action that creates the finite world and offers it the gift of finite freedom, there would not be the willingness to consent to an infinite but personal freedom. Thus mission always implies a graced participation in the divine life. Accordingly, Balthasar’s theology can obviate two risks which could result from discussions of human participation in divine activity. The first of these pitfalls is best described as the human attempt to grasp at God. The second pitfall would be to absorb human nature into the divine. With respect to the first possible pitfall, Balthasar distances himself from any attempt to define human self-transcendence only within the created realm. Since the grace of participation designates a reality shared with our humanity as something transforming our orientation from within, through this we enter into the theo-drama and act out our roles by way of response to Christ’s singular divine action. In this sense, realization of human freedom will occur only with participation in God’s freedom, with his eruption into human existence. Far

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from regarding the two freedoms as competing, Balthasar shows a way to make room for finite freedom to reach fulfillment within infinite freedom.\footnote{113}{See, for instance, TD II: 411-3.}

Balthasar’s approach avoids the second possible pitfall by fully recognizing the primacy of the divine initiative, which does not by any means dissolve the human substance in the divine. The Catholic theologian contends that our participation in God’s mission does not imply that we are merely passive spectators but are in fact active participants in an event that draws us into a living space in Christ. It is the divine offer of such participation in Christ that bridges “the abiding difference between him and us,” provided that “a believer is ready to receive and live his existence as mission in the Yes that faith utters.”\footnote{114}{ET III: 349.} Balthasar develops this theme of active readiness to accept a particular form of mission-existence as essential to the truth of theological personhood and freedom. In so doing, the roles of both divine and human freedom are adequately maintained.

Balthasar’s explanation of human participation in Christ in no way obscures the unique-mediation of Christ, nor does it involve a deficiency in his work. Rather, it holds that the believers are called to “participate in his uniqueness in ways that are ever-new, in order to manifest his fullness.”\footnote{115}{TD II: 311.} Balthasar is insistent that the theological persons in Christ “exist through being prolonged in the mission” so that they cease to exist for themselves.\footnote{116}{TD III: 273. See further Johann G. Roten, “Hans Urs von Balthasar’s Anthropology in Light of his Marian Thinking,” CICR 20 (1993): 328-30.} Their authentic personal identity is attained in their dramatic existence, in which “each is given a unique participation in the Son’s uniqueness.”\footnote{117}{TD II: 270. So to speak, “the more the person, in response to the Son’s call, walks toward his prototype in the Son, the more unique he becomes” (ibid.).}
can see that the ‘mission’ which each of them receives in Christ is intimately connected with other ‘missions’ which make the life of the church.\textsuperscript{118} As a result, those who seek to fulfill their missions can only find true personhood in relation to the community of the church.\textsuperscript{119} Balthasar’s anthropological vision entails a corresponding ecclesial or communal dimension, which also affirms the unique identity of each member in service. Acknowledging all this, we will now examine Balthasar’s dramatic ecclesiology.

\textsuperscript{118} In other words, “Together they form a common ‘We’ on the basis of their interrelated and interpenetrating missions” (\textit{TD} III: 350).

\textsuperscript{119} As Balthasar himself says, “When a human being becomes a person, theologically, by being given a unique vocation and mission, he is simultaneously de-privatized, socialized, made into a locus and a bearer of community” (ibid., 271).
6.1 Introduction: Who is the Church?

Balthasar considers the passion of Christ as the basis of his understanding of the mystery of the church.¹ In particular, he draws his theological insights from the paschal mystery and sees it shaping and establishing the church’s existence and mission in the world. From the wounded side of the crucified Christ the church comes into being (Jn 19), so as to live in accordance with the will and mission of her Lord. It is Christ’s grace and work that draw his church into God’s drama of his eternal love, in which “she is, and cannot be other than, an extension, a communication, a partaking of the personality of Christ.”² According to Balthasar, participation in Christ’s personality is far from an individualistic and self-centered experience in the Christian life. By virtue of the fact that Christ himself cannot be detached from his trinitarian relationship or from his concrete human relations, the individual reality of persons takes shape within the communal identity of the church.³ Balthasar thus stresses that personal being and communal identity lie at the heart of what the church is. The key to ecclesiology is to be found in the incarnate Son’s encounter with his human fellows and through the Spirit, which always

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² ET II: 145.
³ Thus, “In the mysterium of the Church no individual member can be successfully isolated from the whole living organism” (Balthasar, The Office of Peter, 138-9). In his study of the relation between human agency and God’s glory, Jason A. Fout argues that “there is a troubling tendency in von Balthasar’s account to portray the encounter with another as requiring one to ‘make room’ in oneself for the other, which is a kind of withdrawal, a bracketing of one’s own agency” (Jason A. Fout, Divine Glory with Reference to Human Agency: A Theological Study in Barth, von Balthasar and the New Testament (Ph.D. diss., University of Cambridge, 2009), 10). Fout misreads Balthasar because, in my opinion, he lacks an adequate examination of Balthasar’s account of theological person and mission.
represents the essence of what it means to be the church. Her identity is in Christ. For all these concerns, the primary question to be asked is “Who is the Church?”

Phrased in this way, Balthasar rejects any impersonal approach to the church and any reduction of the church to a juridical or sociological entity. The external, structural aspect of the church, for him, is not an end in itself but is in service of “the church’s inner, dramatic constitution,” of her subjective, personal holiness. It exists for the sake of the subjective movement of the ecclesial community in correspondence to the holiness of Christ. Balthasar’s use of the terms objective and subjective points to an inseparable reality of Christ’s presence in the church. As such a two-in-one reality brought about by the Spirit, the church mediates the Christ-event, as the vessel by which the divine beauty is manifest in the world. The church is “Christ living on.” As she remains closely related to her head, she is not a person on her own. Rather, the body of Christ “forms, together with ‘Head’, one being; that is, she is a person only ‘by grace’ of the ‘Head’.”

Balthasar’s argument here hinges on the assumption that the ‘subject’ of the church is simply Christ. The singularity of the incarnate Christ’s subjectivity, accordingly, entails the ‘giftedness’ of his union with the church in which the latter is always a recipient of divine grace.

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4 ‘This is the title of Balthasar’s essay in ET II: 143-91.
5 TD III: 358. In other words, “what never falls away is the nuptial encounter between God and the creature, for whose sake the framework of the structures is now set up and will later be dismantled” (ET II: 158).
6 If we consider, for example, the office of Peter, “this ‘objective spirit’ necessarily presupposes a ‘subjective spirit’ to receive it. This is Peter’s faith” (ET II: 160).
8 ET II: 144.
9 Ibid., 145.
Does, then, Balthasar answer the question “Who is the Church?” in a christomonistic way? If at the center of the church is the living Christ, how does the church take a dramatic role in the salvific drama without losing her own identity? Balthasar’s primary focus on the personal encounter between human and divine freedom as “the real core” of the church leads him to preclude any sociological idea of ‘collective’ personality. Instead, he suggests that the church is definable as “someone, in other words a person.” Far from dissolving the polarity between Christ and the church into a higher synthesis, Balthasar’s use of drama imagery affirms the distinction and maintains the ontological and personal identity of the church in their personal union. It is in and through such a personal union that the church is “the grace and fullness of Christ poured out into the ‘other’ (created) subject.” In this light, the relation of the head and body is understood as inter-personal and therefore nuptial. Christ and the church are one in their complementarity and differentiation. Christ and the church form one undivided reality, in which Christ is understood to be always remain transcendent over the church, no matter how imminent his personal presence within it.

One might think that Balthasar’s concept of the church as person in turn gives insufficient weight to the involvement of “concrete members” in the church, thus absorbing them into an all-encompassing totality. In fact, as mentioned in the previous

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10 In Fout’s view, Balthasar “seems to suggest that the only way humans may follow Christ is through actively bracketing out one’s own agency” (Divine Glory with Reference to Human Agency, 208). We will not go into the details of Fout’s criticism here, but it is obvious that he does not deal with Balthasar’s theodramatics and its theological consequence in a complete sense. See further ibid., 114-56.
11 ET II: 143. Balthasar also states that “There is no more important task for the Church today than to demonstrate that in reality Christ, separated from the Church, does not exist, that one cannot follow him, or live from him without her,” in Test Everything: Hold Fast to What is Good, trans. Maria Shraday (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989), 17. Thus, for Ballthasar, it is impossible to know Christ apart from the church.
12 Ibid., 21.
13 See J.B. Quash, “‘Between the Brutally Given, and the Brutally, Banally Free’: Von Balthasar’s Theology of Drama in Dialogue with Hegel,” Modern Theology 13 (1997): 293-318; Nicholas M. Healy,
chapter, in the discussion of Balthasar’s theological anthropology, a vision of the realization of the human person-in-relation clarifies that every individual who has been personalized in Christ becomes a member of his mystical body:

Everyone who participates in the pneumatic body of Christ, shared out in the Church, not only becomes a member of the Church community: he actually acquires an intrinsically ecclesial quality. Every theological person thus has whole spheres of community that are personal to him, and the interpenetration of these spheres constitutes the reality of the communio sanctorum with its mysterious laws whereby each can ‘be for’ others through prayer, initiative and suffering on their behalf. Nor is this communion restricted to the realm of the visible Church: it reaches as far as Christ’s merits extend.14

Thus Balthasar sees the church as “uniquely the sphere that binds God and creature together.”15 The church is that in which each person “is both elevated and sublimated in his personality and opened to and made the portion of the community.”16 This elevation “confirms and fulfills the ultimate end of the created being as such (gratia perficit naturam).”17 In other words, the “I” of the individual believer is raised to a new level through participation in the “we” of the church, of one heart and one mind (Rom 15:5-6).18 To sum up thus far: the “one flesh” union between Christ and the church is grounded “in God’s life imparted but no less essentially in the subjectivity and personality of the real subjects who form the Church.”19

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14 TD III: 281-2.
15 ET II: 171.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid., 172.
18 In Balthasar’s meditation on Paul’s life, “This taking up of the ‘I’ and the ‘we’ through God into Christ is often described by Paul as a changeover from consciousness of one’s own action to consciousness of God’s action taking place within us: ‘Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own’ (Phil 3:12)” (ibid., 167).
19 ET II: 157.
As Marc Ouellet rightly puts it, “the advantage of this theological conception of the person is that it establishes at once both uniqueness and ecclesiasticality.”\(^{20}\) We may recall that for Balthasar a human subject becomes a theological person by a unique call and mission, which is “imparted *en Christōi* by the Spirit to the created conscious subject and accepted by the latter.”\(^{21}\) Insofar as this unique mission finds its fulfillment within the prototypical mission of Jesus Christ, it “de-privatizes the ‘I’, causing the latter’s fruitful influence (through grace) to expand into the whole ‘Mystical Body’ of Christ.”\(^{22}\) In this sense, every person is disposed to have her own “I” conformed to Christ’s person and mission, becoming a ‘bearer’ of the whole community. Rather than a mere juxtaposition which would rule out any real union, there is “a mutual interpenetration of the diverse missions and the persons who identify themselves with them.”\(^{23}\) Thus the church is in essence a dynamic multi-dimensional reality, “christologically fashioned,” and made up of various ‘person-principles’ that are, through the Spirit, extended to the whole church, embracing all ecclesial life and missions. In mutual indwelling each other these principles point beyond themselves to the unity of Christ. On the basis of his theological presupposition that “the risen Lord who wills to be present in his Church all days to the end of time, cannot be isolated from the ‘constellation’ of his historical life,”\(^{24}\) Balthasar thus proposes an ecclesiology of symbolic archetypes. These archetypes identify constitutive principles and missions of the church in every age. Since the historical Jesus


\(^{21}\) *TD* III: 353 n49.

