

WISDOM FROM THE MARGINS SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY AND THE MISSIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

I. MISSION AT THE MARGINS

Two Neglected Doctrines

Toward the beginning of his little book on the Trinity, Karl Rahner makes the wry—and often quoted—observation that “should the doctrine of the Trinity have to be dropped as false, the major part of religious literature could well remain virtually unchanged.”¹ Within Christianity’s doctrinal system, Rahner continues, the doctrine of the Trinity “occupies a rather isolated position,” and “its function in the whole dogmatic construction is not clearly perceived.”² Even “despite the faint opposition deriving from the frozen hieratic formulas of the ancient liturgy,”³ the doctrine really remains “locked up within itself.”⁴ It has little influence on the shape of systematic theology, its method, or its content.

Today, of course, Rahner’s observation of almost four decades ago is becoming less and less true, thanks to the work of theologians like Jürgen Moltmann, Leonardo Boff, Elizabeth Johnson, Eberhard Jüngel, Lesslie Newbigin, Young Jung Lee, Catherine LaCugna, Joseph Bracken, David Coffey and Robert Jensen (to name only a few). In fact, we might even say that the theology of the Trinity has begun to assume the central place in systematic theological reflection. Many today would heartily agree with Catherine LaCugna that Christian theology’s “only option . . . is to be trinitarian.”⁵ As we move into a new century, a large part of theologians’ task will be to help their colleagues and Christians in general develop a much more lively “trinitarian imagination” as they continually attempt to live out and express their Christian faith.

¹Karl Rahner, *The Trinity* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970) 10-11. Those who have quoted this passage are, among others, Catherine M. LaCugna (*God For Us* [San Francisco: Harper/Collins, 1991] 6); Elizabeth Johnson (*She Who Is* [New York: Crossroad, 1992] 192); and Thomas Marsh (*The Triune God* [Mystic CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1994] 163).

²Rahner, 14.

³*Ibid.*, 12.

⁴*Ibid.*, 14.

⁵LaCugna, 3.

As part of developing this "trinitarian imagination," I would like to propose in this reflection that systematic theologians consider the contribution of a "missiological imagination." Like the doctrine of the Trinity until very recently—and, I believe, in a not-unrelated way—mission has long been marginalized and isolated in Christian theological reflection; and while it might no longer be true of the Trinity, it is still true that, should mission have to be dropped as false, the major part of religious literature could well remain virtually unchanged. Perhaps, however, in the same way that theology has taken on new life from a fresh appreciation of the once-marginal doctrine of the Trinity—and in an analogous way to how it has been transformed by paying heed to the marginal voices of women, people of color and subaltern traditions—systematic theology might profit greatly from attending to the church's missionary practice and missiological reflection.

The Acids of History

Mission, of course, was not always marginal to the theological enterprise. For a few brief centuries as Christians struggled for identity within the religious matrix of Judaism and the secular and multireligious context of the Roman Empire and Hellenistic culture, the church's missiological imagination was what gave it identity and inspired its theology. Mission, said Martin Kähler in 1908, is "the mother of theology." Theology has its origins, Kähler argued, as "an accompanying manifestation of the Christian mission," not as "a luxury of the world-dominating church."⁶ "The history and the theology of early Christianity," insists Martin Hengel, "are, first of all, 'mission history' and 'mission theology.'"⁷ Theology as such began as reflection on mission.⁸

But as Christianity became the established religion of the Roman Empire and Europe began to identify itself as "Christendom," theology was gradually transformed into reflection on the church's life and on Christians' faith. Focus shifted from reflecting on the problems and challenges arising from proclaiming and witnessing Christian faith to what that faith was and how it should be properly expressed. From the "Golden Age" of the patristic period, through the Middle Ages and into the eighteenth century, theology was concerned with "the knowledge of God and the things of God."⁹ The irony was that, while amazing

⁶Martin Kähler, *Schriften zur Christologie und Mission* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1971; 1st ed. 1908) 189, 190. Quoted in David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1991) 16. The quotations are Bosch's own translation.