\(^{22}\) Ibid., 349.

\(^{23}\) Ibid.

\(^{24}\) Balthasar, *The Office of Peter*, 172.
stands within a “constitutive human group,” it is the archetypal experience of these individuals which has a particular significance for the whole church:

The archetypal experience of individual members ... is but a privileged participation in Christ’s all-sustaining experience of God. And Christ makes the Church as a whole participate in this experience, uniting each member of the Church directly to himself and yet, at the same time, mediating between individual members and uniting them to himself through others.

Above all, Balthasar sees the Marian dimension as the all-embracing principle, the point where all the other profiles of the church find their fundamental point of internal unity.

Mary’s personal *fiat* through and to the Word by grace makes her a faithful partner with Christ in the economy of salvation. This obedience of faith is considered the archetype of the church’s response of love to her Lord. Because Christ gave birth to the church as the *ecclesia immaculata* in Mary before the apostles had been called, the “Marian experience of Christ” wholly conditions the apostolic experience as well as ours. In this sense, the church “flowing forth from Christ finds her personal center in Mary,” in whom is seen the realization of the church as the bride without spot or wrinkle (Eph 5:26ff.). Following this line of argument, Balthasar can say that, through the gift of her faith, the church’s identity is in Mary. To answer his own question “Who is the Church?,” Balthasar concludes:

the only satisfactory answer is that she consists of real subjects. ... Real subjects, then, but only such as participate through divine grace in a normative subject and its consciousness. And if this participation is possible only through infused grace, then that in which they participate is divine: the supreme subject demanded by the question posed can only be the Divine itself. Mankind gains participation in it

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25 Ibid., 143.
26 *GL* I: 350.
27 See especially *ET* II: 157-72.
28 *GL* I: 362. Balthasar reminds us that, “Mary, the (*ecclesia* immaculata), is on the scene prior to the call of the Apostles, yet the concrete community is built on the *rock* of the apostolate” (*TD* III: 358-9). It is this bipolar character of Marian subjective holiness and Petrine objective holiness that renders the full reality of the church.
29 *ET* II: 161. Emphasis mine.
through Christ and the sphere that is his (en Christo) and that he has prepared as Redeemer, namely, the Church. Insofar as this sphere is his own, he is her consciousness; and insofar as she makes to him the response of a woman and a bride, she has her supreme, normative subjectivity in Mary.\(^{30}\)

### 6.2 The Marian-Bridal Character of the Church

From the outset, the role of Mary in the mystery of the church is “wholly ancillary,” since it is Christ, not her, who brings the church into being by his passion.\(^{31}\) In sharing his overflowing love with the world, God needs no human partners for accomplishment, but rather he invites them to join in the mission of love. It is through this invitatory grace that Mary is enabled to cooperate with Christ in the event of the Word coming to dwell among us. Yet how is it that, without losing her identity, the individual Mary “permeates and perfumes the whole life of the church”?\(^{32}\) Balthasar spells out the relation between the historicity and universality of the person of Mary by taking into account the role of the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit by whom all that is personal and particular to Mary, her bodily, believing and loving relation with her Son, is made universal and ecclesial.\(^{33}\) On the one hand, through the work of the Spirit, Mary’s yes is conformed to the Son’s yes. On the other hand, her fiat as the archetypal and personal realization of the church is expanded and extended to be the foundation of the church’s faith. The personal life of Mary and her relationship to Christ her Son come to us as the gifts of faith by the universalizing power of the Spirit. Thus Mary has a “special place

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\(^{30}\) Ibid., 179.

\(^{31}\) Ibid., 165.

\(^{32}\) Balthasar, The Office of Peter, 168. “Mary herself,” Balthasar asserts, “had neither the vocation nor the inclination to concern herself with Mariology” (ET II: 23).

\(^{33}\) Balthasar particularly emphasizes on the relation between ‘Mary’ and ‘Peter’ in a way that the Marian (feminine, receiving) dimension of the church precedes and enfolds the Petrine (masculine, giving) dimension of the church but not the other way around. See Balthasar, The Office of Peter, 219-42. For the universalizing role of the Holy Spirit with regard to the concrete presence of Christ in ecclesial and sacramental life, see idem, A Theology of History, 81-100.
within the ‘We’ of the church.”

By the power of the Spirit, and through her *fiat*, Mary participates in Christ’s gracious action towards the church:

> Her mission, in the feminine and creaturely mode, is to let things happen; as such it is perfectly congruent with the masculine and divine mission of the Son. Thus it is a concrete, realized prototype of the Church, and all other, particular missions in the Church will be integrated into it. *Doubtless this will not be done by Mary herself but by the Spirit*, who is also the Spirit of Christ and the Spirit who, in anticipation, fashioned the Mother and her consent after the pattern of the Son’s ‘Not my will, but thine be done’.

Like Christ, in the Spirit, Mary has been expropriated and given to the whole church.

As Mary is the prototype of the church who perfectly responds to mission, her *fiat* becomes the precondition and model of all response in faith. Accordingly, the church is Marian in her ‘active receptivity.’ To be church is to be like Mary, who through the Word was willingly the “handmaid of the Lord.” The church’s task is the same as hers, to hear the Word and do it.

According to Balthasar, Mary’s *fiat* continues on in the church as the “common source” of all forms of ecclesial faith. This continuity is possible only in God’s grace, in which the Marian principle is given to the church. In Mary, the church seeks to fulfill her feminine identity, namely her bridal response of love to the Lord. The church as bride who is feminine in her being, accordingly, stands in companionship with Christ, helping to carry out his mission. At the heart of this relationship is that Christ and the church

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34 *TD* III: 351. Most strikingly, Balthasar emphasizes Mary’s real presence in the church as disappearance: “Mary disappears into the heart of the church to remain there as a real presence which, however, always gives place to her Son” (*The Office of Peter*, 168). This means the church is truly Marian when the Word of God takes his right place in the church.


36 Since Pentecost, the Spirit “impels the believer toward the full, Marian Yes. ... This applies not only to the imperfect members of the Church ... ; it applies to the entire Church in her Marian perfection” (ibid., 357). See also *The Office of Peter*, 214-5.

37 Thus Balthasar sees the church’s personality “as the interplay [perichoresis] of personal and social missions (understood as a unity of *gratia sanctificans* and *charisma*) around the center, which is the mission of Mary” (*TD* III: 353).
become one flesh (Eph 5:31-2). Closely related to the church as the bride of Christ is therefore the image of the church as his body. In fact, Christ’s self-offering on the cross is what constitutes and brings the church into being. This happens by virtue of the “wondrous exchange” (admirabile commercium) between Christ and us. Through his kenotic action in the cross, he took the poverty of our humanity in order that we might share in his divine, trinitarian life. Among other images which shed light on the mystery of this ‘life exchange’ in Christ’s mission for the church’s sake there is the combined analogy of body and bride in Ephesians. In this setting, Balthasar notes, “‘head’ means the ruling partner, the lord, in a marriage; ‘body’ means completion and unification in the physical nuptial order.” Here Balthasar reminds us to take in a personal sense these images which point to the mystery of the relationship between Christ and the church. “Christ loved the church [as his own body] and gave himself for her” (Eph 5:25), in order to make her holy as his beloved. In this loving relationship, the church is never an independent reality. For Balthasar, the church born on the cross as Christ’s body is chosen to be his bride and partner in Mary. Thus we can say that, the church as “Christ’s macro-Body” and as “his Bride and Partner” are “two aspects of the same reality.”

The church is one with Christ, yet, at the same time, she is a “someone” who stands over and against him. This paradoxical conjunction of images leads to a further question: should the church be “seen as originating wholly from the dying Christ” or

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38 In fact, “For, as Christ’s concrete partner, [the Church] has a visibly defined form; yet she becomes his partner only through a special influence on the part of the Savior – it is only because she is his ‘Body’ that she can be his ‘Bride’” (ibid., 429).
40 There is also the Johannine image of the vine and the branches. See ET II: 146.
41 Ibid., 147.
“considered preexisting”? In order to avoid any misunderstanding of the church’s subjectivity, one needs to observe and sustain a tension, yet not an opposition, in the dialectic between the “somatic” and “nuptial” aspects of the church. This means that these aspects cannot be contradictory or understood in isolation from one another. While Balthasar realizes the bridal image of the church has been blurred and no longer holds much attention in the “general consciousness of the Church,” he endeavors to retrieve the Catholic idea that the church is fundamentally feminine in relation to God. This authentic femininity evidences that the church’s work and service is focused beyond herself on the saving and powerful work of Christ, which is accessible to the believers within the framework of the ecclesial structure. This structure, established by Christ, exists to bring the believers closer to God. Since Balthasar maintains that both the Marian and Petrine elements are indispensable, he unpacks how the two aspects tend towards each other in order to become the one church of Christ. They are what Balthasar sees as constitutive of the church in her inseparable unity: the bridal church is led into her fruit-bearing mission, and this is concretely realized through the structural, sacramental dimension of the church.

43 ET II: 148. Balthasar realizes that the body and bride are “two divergent images of the Church. ... From these, there follow the equally divergent aspects of a Church that is no more than the outpouring and prolongation of the twofold nature of Christ and of a Church that confronts Christ as a ‘someone’, a subject, a person. Paul, in his tremendous vision, conjoins these seeming incompatibles” (ibid.). For the preexistence of the church as bride, see TD III: 344-5.


45 ET II: 148-9. He finds that “The analogy of the body has been resuscitated and is again in vogue, but this had not happened to the analogy of the bride” (ibid., 149); in particular, “The contemporary doctrine of the Church goes further than an ecclesiology of the hierarchic and sacramental structure that communicates the grace of Christ; it is focused primarily on the simile of the body” (ibid., 154).

46 Balthasar, The Office of Peter, 215-8. Arguably, “Far from being the antithesis of the nuptial ‘event’, the institution actually makes its possible for this event to be a here-and-now reality at every point through history. The institution guarantees the perpetual presence of Christ the Bridegroom for the Church, his Bride” (TD III: 354).

47 See, for instance, TD III: 353-60; ET II: 157-66; The Office of Peter, 219-42. Balthasar also outlines the contemporary development on how the analogy of the body has been employed in the conception of the hierarchical church in ET II: 154ff.
In effect, as the unity of the Petrine hierarchy and the Marian communio, the church is a concrete historical reality. These polarities in the character of the church “makes her the extension (‘fullness’, ‘body’) of Christ as well as his partner (‘Bride’), enabling her to participate in Christ’s redemptive mission and in his trinitarian being.” As long as the “bodily constitution” is a gift of Christ who grants offices and charisms for the benefit of the whole church, the hierarchical (male) aspect cannot be foremost, but must itself belong to “the overall feminine modality of the Church.”

It is the Marian faith, not the Petrine office, that is given as the model for the faith of every Christian:

The form of the Marian faith (consenting to God’s activity) is offered to the Catholica as the model of all being and acting, while the catholicity of Peter’s pastoral care, though all-embracing in its object, is not communicable in its specific uniqueness. In this scheme, the church is “the ‘Bride’ of Christ, and at the same time she is equipped with an official and institutional side.”