⁷Martin Hengel, "The Origins of the Christian Mission," in *Between Jesus and Paul: Studies in the Earliest History of Christianity* (London: SCM, 1983) 53. Quoted in Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 15.

⁸See Heinrich Kasting, *Die Anfänge der urchristlichen Mission* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1969) 127; see Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 16.

⁹Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education*

reflection was done out of missionary experience—think of Gregory the Great writing to Augustine, for example, or the creative efforts of inculturation practiced by Cyril and Methodius, Ricci, de Nobili and de Rhodes, or the arguments for social justice proposed by las Casas—very little of these potentially groundbreaking principles found their way into the thought of the great theologians of their day, and theology was so much the poorer for it.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as theology was influenced—consciously or unconsciously—by the rationalism of the Enlightenment, the mission dimension of theology became even more isolated from mainstream theological thinking. What had been a unified process became subdivided into practical fields necessary for priests and pastors. Moral theology, for example, had already emerged by this time as a particular theological discipline. On the other hand, dogmatic or doctrinal theology in particular became more and more a “technical and scholarly enterprise,” claiming the status of an academic, “scientific” discipline. What had developed into a “fourfold pattern”—biblical studies, church history, systematic theology and practical theology—became standard in Protestant theology and had strong influence in Catholic theology as well.¹⁰ Schleiermacher spoke of a threefold schema of theological studies consisting of philosophical theology, historical theology and practical theology, and located “the theory of missions” (conditionally!) within this last area.¹¹

As David Bosch summarizes Edward Farley’s well-known treatment of this development, “practical” theology “became a mechanism to keep the church going,” while biblical exegesis, church history and systematic theology were considered scientific, academic disciplines.¹² In any case, both practical and academic theology was done in the context of the church, or, at most, in the context of Christendom, and was “thoroughly unmissionary”¹³—despite the fact that the nineteenth century saw an explosion of missionary activity on the part of both Catholics and Protestants. “Theology” was what was done in Europe (or perhaps in North America); the new challenges and learnings that both home and foreign missionaries were experiencing had little or no effect on its content or method. There was a “universal” theology, conceived in Cambridge or Tübingen

(Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983) 31, 77. I am following here David Bosch’s explanation of Farley in Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 489-90.

¹⁰See Farley, *Theologia*, x-xii; 73-124; Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 490. Specialization in Catholic theology actually began somewhat earlier and had a slightly different shape. What was common, however, was the development of specializations in theology that divorced the “practical” from the “academic.” See Aidan Nichols, *The Shape of Catholic Theology* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1991) 318-19; Yves Congar, *A History of Theology* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1968) 165-76; 180-81.

¹¹Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline on the Study of Theology*, trans. Terrence N. Tice (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1966; orig. 1830) 102 (§298).

¹²Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 490.

¹³Ibid.

or Rome; this is what was taught to anyone who studied theology, whether at St. Mary's, Baltimore, the Gregorian University in Rome, or the Major Seminary in the provincial town of Vigan in the Philippines. Theology was for pastoring a parish or defending the faith against *adversarii*, not for reflecting on the church as it crossed its boundaries into an emerging democratic consciousness, into a world turned upside down by the Industrial Revolution, or into new cultural worlds in Africa and Asia.

In the late nineteenth century as Alexander Duff¹⁴ and Gustav Warneck developed the discipline of missiology, reflection on mission was introduced into the theological curriculum. But even this move was "no guarantee that missiology now had a legal domicile in theology."¹⁵ Duff's conviction was that theological reflection on missionary activity was central to theology and should be studied not only by those preparing to minister in "mission lands," but by those "whose ministry lay amid highland farms and flocks, Clydeside factory sirens" or among women and men "stocked with solid comforts of the urban middle class."¹⁶ Nevertheless, he seems to have been able to get approval for his chair in Edinburgh only by insisting that what he taught in *evangelistic theology* "would not affect the other branches of the theological curriculum."¹⁷ Other chairs of missiology were established, says David Bosch, not out of conviction of the missionary nature of theology, but as a result of pressure from Protestant missionary societies, from students looking for some kind of preparation for overseas missionary work, or even from governments who wanted theological faculties to devote reflection to issues that arose in their colonies. The chair established for Catholic missiologist Josef Schmidlin, for example, was entitled *Die katholischen Missionen in den deutschen Schutzgebieten*.¹⁸ Missiology, while part of the theological curriculum at many universities (for example in Halle and Münster in Germany; in Princeton and Yale in the United States; at the Urban and Gregorian Universities in Rome) was not integrated into the theological *imagination* in those universities. "Missiology became the theological institution's 'department of foreign affairs,' dealing with the exotic but at the same time peripheral," existing in "splendid isolation."¹⁹

¹⁴See Andrew F. Walls, "Missiological Education in Historical Perspective," in *Missiological Education for the 21st Century: The Book, the Circle and the Sandals*, ed. Dudley Woodberry, Charles van Engen, and Edgar J. Elliston (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1996) 11-22.

¹⁵Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 491.

¹⁶Walls, "Missiological Education in Historical Perspective," 14.

¹⁷Ibid., 17.

¹⁸Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 492.

¹⁹Ibid.

The Turning of the Tide

Theological developments within the last fifty years, however, have begun—albeit until now ever so slightly—to turn the tide. In 1952, at a meeting of the International Missionary Council in Willingen, Holland, Wilhelm Andersen proposed a dynamic understanding of the Trinity as the God whose very nature is expressed in saving involvement with all of creation. Further, said Andersen, what it means to be church is to participate and cooperate in this *missio Dei*.²⁰ In the 1960s, biblical studies rediscovered, as it were, the centrality of the Reign of God in Jesus' preaching and witness, thus integrating an understanding of the mission of the triune God with the concrete ministry of Jesus and, through the presence of the Spirit, with the concrete ministry of church, whose very existence hinged on its sharing and continuing Jesus' work.²¹ In 1965 Vatican II's "Decree on Missionary Activity" linked Trinity, mission and church when it said that "the pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature. For it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she takes her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father."²² What has been growing more and more evident in these last years is that, like the doctrine of the Trinity, mission needs to be central to the way that the shape and the content of theology is imagined. Mission should not be only "the roof of a building that completes the whole structure, already constructed by blocks that stand on their own, but both the foundation and the mortar in the joints, which cements together everything else."²³ In other words, to change the metaphor, mission must once more be acknowledged as "the mother of theology"—and in our context here, of systematic theology.

²⁰Wilhelm Andersen, *Towards a Theology of Mission. A Study of the Encounter between the Missionary Enterprise and the Church and Its Theology*, IMC Research Pamphlet no. 2 (London: SCM, 1955). See also Rodger C. Bassham, *Mission Theology: 1948–1975. Years of Worldwide Creative Tension. Ecumenical, Evangelical, and Roman Catholic* (Pasadena CA: William Carey Library, 1979) 33–36.

²¹See Craig van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Books, 2000) 33. Van Gelder gives as an example of such biblical research Herman Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1962). I might add here, among others, the works of Norman Perrin, Joachim Jeremias, and C. H. Dodd. For a recent overview of biblical and theological scholarship on the reign of God, see John Füllenbach, *The Kingdom of God* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1995).

²²Vatican Council II, "Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church" (*Ad Gentes* [AG] 2, in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbot (New York: Herder and Herder/Association Press, 1966) 585.

²³J. Andrew Kirk, *The Mission of Theology and Theology as Mission* (Valley Forge PA: Trinity Press International, 1997) 51.