Insofar as the dynamic of the Marian faith and love lies at the church’s core, the living totality of the church expresses itself concretely in the interplay of her missions and in the laws inherent in her structure.

Therefore, every form of ecclesial mission has its root in the Marian-bridal mission. The church as a whole is bridal in a sense that all members, including the Pope, assent to Christ’s sacrifice for the world and shape their lives in Christ by receiving the gift of the trinitarian life of love. In Mary, the sacramental unity of Christ and the church is one of a mutually self-sacrificing love. Balthasar sees this as continuing in the heart of the church, since it is that Christ’s self-giving and Mary’s consent is always present in the

48 TD III: 358.
49 Ibid., 354.
51 TD III: 358.
church’s reality through the power of the Spirit. Thus, the church’s relationship to Christ is feminine, characterized by her receptivity for mission and obedience. The church is established and called to respond to the Word, just as Mary did.\footnote{Ibid., 351-2.} In its “feminine and creaturely mode” the Marian mission is to follow Christ as Lord, and for the church to say “yes” to what Christ does. This mode should not be understood as mere passivity, but as a mode of active receptivity in which the church bears the possibility of active fruitfulness insofar as she makes herself available to the Lord.\footnote{Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Thoughts on the Priesthood of Women,” CICR 23 (1996): 701-9, here 705.} For this reason, the church is enabled to exercise her finite freedom and thus to give her secondary “yes” of consent, which is made possible first and foremost on the basis of Christ’s self-offering.\footnote{ET IV: 125-38.} In this realization of finite freedom the church responds to Christ’s initiative of love in obedience. She actively enters into the sentiment of Christ. The capacity to respond in this way is given as a prerequisite for the active, consenting co-operation of the church in Christ’s mission and suffering: “For while we live, we are always carrying in the body the death of Jesus” (2 Cor. 4:10). The church owes her whole existence to Christ. Thus in each and every experience of suffering, the church truly knows that this is not her own property but only a loan for which, in the ecclesial word of consent, she is responsible to the true owner.\footnote{Balthasar, Mysterium Paschale, 134-5.}

In short, as God’s finite partner, the church is rendered by God as feminine and therefore actively receptive and responsively fruitful. She receives and fulfills her mission in obedience, in which her freedom becomes genuinely realized. In integrating the ecclesial mission with the mystery of faith, Balthasar stresses the Marian \textit{fiat} in its
unlimited availability as the fundamental stance of ecclesial faith and the necessary response, which involves a complete surrender to the Word of the Lord. This *fiat* is one in which the church reaches beyond all activity into “a state of agreeing and permitting things to happen, without limit and without setting conditions.”\(^{56}\) In this openness, the mystery of the Trinity made known in Christ continues to become concrete in the church and the world. The church who offers herself to the Lord is thus also called the handmaid who “lets herself be used for his purposes.”\(^{57}\) This role of the church is always feminine, not only initially, but from beginning to end:

> It does not change subsequently into a masculine-active co-operation in the activity (the co-operation of the Body with the Head in an identity of sacrifice) but remains, as the fundamental action of the Ekklesia, in the act of permitting the Head and Bridegroom to work and in receiving him.\(^{58}\)

As the bride who receives her Lord, the church also receives a share in God’s mission. Because we know that the church herself is receptive to this mission, we may know that the world itself becomes receptive to the trinitarian life, and in fact is able to receive it. This implies that participation in Christ’s mission is not merely the church’s own activity, but always a life-giving exchange between Christ and his body the church. The focus here is on God’s activity. It is, however, through receiving and offering the Eucharist that the church, “totally expropriated,” is taken into Christ’s missionary gift of love towards the world. This leads us to the discussion of the next section.


\(^{57}\) *ET* III: 227.

\(^{58}\) Ibid., 228.
6.3 The Church’s Mission as Gift Received in the Eucharist

Balthasar situates his theology of the Eucharist in the context of theo-drama. One of his key concerns is to understand how the celebrating community is involved in Christ’s saving mystery.\textsuperscript{59} This is not achieved without recourse to the active, personal presence of love in the Eucharistic event. Through our acceptance of the gift of the Eucharist, this central ecclesial practice gives shape to the whole of our Christian life, thus especially drawing us into Christ’s mission.\textsuperscript{60} Participation in the Eucharist, in this regard, “takes place as a true ‘eating and drinking’, which is a process of real transformation of another substance into one’s own.”\textsuperscript{61} It is through Christ’s own Eucharistic action that we are chiefly grafted into his slain body, as it is Christ who breaks his body and opens God’s own being as love so that the church continues his mission in the Spirit. By assigning the priority in the Eucharist to Christ’s presence and action, Balthasar seeks to show that the “Eucharistic cult” is no bare commemoration:

Christ who died for us “becomes alive and present for us” in and through the miracle of transubstantiation.\textsuperscript{62} The church, far from offering “an ‘alien’ sacrifice, that is, Christ’s” sacrifice of himself, is herself drawn into his unique sacrifice offered to the Father which enables her to have a share in the offering of this sacrifice. In other words, the church’s

\textsuperscript{59} For Balthasar, it is the church’s acceptance of the gift of the Eucharist that draws her into Christ’s sacrifice: “As far as the Church’s act itself is concerned, to what extent does it go beyond a mere act of offering (oblatio) and involve an actual sacrifice (sacrificium) that is at analogous to the sacrifice of Christ? For what is sacrificial in this act inheres wholly in the offerendum, namely, Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross (which the Church of God proclaims), not in the offerens” (TD IV: 394). Besides the ecclesial participation in the Eucharist, Balthasar also explores the trinitarian opening to the world through the Eucharist. For this see Peter Casarella, “Analogia Donationis: Hans Urs von Balthasar on the Eucharist,” Philosophy & Theology 11 (1998): 161-71.

\textsuperscript{60} Thus Balthasar develops the doctrine of transubstantiation on the basis of the encounter of Christ and the church in the Eucharist: “What is important for the Church is not that something is to be found on the table of the altar, but that by consuming this nourishment the Church becomes what she can and ought to be. Mass without communion ... is impossible and meaningless for the Church as such” (GL I: 574).


\textsuperscript{62} GL I: 573-5.
Eucharistic action is wholly Marian. This action “consists in letting herself be drawn into Jesus’ availability for the Father’s will.” Here we arrive at the central focus in Balthasar’s understanding of the Eucharist: the primary reality is always Christ’s self-offering, beginning already in the Trinity, and the ecclesial response to the offer of love is accepted into the offer itself.

Balthasar sheds light on the active role of the church within Christ’s trinitarian mission for the sake of all humanity. The church performs this service for Christ in agreement with his gift of himself. Balthasar’s concern here is to hold two themes together. First, by the grace of Christ her head, the church can participate in the unity of her offering with Christ’s offering. Secondly, a radical distinction remains between Christ’s deed and the human response. What, then, does Christ’s presence in the Eucharist mean for the church? He makes himself “as a totality sacrificial food and sacrificial drink, in a definitiveness that goes into death.” By offering his body and blood for us as the gift of the Eucharist, the Son fulfills his Father’s will. From the very

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64 ET III: 216.

65 Indeed, “The Eucharist seals the union of both aspects, in its sacrificial dimension, it presupposes that Jesus has taken our sins and defects on himself, in his Passion, so that we can be given what is his, not as something alien, but as what – beyond all imagining – is our very own, leading us from alienation to authentic personal being” (TD III: 232). Thus, Ben Quash seems to give an inadequate judgement that for Balthasar the Marian perfection overshadows human participation in the Eucharist, especially when he says: “By giving it a marian still centre which operates, apparently, as the resolved a priori condition for its human dimension, Balthasar makes the eucharist less dramatic than the terms of his theology encourage us to expect, undercutting its existential significance.” See Ben Quash, “Drama and the Ends of Modernity,” in Balthasar at the End of Modernity, ed. Lucy Gardner et al. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 161-3, here 162.

66 ET III: 235.

67 Balthasar grounds this in the event of the incarnation: “One can see that because of the Incarnation, the human reality of Jesus ... is already predisposed to be eucharistic, insofar as it is God’s personified gift to the world; and the realization of this self-giving at the Last Supper, the Passion and the Resurrection is nothing but the actualization of this self-giving that was always intended and really planned and initiated” (Balthasar, New Elucidations, 115).
first moment, the whole historical life of Christ is a ‘thanksgiving’ (*eucharistia*) directed and offered to the Father. In the celebration of the Eucharist, there nevertheless takes place each time in it the event of the death of the Lord:

Christ, in surrendering his sacrificed flesh and shed blood for his disciples, was communicating, not merely the material side of his bodily substance, but the saving events wrought by it. … The fundamental presupposition is that the Person of Jesus is really present; but along with the Person comes his entire temporal history and, in particular, its climax in Cross and Resurrection.  

Thus, to receive the Eucharist is to participate in the Son’s Eucharistic response to the Father. This is the existential mission of Jesus including every particular act and event in his historical life. What Christ makes available in the Eucharist to the church is precisely his “Eucharist to the Father: he thanks the Father for his divine permission to give himself on behalf of sinners, for the privilege of thus manifesting the Father’s uttermost love.” The celebration of the Eucharist, in terms of being drawn into Christ’s original sacrifice to the Father, thereby echoes “the Lord’s prior action of grace, … the action, through the Son, of the triune God.” The church serves the Lord through this obedient act. Given that Christ alone is in a position to offer sacrifice, receiving the Eucharistic body and blood of the Lord makes the church join in Christ’s self-offering as

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68 TD IV: 391-2.
69 This receptivity, in Balthasar’s account, specifies the vital importance of the Eucharist as sustaining reality for mission. Balthasar identifies the Eucharist as a trinitarian event that leads to real incorporation into the body of Christ by receiving Christ’s body and growing in ‘becoming what we receive.’ Thus the Eucharist is not only a missionary gift but also a life-giving gift. For Balthasar, what it means to be a person is only intelligible in light of revelation in Christ and the imparting of the Christian mission.
70 Ibid., 400-1. In exploring how Balthasar understands the manner of the Son’s eternal reception from the Father, Nicolas J. Healy and David L. Schindler draw their conclusion that “the realm of creation is taken into the mission of Christ (and thus ‘deified’) to the extent that it shares in his mission of mediating the trinitarian love of Father, Son, and Spirit by realizing its original purpose in being created.” See Healy and Schindler, “For the Life of the World: Hans Urs von Balthasar on the Church as Eucharist,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 52-55, here 54. On this ground, for Healy and Schindler, the church continues Christ’s mission by transforming the world through the celebration of the Eucharist. In this thesis, we will not go in great detail the idea of creation as gift returned to the Father through the Son and the Eucharist.
71 TD IV: 405.
the basic form of their deep communion. She must always receive Christ’s gift of himself unto death. This does not imply that Christ’s suffering is incomplete. Rather, it is his grace makes room for “a fellowship of suffering.” Balthasar acknowledges the dynamic of the “distance” and “closeness” that characterizes the ecclesial participation in Christ’s kenotic movement. On the one hand, in a passive sense, the church stands over against Christ in a distance and lets him suffer for the sake of the world. On the other hand, in an active sense, the church proclaims the Lord’s death and shares his personal responsibility for the Father and for the world. Only in the grace of participation, the church becomes one sacrifice together with Christ.