II. WISDOM FROM THE MARGINS

British missiologist Andrew Kirk has noted that there are two major obstacles to be overcome if mission is to become part of the "theological imagination" of Christians in general and Christian theologians in particular.²⁴ In the first place—and perhaps most basically²⁵—since there is confusion over the nature of mission, it must be explained in a way that expresses its richness as a theological concept. Secondly, theologians need to be challenged to see both the missionary implications of their disciplines nor and to imagine how their disciplines might be transformed by attention to missiological concerns. Kirk's observation is exactly right, I believe, and so in this second part of my paper I will try to sketch out an understanding of mission that both captures current missiological thinking and shows how the marginal may actually be central for Christian life. This will be followed by a few reflections on how this "missiological imagination" might shape the method and content of systematic theology today.

The Nature of Mission

Mission has acquired a bad reputation. It conjures up images for many Christians—and for not a few systematic theologians—of ill-prepared, sincere but naive, narrow-minded, fanatical women and men who invade and destroy customs and cultures and trample on people's consciences and cherished beliefs. Novels, plays and movies have reinforced such images in our minds. There are some famous sympathetic characters—the priest in Graham Greene's *The Power and the Glory* or the young female Evangelical missionary in John Grisham's *The Testament*, but these are exceptions. Much more common are characters like Francisco Pizarro in "The Royal Hunt of the Sun," the Yankee missionaries in James Mitchner's *Hawaii*; or the misguided fundamentalists in Peter Matthiessen's *At Play in the Fields of the Lord* and Barbara Kingsolver's *The Poisonwood Bible*. While such characters are often only caricatures, and while scholars like Lamin Sanneh, Kwame Bediako and Andrew Walls have done much to show the liberating influence of the Christian gospel²⁶—often *despite* the

²⁴J. Andrew Kirk, *What Is Mission? Theological Explorations* (Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press, 2000) 20.

²⁵Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 492.

²⁶Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message—The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1989); Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press; Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1995); Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1996); Kirk, *What Is Mission?*, 23. See also James A. Scherer, "Global Mission in the Twentieth Century: An Interpretation of Its Meaning," *Neue Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft / Nouvelle Revue de science missionnaire* 56/3 (2000): 163-72.

bungling of its messengers—there is no denying that Christian mission has been responsible for an untold amount of suffering, for the damage and destruction of cultures, for the theological rationalization of colonial expansion and exploitation. Scholars like George Tinker and Enrique Dussel have reminded us of that.²⁷ This past September, the Vatican issued *Dominus Iesus*,²⁸ a document in which, while rightly trying to counter a certain relativism present in today's world, Christian mission was described in a tone that could be understood as superior and condescending, and which provoked terrible misunderstandings both in the media and in the minds of ordinary people. We cannot pretend, as Peter Phan has said recently, that "mission" is an innocent word.²⁹

But in the same way that abuses of papal power do not negate the importance of the Petrine ministry, or that clericalism and sexism are distortions of an understanding of the holiness of the Sacrament of Order, or that abstract, bloodless theologies of the trinity are inadequate ways of expressing God's rich communal and saving reality, a wrongheaded understanding and practice of mission does not absolve us from ignoring its claim on Christian life and Christian theological reflection. We cannot lose sight of the insights of relatively recent theology that insists on the radical missionary nature of the Triune God and the equally radical missionary nature of the church. Perhaps if these were taken more into account a less exotic, less imperial, less invasive, more theologically accurate understanding of mission might be articulated.

Mission has its origin neither in the motive to save lost souls nor in the zeal to expand the boundaries of the church. Church teaching is quite forceful about the *real possibility* of salvation even without explicit knowledge of Jesus Christ³⁰ and expresses itself strongly about not seducing people into the church or imposing the faith by force.³¹ Mission has its origin, rather, in the interpersonal,

²⁷George Tinker, *Missionary Conquest: The Gospel and Native American Cultural Genocide* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993); Enrique Dussel, "The Real Motives for the Conquest," in *1492–1992: The Voice of the Victims*, ed. L. Boff and V. Elizondo, *Concilium* (December 1998): 30–46; "Was America Discovered or Invaded?" in *Truth and Its Victims*, ed. W. Beuken, S. Freyne, and A. Weiler, *Concilium* (December 1998): 126–34.