This is why the kenosis of Christ makes possible and gives shape to the church’s missionary existence. Christ offers himself in such a way that he draws the church into his act which determines her act. To understand Christ’s mission fulfilled in his death, Balthasar draws from John’s gospel the insight that the event of Christ’s loving the world to the end (Jn 13:1) through the gift of himself in the Eucharist expresses the original and eternal love of the Father. The way that Christ offers himself back to the Father consists in “giving up his life for the sheep” (Jn 10:15). In other words, the Father’s love given to the world in his Son is “definitively given and distributed by him and is never to be taken back.” By virtue of this divine act, the finite creaturely structure is “made fluid – without fragmenting or violating it – that it is able to become the bearer of the triune

72 Ibid., 387-8. Balthasar explains further: “Through grace, a fellowship of suffering and resurrection is created, and this fellowship only has meaning if the pro nobis is extended to the participants. The metaphor of the vine brings us as close as we can get to uttering its meaning: the man who lives en Christōi, from the root and stem of Christ, will bear fruit” (ibid., 388).
74 Balthasar, New Elucidations, 117. In other words, “[Jesus Christ] will never gather into himself his eucharistic fragmentation in order to be at one with himself. Even as the risen Lord he lives as the one who has given himself and has poured himself out” (idem, Elucidations, trans. John Riches (London: SPCK, 1975), 183). See further ET IV: 224-30.
The church, within God’s plan, is called to enter into Christ’s mission by eucharistically receiving what Christ offers as “the bread of life” (Jn 6:35). She then ought to do as Christ did for the disciples (Jn 13:15), given that his flesh is “now at the Church’s disposal.” He now gives the church what had been his own responsibility. Since the Eucharist is primarily “the complete self-giving of Jesus to his own and to the world,” the church has nothing of her own to give God. Rather she offers God this boundless love which reveals the depth of his love for the world. The ecclesial mission received in the Eucharist is none other than participation in the Son’s “forever thanking the Father as the Father’s substantial Eucharist, which as such never becomes past and mere remembrance.”

Thus it is evident for Balthasar that sharing in Christ’s mission and suffering lies at the heart of Eucharistic fellowship with him. This is “not a question of self-appointed following of Christ, nor of ethico-ascetical imitation of his suffering, but of being disposed to follow the Lord, ‘being led where you would rather not go’ (Jn 21:18).” In this way, the act of disposing oneself moves into the passive mode of being at God’s disposal. Through the gift of the Eucharist, the human act of self-surrender is drawn into the divine act of self-distribution. This fact of the church’s being is at once a commission entrusted to her, in which she is involved in “the very movement of Jesus, who in the Eucharist holds nothing back in his act of distributing himself to the world, by which he is poured out to reconcile the world to God.” This presumes that being joined together

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76 *TD* IV: 399.
78 Ibid., 120.
79 Ibid., 121.
80 *ET* IV: 277. Balthasar also reminds us that “there is also the superfluous and harmful enclosure of a fearful and autistic Church closed in on herself who becomes untrue to her essential mission” (ibid., 279).
with him, the church as bride enters into Christ’s experience of sacrifice. She shares in the archetypal experience in which she must “allow the Beloved to keep his own will to die a vicarious death.” For this sacramental encounter with the Lord, Balthasar intends to highlight the church’s incorporation into the life of Christ but also not abolish the distinction between God and humanity. In the theo-drama, Christ obeys the Father in pure love, but the church obeys the Son’s will with her will:

No creature can enter along with the Son of God into his self-humbling. Rather, the only way for the unity to be established is for us to be compelled by him to enter the humbling, certainly on the basis of a freely given ‘Yes’ of faith, but also in a state of being overwhelmed by his will to humble himself in obedience to the Father, a will that is in no way our own will.

This dramatic dimension of Christ’s Eucharistic action allows Balthasar to maintain his focus on “the interplay between the priority of the divine action and man’s subsequent ‘letting be’, which is both active and free.” Balthasar rejects any charge that his account threatens to swallow up human subjectivity or freedom into Christ’s transcendent presence; rather, he is insistent that, while God’s freedom enters into and interacts with created freedom in Christ, we are “incorporated into Christ’s freedom” and “also become truly free”.

Through his Eucharist, his brethren are made free, having been endowed with his Spirit of freedom. Together they form a common ‘We’ on the basis of their interrelated and interpenetrating missions, and so, in the same Spirit, they can express their gratitude and indebtedness to the Son and, with him, to the Father.

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81 ET III: 232-3; Balthasar, A Theology of History, 98f.
82 ET III: 233. For Balthasar, this kind of ecclesial obedience is not an obligation deduced from an abstract moral principle, but a loving obedience to Christ’s imperative of love.
83 TD IV: 405.
84 According to Christoph Schönborn, “after the Council von Balthasar was considered to have sounded the trumpet for the Church to retreat into the inner room” (Schönborn, “Forward,” 7); however, as Schönborn himself puts it, “he still stands fully by the content of Razing the Bastions” in the 1980s (ibid., 9ff.).
85 TD IV: 406; Schönborn, “Forward,” 14f.
86 TD III: 350.
Therefore, the ontological differentiation between God and the church does not diminish the role of human agency in the God’s drama in the world and hence his communion with us. It rather affirms that God’s Word demands a free response. Just as Christ’s thanksgiving to the Father consists in his obedience and willingness to let himself be offered as the Father’s self-giving love for the sake of the world, so the church is also made genuinely free to respond in obedience to Christ’s call and his mission. To emphasize all this means that the church is both the body of Christ broken for the salvation of the world and the bride who, in receiving the substance of Christ’s life in the Eucharist, brings new life to the world. She is in union with Christ “his flesh for the life of the world” (Jn 6:51).

### 6.4 The Church Being Sent into the World

In his exploration of the church’s missionary existence in the world, Balthasar never sets aside the centrality of Christ’s mission. As the goal and result of Christ’s self-giving, the movement of the church towards the world as her mission is “a eucharistic process involved in the law of Christ’s life – which is given to be shared out.”\(^{87}\) Sent by Christ, the church has to live purely from its source and to give herself to the world. It is Christ’s Eucharistic presence that determines how the church engages with the world.\(^{88}\) Crucially, Balthasar emphasizes Christ’s sharing of his mission with the church. By grace, the church is conjoined to Christ as his own body, which is “so perfectly surrendered in death and the Eucharist that all movement of self-preservation, self-reflection and

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\(^{88}\) Thus Balthasar argues that “it is Christ’s body that opens up an understanding of the Church in the world” (ibid., 92).
planning is alien to it." Like her Lord, therefore, the church should be less concerned with preserving her shape than with promoting the world’s salvation. She shares Christ’s destiny, which is not one to power but one in which being given means being broken and shared. In this respect, the church “always transcends her particular form at any one time, for her goal is the fruitfulness of Christ, which is aimed at the whole of mankind.”

Through transcending herself, the church participates in the “universality of the work of reconciliation” that God has designed and implemented for the whole world. As God’s saving purpose extends to the entire humanity, the church must simultaneously penetrate the world and avoid being held fast by it: “the less church is identical with world and the more she is herself, the more open and vulnerable she is to the world and the less she can be marked off from it.”

Balthasar thus characterizes the church’s interior relationship with Christ as the ground of her being sent to the world, or as he puts it, “the church, while inwardly reaching out to the Lord, must for that very reason externally go beyond herself into the world.” The source of her being and mission always lies in the irreducible reality of Christ. Just as Christ chooses a path by which to cross into the sinful world through his incarnation, the church’s position will become similarly paradoxical. Through her deeper entering into the world, we witness “the descent of the church into contact with the world.” The church goes with Christ in this descent, provided that the celebration of the Eucharist leads her to the reception of his crucified love and her response to it in her

89 Ibid., 94.
90 TD III: 342.
91 Balthasar, Truth is Symphonic, 91.
92 ET II: 34.
93 Balthasar, Razing the Bastions, 99. In particular, “Christ himself was ‘in motion’: he was not at home anywhere on earth, …, without ever having the prospect of returning to his own home. Nor was his food a solid, supratemporal truth-system, but the will of the Father at each instant. He walked in the light of this will, just as those who imitate him are to walk after him. … And so the Church too walks” (ibid., 80-1).
readiness to be sacrificed along with it. The church thus lives in a form of humble self-giving to the world. In so doing, the church will be filled with and serve for the love of Christ. It is a love that “prefigures that formlessness in which the church, crucified in the world, is to lay down her life.”94 In this sense, her intimate sharing in Christ’s ongoing mission brings her into a “horizontal solidarity with the whole of humanity” that the world, in turn, may receive its new reality as an ever-new expression of God’s life-giving love.

Being sent out into the world, therefore, never refers to merely human activity which the church might undertake by human effort alone. Instead being sent comes from her obedience to Christ in faith and freedom. The achievement of this mission results from the fruitfulness of the divine giving, not from human works. By virtue of the fact that Christ fashions his church after himself, the ecclesial response of love is the culminating expression of self-surrender to God, which cannot be characterized as a vehicle for the self-glorification of the church. Balthasar identifies this free enactment of Christ’s ecstatic love for the world as the manifestation of the trinitarian love.95 Through the Spirit, the church is directed to love in correspondence with the outpoured mission of divine love in Christ. The church is in this way “the crystallization of the love of Christ,” which renders God’s final word about the world. The church is God’s sign that places all the world’s values in their true light.96

94 Balthasar, Truth is Symphonic, 104. Emphasis mine. In speaking of the church’s self-surrender, Balthasar also addresses the vulnerability of the world: “If the Church has to squander itself prodigally in the world, giving itself eucharistically to be shared out with the result that its very shape disappears in ruins, it is able to see the collapse of the world, whose form is also passing away, as a destiny it shares; it will be able to speak words of hope to the sinking world” (ibid., 99).
95 ET II: 15-27.
96 Ibid., 34-5.
The strength of Balthasar’s ecclesiology outlined above is its support of an intimate relationship between the church and the world. The world, like the church, has its own role in the theo-drama. The redemption of the world, far from something that can be deduced or manipulated, is dramatically performed by God in utter freedom and this redemptive activity is something of which humans have not usually been aware. Within the finitude of existence, the world seeks a “false maturity” before God which cannot provide a real way out from “the worldwide reality of suffering.” However, this “common lack of an inner orientation towards God and his grace” is something which God does not despise. Rather this lack of orientation has elicited from God “a deeper and more painful form of his love,” by which such wounded humanity is liberated and transformed from within. God is always involved with his world in a graced relationship. Engaged in this divine service of love, the church as “the yeast” and “the light of the world” should take a “responsibility of suffering” upon herself, standing close to Christ in the event of redemption. She cannot withdraw from the world but, in fact through the imitation of Christ, the church experiences, learns, and bears the world’s darkness and brokenness. In the new covenant, there is “no longer any other way … to judge than by suffering inwardly with the brother who is judged.” It is for this reason that the church

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97 Thus Balthasar warns us: “If we fail to allow the world time and space to reveal itself as it is and keep interposing the divine response as something that was ‘always there’, we risk depriving the world/God relationship of all dramatic tension” (TD IV: 76).
99 TD IV: 190-1.
100 Balthasar, Razing the Bastions, 62-6. As “sustained by the consent of feminine Church, suffering with him,” Christ is “entrusted to the hands of the Church, particularly in the Eucharist” (TD IV: 397).
101 Balthasar, Razing the Bastions, 88.
is called to “a genuine involvement with all the forms of human existence of the world,” and ultimately her endurance is part of her cross.102