²⁸Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dominus Iesus* (DI) 20; see <http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_dominus-iesus_en.html>.

²⁹Peter C. Phan, at a colloquium at Catholic Theological Union, 31 May 2001.

³⁰For example, "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church" (*Lumen Gentium* [LG]) 16, in Abbot, ed., *The Documents of Vatican II*, 35; "The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World" (*Gaudium et Spes* [GS]) 22, in Abbot, ed., *The Documents of Vatican II*, 222; John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* (RM) 10, in *Redemption and Dialogue: Reading Redemptoris Missio and Dialogue and Proclamation*, ed. W. R. Burrows (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1993) 10; Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, *Dialogue and Proclamation* (DP) 14–17, in Burrows, ed., *Redemption and Dialogue*, 97–98; DI, 20.

³¹For example, RM 39 and DP 69, in Burrows, ed., *Redemption and Dialogue*, 27 and

communitarian nature of God which overflows in creation of and involvement with all of reality. Mission has its origin in God's universal salvific will (1 Tim. 2:4) God's "intention for the world . . . that in every respect it should show forth the way [God] is—love, community, equality, diversity, mercy, compassion and justice."³² From the first moment of creation, God has been "inside out" in creation, as God's mystery has been present in cosmic processes and human history through the presence of God's Spirit.³³ When the "fullness of time" (Gal. 4:4) had come, Jesus became flesh as the "face" of that ever-present Spirit, preached and witnessed to God's saving activity in God's world, and sent the Spirit with greater focus and clearer identity upon those who were called to share his identity and continue his mission "until he comes again" (1Cor. 11:26). In the same way that God cannot *not* be missionary—that is, involved in being a saving presence in creation—so the church too is "missionary by its very nature" because it shares in God's mission through its participation in the life of Christ through the Spirit. The church's mission, therefore, "is not additional to its being. It is, as it is sent and active in its mission. It builds itself up for the sake of its mission and in relation to it."³⁴ "The Church exists by mission, just as a fire exists by burning."³⁵

This trinitarian understanding of mission turns ecclesiology on its head. It makes mission *prior* to and *constitutive* of the church. Theology has tended to think of mission as an activity that takes place only *after* the church is constituted, as "one among several functions of the church."³⁶ A contemporary theology of mission, however, rooted in the mission of the trinitarian God, points to the fact that the church does not so much have a mission as the mission has a church. "To say 'church,' say the U.S. Bishops in their 1986 Pastoral *To the Ends of the Earth*, 'is to say mission."³⁷

Perhaps the greatest reason why such a revolutionary understanding of God and the church has not yet fully made an impact on theology is what Keith Bridston has called "the mystical doctrine of salt water"—the understanding, in other words, that "travelling to foreign lands is the *sine qua non* for any kind of

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³²Kirk, *What Is Mission?*, 28.

³³See Stephen B. Bevans, SVD, "God Inside Out: Toward a Missionary Theology of the Holy Spirit," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 22/3 (July 1998): 102-105.

³⁴Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV, 1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956) 725.

³⁵Emil Brunner, *The Word in the World* (London: SCM Press, 1931) 11.

³⁶Wilbert R. Shenk, *Changing Frontiers of Mission* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1999) 7. For discussion of mission as *prior* to the church—not temporally but logically—see Hendrikus Berkhof, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1964) 30-31.