Thus the church shares by grace in the redemptive mission for the world that Christ has received from the Father, as the church herself is part of the world. She ought not to be closed in on herself but suffused with Christ’s love and reflect it. Balthasar’s emphasis on Christ’s sovereignty in ecclesial existence and mission allows him to regard the church as “the pure outpouring of the Lord”; she is “the irradiation of Christ into the world to be redeemed,” to the extent that the world, “into which she radiates, is her proper and natural sphere.”103 The church is sent out to all nations (Mt 28:18). It is also “in this twofold transcendence in relation to the Lord and to the world” that the church must “preserve the exclusiveness of her relationship to Christ the Bridegroom even through this proximity.”104 Balthasar insists that encounter with Christ is always the ground of the church’s outward mission. To fulfill her unique call is to preach to the world purely from without and to transform it purely from within.105 Corresponding to this goal, therefore, the church exists only in a dynamic mode in which “the Christian reality … lives entirely in relationships of continual transcendence and in principle … breaks open the complacent, earthly forms, putting them in touch with a Catholic universality.”106 For this reason, the church is always a missionary community, on all the

102 Ibid., 86-7. Then, “where everything is first forgiven (on the Cross), even what is most incomprehensible becomes understandable; the hard outer shells of error break open and release the captive kernel of truth” (ibid., 88).
103 ET II: 28, 34. In fact, for Balthasar, “this self-abnegation in the service of Christ is clearly the only possible way of revealing to the world the self-abnegation of Christ” (ibid., 27).
104 Balthasar, Razing the Bastions, 100. In this vein, Balthasar also asserts that “There is in the Church no closure that is not at the same time an opening, but also there is no opening that does not arise from the closeness around the Lord and his table” (ET IV: 278).
105 In Balthasar’s words, “As Church, she must penetrate without becoming ‘establishment’ and advance without leaving unfinished business behind” (TD IV: 465).
106 Ibid.
roads of the world, going apart precisely in that which unites her, in Christ’s missionary call. Being drawn into Christ’s fellowship of suffering, she enters into the darkness of the world in the form of love and humility and, like Christ, offers herself, as a sacrifice for the world.

For Balthasar, the church as a whole revolves around “the existential form in this centrifugal radiance outward into the world.” Since her outward movement of mission is conjoined to the Son’s thanksgiving to the Father and is enclosed in his sending into the world, the shape of the church is to be dissolved in Christ’s fruitfulness. It is God’s love in his Word which invokes the church’s response and action through her concrete and deep commitment to God’s mission. Since the church is not the Lord, she has no power over world history. It is rather the power of Christ’s love that draws his community into God’s ek-static movement towards the world. This ecclesial ek-stasis is self-humbling and self-giving by both serving the world and waiting upon the Lord. On the other hand, the church’s continuing response of love is also a dynamic relationship embodied in her social ecclesial body. In other words, its ecstasy, that is “the ecstasy of service not of enthusiasm,” emerges as a concrete, living expression of the fruitfulness of humanity. This self-offering is made possible by the Eucharistic fruitfulness of Christ’s return to the Father. Through its earthly, historical activity, in turn, the Eucharistic process of the church’s being drawn into the infinity of divine love requires the whole of

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107 ET IV: 278. Arguably, “The Church of Jesus is essentially centrifugal by virtue of this sending, in contrast to the ever-centripetal movement of the old Israel” (ibid., 276).
108 Here Balthasar remains consistent in providing the trinitarian grounding for the church’s mission: “Precisely when we are placed by God in our uniquely human place in the world, we come to participate in the divine nature and are permitted to partake of his inner-trinitarian life.” See Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Retrieving the Tradition: The Fathers, the Scholastics and Ourselves,” CICR 24 (1997): 362-3.
her involvement in Christ’s suffering service on the cross. Love, above all, reveals itself as the fruition of Christ’s mission and thus also of the church’s mission.  

6.5 Concluding Thoughts: “As the Father Has Sent Me, So I Send You”

The ecclesiological vision brought forth from the missional church movement draws us to seek the church’s very being in her vocation as God’s called and sent people. This vision promotes a missiological grounding of the church’s existence in the world: “Mission is not about a program of the church, [as] it defines the church as God’s sent people. Our challenge today is to move from church with mission to missional church.”

In this scheme, the church is understood as missional because there is a missional God who invites all people into communion with him and sends his church into the world to share his transforming message. The church comes into her missional being because the missio Dei is underway. In giving dogmatic expression, the term “missional” is thereby used to describe both God and the church’s very nature, as well as to explain the continuity of mission. Since God shares his “sending nature” with the church, the latter is empowered to extend God’s mission in terms of a tangible and visible form of the gospel. This repeatable pattern of mission is captured by the words of Jesus: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (Jn 20:21). Accordingly, the identity of the church is defined by her extension of Christ’s mission; the purpose for which the church exists is to follow Christ and the missional model of God’s sending of him into the world.

As we have seen, Balthasar would also use the language of “extension” or “continuation” to specify the connection of Christ’s mission with the church, yet his
thought enters into another level of scope and meaning. For him, it is only in the sending of the Son that we find the proper orientation of the church being sent to the world. Consequently, the church must do what Christ did.\textsuperscript{113} She does not seek her own glory but surrenders herself to God without reserve. With a deep awareness of the intimate link between Christ’s mission and the church’s mission, however, Balthasar in no way diminishes the role of Christ in determining the substance of Christian convictions about God, the church and the world. What is crucial for his ecclesiology is the church’s relation to Christ in faith. In the sending of the church, the one who is sent has a personal relationship to the sender.\textsuperscript{114} It is by receiving the Eucharist that the church intimately and deeply shares in Christ’s love and sacrifice. With this, two delimitations then made by Balthasar are of critical importance for the church’s continuation of Christ’s mission in the world. First, the church’s visible commitment to the world is rooted in her invisible commitment to her Lord. What she does for the world is also a response of love and joy to Christ’s personal call. Thus mission and devotion are integrally related. Second, the mission received implies a distinction between the one-who-is-sent and the one-who-sends. The more the church is sent out and commissioned, the more she represents the Lord, the more profoundly she realizes herself in contradistinction to the Lord.\textsuperscript{115} As his servant, she does not proclaim herself, but rather the living Christ. These convictions and insights lead Balthasar to a different emphasis from those found in contemporary missional ecclesiology. First and foremost it is the mystery of faith that transforms and remodels the ethical and missional dimension of ecclesial existence.

\textsuperscript{113} ET II: 93.
\textsuperscript{114} In other words, the church “must recognize the presence of the Sender, without confusing the messengers with the sending Lord (2 Cor 4:6-12)” (ET IV: 360).
\textsuperscript{115} ET II: 107-8.
Where the missional church perspective broadens the church’s horizons through an understanding of her missionary identity and nature, the teaching of Vatican II instead has contributed to a renewed sense of the church from within the Catholic tradition. One notable feature of post-conciliar reflection on the church has been the essentiality of mission in the life of the church. This is seen clearly in the Council’s statement that “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.” As an expression of the church’s inner life, mission is intimately connected to “the vocation to holiness.” The church’s missionary nature thereby becomes concrete in a distinct way in the religious and consecrated life. More precisely, her participation in mission involves a process of “putting on Christ” (Rom 13:14). Not only does this orientation towards holiness challenge the church to rediscover her missionary zeal, it also enhances a lively awareness of her responsibility to the world. In effect, the church goes on her pilgrim way to bear God’s missionary mandate, to preach the gospel to all humanity. At the heart

116 See Scherer, Gospel, Church, & Kingdom, 196-232.
119 Miller, The Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortations of John Paul II, 669 (= VC 25.1). It is also significant that “consecrated life is at the very heart of the Church as a decisive element for her mission, since it ‘manifests the inner nature of the Christian calling’ and the striving of the whole Church as Bride toward union with her one Spouse” (ibid., 651 (= VC 3.1)).
120 “So,” the Council document continues to state, “all the children of the Church should have a lively consciousness of their own responsibility for the world, they should foster within themselves a truly Catholic spirit, they should spend themselves in the work of the Gospel” (Flannery, The Conciliar and Post Documents, 850 (= AG 36b)). See further Catechism of the Catholic Church, rev. ed. (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1999), 174-80, 191f.
of this Catholic position lies John Paul II’s encyclical letter *Redemptoris Missio* where he states that, “The call to mission derives, of its nature, from the call to holiness.”

As a Catholic theologian, Balthasar puts considerable weight on “the infused holiness of the Church,” which undergirds the act of obedience to the Word in the ecclesial and Christian life. Far from a platonic ideal in the heavenly realm, the church’s holiness given in appropriate measure means a participation in the personal existence of the eternal Word of God. Thus the church’s mission has as its foundation the form of holiness, i.e. “a Son-like and hence Word-like form.” In this respect, Balthasar characterizes God’s grace which the Father gives the church in the Spirit as “Christoform: it assimilates us to the Son without violating us as human beings.”

Balthasar’s approach to the church’s holiness does not prompt him to explain away the trinitarian structure in his theo-dramatics. Quite the opposite, such theological investigation is an attempt to articulate the fact that the movement of the church grounded in the event of the Eucharist is no mere contingent event, but the economical expression of trinitarian mutual love. The holy life of the church, which is at the same time pure grace from the Father, makes her the “ungraspable extension of the trinitarian mission,” since “Jesus, who chooses his trinitarian relation to the Father as his point of departure (‘as the Father has sent me’), imparts this to the ones to whom he gives a mission in the Church (‘so I send you’).” Balthasar’s insight here helps us to understand that the church by her very nature participates in the mission of Christ and hence the mission of

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122 *ETI* 151. In my view, this includes both the objective and subjective holiness of the church.
123 Balthasar, *Prayer*, 59. Put in another way, “the mission itself is Christoform, exhibiting the character of the Word, the Logos” (ibid., 60).
124 Ibid., 58.
125 *ETIV* 357. In consequence, “he who receives whomever I send receives me; and he who receives me receives him who sent me” (Jn 13:20).
the triune God. The call to holiness is, therefore, rooted in the grace of sharing in the koinonia of God’s trinitarian life, including his suffering and glory.
CHAPTER 7
CONCLUSION: RELEVANCE OF BARTH AND BALTHASAR TO ECUMENICAL MISSIONAL ECCLESIOLOGY

7.1 Review: Barth and Balthasar as Dialogue Partners

The focus of this study has been the relationship of Christ, the church and mission. We have seen that the church cannot set its own agenda and goal for mission without reference to the person and work of Christ. Based on the truth that the church should proclaim the gospel to the world, its mission is none other than a sharing in the mission of Christ. In exploring the meaning and feature of this ecclesial involvement, the theological analysis in the preceding chapters has demonstrated how Barth and Balthasar spell out the christological grounds for the being and mission of the church. More decisively, their christocentric approaches to ecclesiology, though put in different ways, give theological qualifications in order to make an unequivocal ecclesiological affirmation. The church, for both theologians, is to be understood within the framework of God’s act ad extra, in which it exists and lives wholly for God and therefore wholly for the world. It has no ontological foundation in itself, but is solely grounded in God’s grace through Christ. Appealing to the notions of God’s priority and transcendence in no way leads Barth or Balthasar to deprecate the practice of the Christian life. Rather, their expositions of the precedence of God provide and govern the paradigm for appropriate human agency and action.

Barth and Balthasar, however, emphasize different dimensions when they “trace the universal reach of the christological particular.”¹ As we have looked at Barth’s mature

¹ Webster, “Balthasar and Karl Barth,” 254. To explore the details of the difference in their theologies and ecclesiology is beyond the scope of this thesis. For a relevant discussion of this issue, see further Stephen D. Wigley, Karl Barth and Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Critical Engagement (London: T&T Clark, 2007);
ecclesiology, three major considerations have emerged. First, the strength of Barth’s approach primarily lies in his insistence upon the lordship of Christ in effecting reconciliation. For Barth this means that this “was once for all reconciliation too, our justification before God, our sanctification for him, our becoming heirs of eternal life.”\(^2\) With his focus upon this ‘objectivity’ of reconciliation, Barth offers us an account of Christ’s being “for us” who actualizes the covenant-partnership with God for all humanity. What is crucial here is Barth’s determination of the ultimate reality of human history out of the reality of Christ. This is a genuine “for us” salvation which comes to us as a gift that is already actual and total.\(^3\) In a second consideration which is related to the first, Barth’s doctrine of reconciliation makes a clear distinction between God and humanity, especially between his action and ours.\(^4\) This “infinite qualitative difference” characterizes a genuine relation of the divine and human agency in which the latter is not subject to divine caprice. Although there is a divine priority and subsequently a human response, the asymmetry allows a conception that clears a moral space in which we can act as responsible agents. Our creaturely freedom and action is, accordingly, that which

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3 In particular, for Barth, the fact that Christ is “for us” in himself is beyond, and decisively different from, the reality of the “with us” of fellow-creatures: “if we are to look and think and speak more precisely it is not a redemptive happening which embraces both him and us, but the redemptive happening which embraces us in his existence, which takes us up into itself. He is the fellow-man who goes before us as an example and shows us the way because and in the power of the fact that he is ‘for us’: in a ‘for us’ which cannot be equated with any ‘with us’” (*CD* IV/1: 229). Within this context, the event of resurrection and ascension is nothing else than the proclamation of the perfect act of redemption once and for all accomplished in the history of “Jesus Christ for us.”
4 “There is a great gulf between ‘Jesus Christ for us’ and ourselves as those who in this supremely perfect word are summoned to regard ourselves as those for whom he is and acts. … How can we dare to extend his being and activity so that we count it our own, speaking of our own sin … of our own justification, of ourselves as his community, and of our own faith, in relation to him? … No, this thing … which is in fact simple in Jesus Christ, cannot be simple for us, as we work it out for ourselves” (ibid., 286).
follows from and is brought into correspondence with the prior action of God *pro nobis* in Christ. Thirdly, Barth emphasizes that the church is the provisional representation of God’s reconciliation of the world to himself. By virtue of the ‘logic’ of his ethics of reconciliation, the church’s mission as witness is true but also “relative, provisional and teleological,” insofar as what the church does is a faithful response to Christ’s own self-utterance to it.\(^5\)

What Barth endeavors to achieve by an ethics of reconciliation, Balthasar undertakes through a theo-dramatics of ecclesial mission. If the Protestant theologian urges the readers to recognize the ecclesial response of dependent partnership in the ordered mutuality of covenant, then the Catholic theologian stresses more the participatory role of the church in the divine drama opened by Christ. In short, Balthasar’s ecclesiology sheds greater light on how the church understands and encounters the mystery of Christ. Alongside Barth’s reflection on the Son’s obedience as the form of the intra-trinitarian life, Balthasar probes the depths of the trinitarian kenosis. From this kenosis he derives richer resources with which to articulate the relationship between divine and human freedom.\(^6\) Balthasar thus explores the paschal mystery further than does Barth, to the extent that the *pro nobis* motif designates the way Balthasar interprets the dramatic and substitutionary character of Christ’s passion and especially his descent into hell. Through the wondrous exchange of Christ and humanity, the latter is

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\(^5\) “The question arises … whether the church is fitted to make this provisional representation. We have to remind ourselves that we are speaking of the representation which, although it is provisional, is a true and effective, genuine and invincible representation of the elevation and establishment of all men as it has been fulfilled in the exaltation of the man Jesus. … It never takes place in virtue of the qualities of this people itself. Jesus the Lord, in the quickening power of his Holy Spirit, is the one who acts where this provisional representation takes place, and therefore where the true church is an event” (*CD IV/2*: 622-3).

\(^6\) On this point, Webster comments that “Though Balthasar presses the logic of kenosis further than Barth, his core claim … is explicitly derived from Barth” (“Balthasar and Karl Barth,” 252).
liberated from sin and freed for a new form of life in Christ. This dramatic change of our status before God, for Balthasar, opens a horizon which makes possible not only the realization of our finite freedom, but also our participation in the suffering and mission of Christ.

In line with Barth’s position on the distinction between Christ’s act and the church’s response, Balthasar insists that, in the theo-drama, Christ’s role and act are in no way obscured or eclipsed by the participation of the church. Balthasar shares with Barth’s accent on the accomplished work of the cross, but he also affirms that the church is drawn into Christ’s suffering and mission in the Eucharist. It is Balthasar’s insight into this graced participation in Christ which grounds his understanding of the church’s mission as a great level of intimacy between Christ and the church without degrading their own uniqueness. In effect, the church’s mission is far from a self-determining activity achieved on its own power. Rather the church enacts its unique vocation received from its Lord Christ. Hence, like Barth, Balthasar establishes his christological basis for the church’s deep engagement with the world, thereby giving shape to its missionary identity and existence. He draws from his dramatic Christology in order to unpack the irreducible fact of Jesus. Jesus’ history does not merely illustrate or exemplify but

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7 To summarize his account of Balthasar on the descent into hell, David Lauber posits that “Balthasar locates the descent into hell at centre stage in his dramatic soteriology because it logically follows within his vision of the pattern of redemption. … Christ’s descent into hell fits specifically within the internal logic of Balthasar’s soteriology, and more broadly, within his theological vision as a whole” (Barth on the Descent into Hell, 74). In agreement with Lauber’s insight, chapter 5 has already shown that the descent into hell plays a pivotal role in Balthasar’s exploration of Christ’s identity and mission which is unique and unsubstitutable. Remarkably, Balthasar positions himself in no opposition to the official teaching of the Catholic Church: “The descent into hell brings the Gospel message of salvation to complete fulfillment. This is the last phase of Jesus’ messianic mission, a phase which is condensed in time but vast in its real significance: the spread of Christ’s redemptive work to all men of all times and all places, for all who are saved have been made sharers in the redemption” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 144).

8 According to Balthasar’s theological aesthetics, the particular, concrete form of Christ is the form of the splendor of God’s being, which cannot be reduced or transposed to another key without irreparable loss. See GL I: 482-509.
actually *embodies* the ways and works of God, in virtue of which the church is intimately involved in a genuine exchange of life-giving with Christ. Thus, the church acquires a share in Christ’s redemptive work through this life-giving exchange, and its suffering can in turn bear fruit, albeit only by the power of Christ in the Spirit. Throughout his christological writings, Balthasar seeks to capture the significance of the historical particularity of Christ. Balthasar’s strongly incarnational and Eucharistic theology leads him to reject attempts to make Jesus a merely relative figure, one of many ways in which *missio Dei* can be carried out in the human and temporal sphere.

This is the substance of our characterization of Barth’s and Balthasar’s ecclesiology in relation to Christ and mission. Their accounts of the reality of the church are advanced on the basis of a specific divine self-determination, not a human possibility, which by grace is an event in Christ that evokes genuine ecclesial response to the power of the divine love. For both theologians, an ecclesiological discourse would become abstract if it had failed to account for the impact of the real presence of Christ and his will upon the church. In their views, ecclesiology is always a derivative, not a foundational, doctrine. The presence of Christ functions as an interpretative key for understanding ecclesial existence, which cannot be considered apart from its relationship to divine grace. Barth and Balthasar remind us to affirm ecclesial action with caution, so as not to lose sight of the primacy of divine agency. As was made clear in the first two chapters of this study, Christ’s life and work is also the defining feature of ecumenical missional

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9 Nicholas J. Healy asserts the following as the essential feature of this life-giving exchange in Balthasar’s account: “Christ gives us all that is his and takes into himself all that is ours. Christ’s being is his mission to the world, a mission that extends to all time and all space. The fullest reception of the gift of the Eucharist, then, is the receiving of Christ’s being and hence his mission to the world.” See Nicholas J. Healy, *The Eschatology of Hans Urs von Balthasar: Being as Communion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 199.
ecclesiology. However, the saving significance of Christ in this ecclesiological paradigm is measured largely in terms of its pragmatic or functional value. Christ primarily serves as a life model for the missional formation of his community, in order that the church can continue Christ’s mission of demonstrating God’s kingdom in the world. Christ’s incarnate life, accordingly, gives shape to the relationship of the church in context. Through the works of Bosch, Newbigin and Guder, we have seen that the missional church movement develops an incarnational understanding of the church’s mission. The church is perceived as the embodiment of God’s love and gospel, insofar as it takes responsibility for the healing of the world. Far from distinguishing adequately between Christ and humanity as Barth and Balthasar do, missional ecclesiology proposes that the church is empowered “by a certain communion with Christ which allows some measure of his perfected spirituality and destiny to be repeated or re-enacted in our lives.”

In this estimation, Christology remains a legitimate source of theological input only to the degree that it fosters a view of mission, mainly based on the ethical example of Jesus. This disinterest in the “ontological content” of Christ’s gospel in turn threatens the inseparable unity of his person and work. As such, the fact that the history of Jesus is a singular and irreducible reality is not fully accepted.

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10 To ground their construction of a “missional theology of culture” in Christology, Gelder and Zscheile assert that “Christ is the ultimate key to discerning the participation of God in the world and of the world in God as the one in whom that participation is fully realized” (The Missional Church in Perspective, 139).

11 Hunsinger, Disruptive Grace, 264-5. Here Hunsinger describes what lies at the heart of Rahner’s “middle Christology.” I find that Hunsinger’s idea could also be applied to the church’s relationship to Christ in missional ecclesiology.

12 See especially Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, ReJesus: A Wild Messiah for a Missional Church (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009). Frost and Hirsch here promotes an incarnational model of Jesus that considers mission “not merely as a practice preferred by God but as an aspect of his very character” (ibid., 24ff.).

13 In contrast, Barth firmly holds to the gospel’s ontological content: “In the revelation and efficacy (e;ndeixij) of the grace of Jesus Christ proclaimed in the gospel what comes first is not the justification of the believer in Jesus Christ but the basis of it – that God shows himself to be just: eivj to. ei=nai auvto.n di,kaion, and only then and for that reason: kai. dikaiou/nta to.n evk
It is against this background that the contours of Barth’s and Balthasar’s ecclesiologies could serve as a critical guide to the development of missional ecclesiology. They attempt to clarify the distinction and relationship between the divine and human agency which missional ecclesiology has not clearly articulated. What Barth and Balthasar have offered is a massive example of fluent discourse about the church as it relates to Christ and therefore to the world, preventing the collapse of Christology into ecclesiology or missiology. These dogmatic trajectories are of great help in clarifying more fully the ontological relation between God and human beings, by virtue of which the church and its mission are conceived within the sphere of the sovereignty of God. By appreciating the contributions of Barth and Balthasar, ecumenical missional ecclesiology might seek to situate the church in a richer Christology and reconsider the essence of the church-in-mission as a spiritual reality that is rooted in Christ’s personal relationship with the church. In addition to this basic consideration, some further implications may be drawn from the works of Barth and Balthasar which reflect on the reality of the church-in-mission. In particular, the rest of this concluding chapter will

\textit{pi, stewj vIhsou/} (Rom. 3:26). In it God himself is right. He is at one with himself. He is faithful to himself. That is its basic ontological content” \textit{(CD IV/1: 532).}

14 On this point Dietrich Bonhoeffer warns us in \textit{Ethics}, trans. Reinhard Krauss et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 67, that “It is nothing but unbelief to give the world … less than Christ. It means not taking seriously the incarnation, the crucifixion, and the bodily resurrection. It means denying the body of Christ.”

15 While realizing “ambiguities, tensions, and underdeveloped threads in the missional church literature,” Gelder and Zscheile deduce a model for our missional existence from social trinitarianism in order to overcome the “limitations of the ‘sending’ view of the Trinity” \textit{(The Missional Church in Perspective}, 99-123). In this scheme, the incarnation, for instance, shows that “God identifies with us relationally in a posture of humility” so that “we are to share this same love with our neighbors” (ibid., 115). However, it is questionable whether Gelder and Zscheile could really bring much-needed clarity to the missional church conversation. Not surprisingly, the ontological distinction between God and humanity is still left unexplained in their theological synthesis. By way of contrast, both Barth and Balthasar develop their understandings of trinitarian relation (not as a template for human relations) in the context of the movement of the triune \textit{God pro nobis}, in order that this radical difference is not possibly ruled out. For a penetrating critique of social trinitarianism, see Mark Husbands, “The Trinity is Not Our Social Program: Volf, Gregory of Nyssa and Barth,” in \textit{Trinitarian Theology for the Church: Scripture, Community, Worship}, ed. Daniel J. Treier and David Lauber (Downers Grove: IVP, 2009), 120-41.
explore three areas of the church’s life for our rethinking of the construal of missional ecclesiology. We will seek a deeper theological understanding of the missional church in a way that Barth’s and Balthasar’s insights are taken into account with seriousness. The following reflections will not only call for careful dogmatic specification of some crucial notions such as visibility and discipleship, but also illuminate how the church today is to engage in the world for the sake of Christ.

7.2 The Necessity of Visibility

The incarnational model of missional ecclesiology puts great focus on the church’s responsibility to live as a distinctive community before the world. This model is primarily devoted to the task of describing the visible form which the church’s distinction from the world must take. On the basis of the power of the gospel which “shapes the culture of a society – its assumptions, its perspectives, its choices,” the church lives in confidence that “it will always be called to express the gospel within the terms, styles, and perspectives of its social context.” The stress on the church’s visibility in this approach is governed by a theology of the incarnation which grounds the church’s missional vocation in the analogy in Christ himself, thus refusing the fatal separation of the divine work from that of human beings. In effect, as Guder argues, the mission church should demonstrate the “fundamental translatability of the gospel.” In this vein, the more pressing issue is therefore not whether the church is visible, but what

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16 “And the more the church lives such distinctive faithfulness, the more visible the reign of God will be for all to see” (Guder, Missional Church, 129). On the other hand, in developing a “missional trinitarian framework” from social trinitarianism, Gelder and Zscheile hold that “being the church from a missional perspective means that Christians share in the triune God’s creative, redemptive, and reconciling movement within human societies, communities, and cultures” (The Missional Church in Perspective, 121-2, 139-45, here 142).

17 Guder, Missional Church, 14.

18 Guder, The Continuing Conversion of the Church, 78.
kind of visibility is to be reflected in the life of church. It is true that the church is not to be sought in the purely invisible realm, but neither is it to be sought according to self-confidently set goals.

When Barth and Balthasar begin with the statement that the church exists for the world, they are “not idealizing its reality, or announcing a programme, but realistically describing the historical actuality of the one church which is at one and the same time both visible and invisible.” The true visibility, for both theologians, which belongs to the realm of faith, is described only by reference to “God’s action toward … the world for its salvation and his own glory.” The visible, bodily form of the church, no less than “the real result of the divine operation,” is not convertible into something resident in the church, or something which the church fills out in its action. Rather, the church “has continually to reflect anew on its fundamental values and compare them with the results of its endeavors in the field of inculturation.” As such, the church neither becomes self-assertive, nor could it be detached from the divine grace. Rather it always owes itself to God in terms of its sharing in his reaching out to the divided world.

At this point, Barth stresses more strongly than Balthasar the distinction between the invisible church and the visible church. For Barth, as Webster puts it, “if the

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19 John Webster, “The Visible Attestst the Invisible,” in The Community of the Word, 100f. On this point Bonhoeffer challenges us to reject a ‘humble’ invisibility in the form of total conformity to the world and to rediscover the true visibility from the cross of Christ: “What sort of light is to shine from the place where only the disciples have a right to be? What do the invisibility and hiddenness of Jesus’ cross, under which the disciples stand, have in common with the light which is to shine? … To the shock of everyone else, is the cross not something which became outrageously visible in the complete darkness? Is it not visible enough that Christ is rejected and must suffer, that his life ends outside the city gates on the hill of shame? Is that invisibility?” See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Discipleship, trans. Barbara Green and Reinhard Krauss (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 114.
20 CD IV/3: 785. Emphasis mine. See also TD IV: 464-5.
21 CD IV/3: 785. According to Balthasar, “However much the Church is also a supernatural community established from above – just as Christ came from God above and not ‘through the will of an earthly father’ or ‘of the flesh’ – so too is she still an authentically natural, authentically human and authentically visible society – just as Christ was a natural, visible male human being” (“Retrieving the Tradition,” 363).
22 TD IV: 466.
phenomena of the church really are the church’s visibility, this is … because through the Spirit they are consecrated, taken up into God’s service as the witnesses to his presence and act.” 23 As the church cannot create or confer its reality, the same is true of its visibility. It can only be endowed with it by the Spirit. Here Barth differentiates the “real church” (die wirkliche Kirche), which is the church that never can be actualized by human effort, from the “semblance of a church” (die Scheinkirche):

We can see the members of the church, and its officials and constitution and orders, its dogmatics and cultus, its organisations and societies, its leaders with their politics, and its laity, its art and press – and all these in the context of its history. … This something which claims to be the church, and is before us all in these manifestations, may well be only the semblance of a church, in which the will and work of man, although they allege that they are occasioned and fashioned by God, are striving to express only themselves. … If it is visible as a true church (wirkliche Kirche), this means that the victory of the divine operation, the mighty act of the Holy Spirit in face of the sinfulness of human action, finds further expression in a free emergence and outshining of the true church from the concealment in which it is enveloped by the sinfulness of all human volition. 24

Thus it is important to note that as the reality of sinful humanity, the church is spiritual history only as the Spirit “sanctifies men and their work, building up them and their work into the true church (die wirkliche Kirche).” 25 This leads Barth to conclude that the visibility of the church has its center in the ever-fresh coming of the Spirit. The good work of the Spirit which has begun in the church thus “should begin again at the beginning.” 26 For Barth, it is in this true confidence that the church’s being and visibility find their living basis. Barth’s proposal here guards against the danger of confusing the action of the Spirit with ecclesial practice, in order to maintain the inseparable unity of the invisible and visible church. The church as genuine creaturely event and assembly is

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24 CD IV/2: 619.
25 Ibid., 617.
26 CD IV/4: 39.
spiritually discerned as visible through human activity and by the witness of the Spirit. Therefore, Barth’s approach to the church’s visibility places a stronger emphasis than ecumenical missional ecclesiology on the centrality of divine agency in the ecclesial practice and mission. Barth would suggest that in engaging its social and cultural context, the church is always located in its inextricable relation to divine action, which shapes the church’s identity and orients its service for the world. In order to avoid the risk of absorbing the invisible into the visible church, missional ecclesiology might incorporate Barth’s insight into its further reflection and articulation.

7.3 The Way of Discipleship

The visible church is not a static embodiment, but the living-space (Lebensraum) “where the reign of Jesus Christ over the world is to be demonstrated and proclaimed.” When this happens, confessions come to testify the fact that as the risen one Christ is not separated from us but now present in the Spirit. This coming of Christ is not an accidental reality, provided that the one who took on a human body for our sake demands bodily commitment to him and with him throughout our daily life. In all this is the way of discipleship which finds its fulfillment in the cross of Christ. From a missional theological perspective, discipleship denotes a lifestyle of “following Christ into participation in God’s mission in the world in the power of the Spirit.” The call to discipleship as such reorients our involvement with the world around the point where Jesus gives compassionate response to human need. Since the life of Jesus shows the primary pattern of God’s presence and movement in the world, the church, in following the way of Jesus, can discover its missional identity through missional practices of

27 Bonhoeffer, Ethics, 63.
discipleship in which its participation in God’s mission is embodied in relation to its neighbor.\(^{29}\) As the book *Missional Church* notes, missional discipleship describes the dynamic process for “those who have chosen to take on the commitment, practices, and disciplines that make them a distinct, missionary community.”\(^{30}\) This ethical approach to mission and discipleship calls forth a deep engagement in the ministry of Christ coupled with his experiential impact.

While Barth and Balthasar also look to Jesus for content and pattern in the Christian life, the command to follow Jesus is for them essentially a question of obedience: “It is demanded by Jesus – the Son of Man who as the Son of God speaks in the name and with the full authority of God.”\(^{31}\) Accordingly, neither Barth nor Balthasar takes an anthropocentric approach in order to consider discipleship as merely ethical practice or humanist adventure. Instead, both of them retain their christological concentrations in their attempts, in which receptivity, rather than self-actualization, is fundamental to our Christian identity and calling to be God’s partner. The shape of discipleship, for them, is determined by the history of Jesus who died for us (Rom 5:8).

The importance of this christological foundation brings Barth and Balthasar into fruitful dialogue with ecumenical missional ecclesiology.

To respond to the call to discipleship, for Barth, is to conform oneself to the direction of Jesus and towards his cross. The achievement of this commanded correspondence never relies on an act of self-assertion, but on the event of an act of grace.

\(^{29}\) Ibid., 148-55. See also Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 113-25.

\(^{30}\) Guder, *Missional Church*, 208. See further ibid., 93-109

\(^{31}\) *CD IV/2*: 537. For Balthasar, “It is all part of the disciples’ attempt to follow Christ by giving up their lives out of love for the world and in obedience to God who so loved the world that he gave his only Son that the world might saved through him” (*The Moment of Christian Witness*, trans. Richard Beckley (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1994), 35-6). Thus “discipleship is not the recognition and adoption of a programme, ideal or law, or the attempt to fulfil it. It is not the execution of a plan of individual or social construction imparted and commended by Jesus” (*CD IV/2*: 536).
through Jesus Christ. It is this Jesus Christ who “does create this correspondence to his life in the existence of other men.”32 In other words, “our existence receives a new determination”33 – we both realize our own true self-determination and conform to a determination already set in Christ. These two aspects of determination make Barth’s position instructive to the development of missional ecclesiology. As Christ’s witnesses, Barth insists, we always stand under the law which determined and delimited his historical existence: “The determination of the existence of Jesus for death … has in the existence of the disciples a counterpart which has an unmistakable likeness for all its inferiority.”34 This does not imply that the Christian community possesses some sort of self-realizing power to exactly imitate the actions of Christ described in Scripture. Rather the Christian obedience to the call of Jesus Christ is grounded in his very being and action. In its conformity to Christ, according to Barth, the community should bear its own cross, not the cross of Jesus. While missional ecclesiology explains that we can be “a testimony to the transformed understanding of power that we are learning from Jesus,”35 Barth reminds us that “his [Christ’s] own crown and the dignity which comes to the disciple in discipleship are two distinct things.”36 The disciple follows his master, but cannot reenact his crucifixion. Barth stresses that our activity of obedience is possible only in the dynamic of our fellowship with Christ, in which we encounter through the Spirit, the person and the will of the crucified Christ. In response to the charge that missional church might threaten the sovereignty of Christ, missional ecclesiology could

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32 CD IV/2: 325.
33 Ibid., 318. Barth further explains: “Man is an active, not an inactive recipient, yet even in his activity he is still a recipient” (ChrL, 29).
34 CD IV/2: 263.
35 Guder, Missional Church, 268. For a further discussion of how missional church learns from Jesus, see Hirsch and Altclass, The Forgotten Ways Handbook, 37-62.
36 Ibid., 600.
draw renewed attention from Barth’s clarity concerning the theme of discipleship. It might find that the practice of discipleship needs to be defined by Christ’s calling to attest him as the savior of the world.

Although Balthasar, like Barth, highlights the self-sufficiency of Christ’s suffering in his passion, he also affirms that “discipleship brings with it the gift of participation in the cross and resurrection of Christ.” For this Catholic theologian, the church is enabled to participate in the pro nobis reality of Christ’s paschal mystery and so remains one with Christ. In this respect, following Jesus does not mean a repetition of the historical sequence of Jesus’ life: it is instead “the exact imitation of Christ’s movement,” in a twofold rhythm of dying and being buried with Christ and rising with him. Thus we are called to let what is true in the paschal event be true in us and for us, namely that the subjective appropriation in faith hereby is not only a result (Ergebnis) of Christ’s work but also an event (Ereignis) in our Christian life. According to Balthasar, this call to an intimate form of discipleship takes on a basic structure that God’s involvement with Christ impinges upon our involvement as Christians. Because God invites us to share “in his act of surrendering his incarnate Son for the world, there is no such thing in Christianity as a way of experiencing God ‘in himself’ except the way of discipleship of Christ under the guidance of the Spirit of Christ.” Through this manner of participation in the life of the Trinity, we are granted a share in the freedom of the Son’s divine

37 TD IV: 387. Balthasar further says: “The sufferings of the God-man are all-sufficient, but within those sufferings has been left for the disciples” (ibid., 388).
38 Balthasar, “Retrieving the Tradition,” 361, 364. This does not imply that Balthasar fails to pay attention to the difference between Christ and the church, as he asserts that “at this juncture it is significant that the Church herself is not identical with Christ the Redeemer but stands over against him in the distance of worship and obedience” (ibid., 363).
39 TD IV: 241-2; TD V: 332ff.
40 Balthasar, Engagement with God, 37.
41 ET IV: 38.
sonship. In Christ, our Christian existence conforms to the pattern of Christ’s self-giving love. Therefore, for Balthasar, at the heart of discipleship is a drama of divine and human freedom. The drama of discipleship invites individual persons to realize concretely and uniquely their fundamental human identity in Christ. In the missional approach to discipleship, however, there is a lack of this kind of personal participation. The missional church gives little emphasis to the dramatic dimension of human existence that Balthasar would not underrate. For this reason, Balthasar’s theo-dramatics provides insights for missional ecclesiology to reflect further on how Christ extends his mission and existence to every person and the ecclesial community.

7.4 The Practice of Prayer

Costly discipleship implies both a disciplined life of prayer and community and an engagement with those earthly powers and ordinances. Only this form of life can penetrate the secular world as leaven. Therefore, Christians find themselves not only called and given a common ecclesial life, but also are drawn together into public witness. Through prayer the focus is redirected from the achievements of Christian members to the coming of God’s reign, by virtue of which their vision of the world is being transformed. As Christian public posture is rooted in God’s establishment of a different order of reality, it is the prayer life that lies in the essence of authentic Christian life of obedience to God amidst the world. In this vein, the decisive practice in the church for shaping a missional life is also prayer, which is “a basic element in the whole action of the whole community.” It is for this reason that missional church could also learn to pray from Jesus. When reading the gospels, we find that Jesus is portrayed as an

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43 CD IV/3: 882.
exemplar of prayer. The disciples ask him to teach them to pray, more than to inspire them how to replicate his example of being missional. From the fact that Jesus hands himself over to the Father in prayer, there does arise a prayer-centered life in the elected community that leads its members to turn their lives over to God. In this light, missional ecclesiology could seek to develop a theology of prayer in relation to the church’s mission and ministry.\footnote{From what I have read in the missional church literature, the only published discussion on prayer (as ecclesial practice) is Guder, \textit{Missional Church}, 153-8. This reflects the fact that theology of prayer remains underdeveloped in ecumenical missional ecclesiology.} Balthasar and Barth are illuminating for this reason. For both theologians, prayer and mission interpenetrate and mutually imply each other.

In his theology of prayer, Barth chooses the rubric of “invocation of God” as the term to describe the Christian life as creaturely response to divine grace and command.\footnote{In particular, Barth considers the Lord’s Prayer “in its totality as an invocation of God: ‘Our Father who art in heaven.’ Those who pray thus do so as those who for their part are called upon to do so. They do not do it by reason by their own desire or need or taste. They are directed to do so. Invocation of God … is not an action that may or may not be undertaken at will, but one that follows an absolutely superior command” (\textit{ChrL}, 50). See further Webster, \textit{Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation}, 174-213.} Life in obedience to Jesus Christ as the Lord, in his discipleship, always consists in fulfilling of the movement of his own prayer after him and with him. Within the context of Barth’s ethics of reconciliation, the children of God are only empowered and obligated to invocation by God’s grace, in virtue of the movement and act of God in the Spirit.\footnote{\textit{ChrL}, 89-90.} Prayer is therefore “not a matter of their own reason and power,” nor a possibility which they possess of themselves.\footnote{Ibid., 93-95. Barth realizes that “This is one of the facets of the problem of grace and liberty: we work but at the same time we very well know that God wills to fulfill our work; we are in this human liberty which is not crushed by the liberty of God; we allow the Holy Spirit to act, and yet, during this time, our mind and our heart do not sleep” (\textit{Prayer}, trans. Sara F. Terrien (Louisville: WJK Press, 2002), 20.)}

Prayer is therefore “not a matter of their own reason and power,” nor a possibility which they possess of themselves. On this theological basis, Barth moves on to consider invocation as human action, which is a real movement from humanity to God. When God’s children pray, they not only “look and wait” but “have a part in the history in
which God is their partner and they are his partners.”\(^{48}\) They are exalted to a life in act which corresponds to God. As a result, the prayer for the hallowing of God’s name should involve “the corresponding willing, acting, and doing on man’s part.”\(^{49}\) This movement of invocation does not prompt Barth to ascribe the work of hallowing God’s name to our work, for he insists that “we can only pray that it will take place.”\(^{50}\) It is always God alone who can sanctify his name and bring his kingdom. Along these lines, Barth’s exposition of the opening petition of the Lord’s Prayer leads to a description of the activity of Christian hope. Our hope does have its first expression in prayer that “God will end all the division and ambiguity of our present situation.”\(^{51}\) Realizing that the present is not all that there is, our experience of Christian hope entails “a final profound disquiet.”\(^{52}\) Our whole life is thereby set in motion through prayer. In other words, for if Christians “are really grateful and really hope, if their prayer is a brave prayer, then they are claimed for a corresponding inner and outer action which is also brave.”\(^{53}\) It is therefore evident that Barth confirms the continued significance of prayer and hope in Christian witness and mission.

Balthasar takes his Catholic approach to underscore the significance of the interpenetration of prayer and mission in the Christian life. The path of prayer, for him, shapes our receptivity to God, in which mission and personal identity are integrally related. The prayer that would lead to fulfillment, then, is always contemplative, open and

\(^{48}\) ChrL, 104. “What he wills with and for these children is, therefore, history, intercourse, and living dealings between himself and them, between them and himself. They too have to enter into these dealings on their side. They have to actualize the partnership in this history. They have to express in word and deed his fatherhood and their sonship” (ibid., 85).

\(^{49}\) Ibid., 156.

\(^{50}\) Ibid., 158. Barth accordingly asserts that “The name of God is God concretely, God in his step outwards, God in his work and word, God in his self-declaration, God as he is known in the world” (ibid., 157).

\(^{51}\) Ibid., 161.

\(^{52}\) Ibid., 164.

\(^{53}\) Ibid., 264.
attentive to Christ. Balthasar’s understanding of contemplative prayer opens a new perspective in which the apparent dichotomy between receptivity and activity is resolved, thereby showing his concrete importance for missional ecclesiology. In Balthasar’s view, Christ’s whole life is both contemplative and active, and his action is always a form of his contemplative prayer. His contemplative life and prayer demonstrates his abiding disposition to let the Father’s will work in him. Specifically, Balthasar emphasizes that Christ, who represents the unity of action and contemplation, is the model for the Christian. In his unlimited availability to the Father, Christ opens himself to us and enfolds us in an analogous certainty that our prayer will be answered in him. Being incorporated into his sonship, we are meant to be inserted into his prayer life with the Father. As such, contemplation is an indispensable component of the drama of discipleship, in which our prayer is a process of growing into the Son’s prayer to the Father. Through this process, we find our personal and unique calling which leads us to seek and obey nothing other than the Father’s will. It is this contemplation and obedience that opens our lives to mission, and in that we simply place ourselves at God’s disposal.

Christian mission, in this sense, far from an expression of Protestant activism, is sustained by contemplative prayer in Christ. It is precisely what Christ realizes and shares eucharistically with the church.

Balthasar reminds us the importance of contemplation and the Eucharist in understanding the church’s mission. His abiding emphasis upon the receptivity of the church to Christ’s informing action as the ground of ecclesial ministry and mission would

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54 See ET I: 234ff.
55 TD II: 296ff.
56 “In the act of contemplation,” Balthasar stresses, “we are at once drawn deeper into the springing source and at the same time thrust out from the source into our own channels of activity” (Engagement with God, 48).
bring a distinctively Catholic contribution into the missional church conversation. Like Barth, Balthasar challenges missional ecclesiology to place the irreducible reality of Christ at the heart of the church’s mission. This Catholic theologian also offers his original insights which open up a new way of rethinking the Eucharistic and contemplative dimensions of mission. We could expect the challenge involved in bringing this into a Protestant and missional context, which tends not to think in these terms. As ecumenical dialogue is considered important for constructive missional ecclesiology, the next step in research is to explore more deeply the ecclesiological difference that may impede the reception of Barth’s and Balthasar’s theology, and to seek a real and demonstrable agreement concerning the church’s self-identity and its participation in mission.


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