³⁷U.S. Bishops, "To the Ends of the Earth," Pastoral Statement on World Mission, 16, in *New Directions in Mission and Evangelization 1: Basic Statements 1974-1991*, ed. James A. Scherer and Stephen B. Bevans (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1992) 135.

missionary endeavor and the final test and criterion of what is truly missionary."³⁸ However, as the World Council of Churches' Commission on World Mission and Evangelism expressed it in its 1963 meeting in Mexico City, mission is now on "six continents,"³⁹ and the *local church* is understood as the primary agent of mission—we should really speak no more about "sending churches" and "receiving churches." The geographical understanding of mission certainly had *some* validity in former times when Europe and North America were basically Christian cultures and the church needed to be planted and strengthened in other parts of the world, but the world has changed. On the one hand, we can speak of the end of the great modern missionary era that began at the end of the fifteenth century; it has been a success, as Wilbert Shenk and Justo González have argued.⁴⁰ There are very few places where the gospel has not been preached and the church planted; and Christians in the so-called Third World⁴¹ now outnumber those in the First. In addition, world population patterns are changing rapidly as millions of people from Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America are migrating to Europe, North America, Japan, Australia and New Zealand. In the third place, the West can hardly be understood as a Christian culture any longer. For the first time since the first three centuries of Christianity, Christians are living as a minority in North America and especially in Europe. In the same way as in the first three centuries, the church finds itself in every part of the world in a truly missionary situation.

Mission happens, therefore, wherever the church is; it is how the church exists. Mission is the church preaching Christ for the first time; it is the act of Christians struggling against injustice and oppression; it is the binding of wounds in reconciliation; it is the church learning from other religious ways and being

³⁸Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 10, referring to Keith Bridston, *Mission Myth and Reality* (New York: Friendship Press, 1965) 32-33.

³⁹See *Witness in Six Continents: Records of the CWME . . . Mexico City 1963*, ed. R. K. Orchard (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1964).

⁴⁰Shenk, *Changing Frontiers of Mission*, 165; Justo L. González, *Christian Thought Revisited: Three Types of Theology* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1999) 126-27.

⁴¹"Third World" is a disputed term. Many people prefer terms such as "Two-Thirds World" or the "underside of history." W. J. Grimm points out that while the term originally had a positive meaning, analogous to the emerging power of the Third Estate during the French Revolution, its meaning has subsequently shifted to "a term of comparison. The third world was now defined in terms of the first." Grimm, therefore, suggests that another term be used. See W. J. Grimm, "The 'Third' World," *America* (5 May 1990): 449. On the other hand, the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT)—a group that would be very sensitive to any term that would demean their cultures—uses the term to describe "a social condition marked by social, political, religious, and cultural oppressions that render people powerless and expendable," including even people in the First World who "form a dominated and marginalized minority." See Virginia Fabella, "Third World," in *Dictionary of Third World Theologies*, ed. Virginia Fabella and R. S. Sugirtharajah (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 2000) 202. I have elected to follow this latter usage.

challenged by the world's cultures. "Missions" exist in urban multicultural neighborhoods, rural Ghanaian villages, Brazilian *favelas*, American universities, in the world's cyberspace. Mission is the local church "focusing not on its own, internal problems, but on other human beings, focusing elsewhere, in a world that calls and challenges it."⁴²

Such an understanding of mission in no way means to negate or even less demean the work of foreign missionaries; indeed, the catholicity of the church calls for a constant mutual exchange of ministers and mutual accompaniment, and many churches are still in need of help and support from churches in other parts of the world. The only point is that mission—at any level—cannot be defined by geography, especially today in our globalized world and pluralist society.

Mission *still is*, however, about crossing boundaries. Like Jesus, whose ministry crossed the boundaries that religion, culture and class had set up, the early community crossed boundaries that even Jesus could not have imagined when it admitted Gentiles and respected their customs. Indeed, I believe that it was in this willingness to move beyond itself under the guidance of the Holy Spirit which allowed the early community to become aware of itself as something clearly distinct from its Jewish roots, as a discrete *ekklesia* or church. Furthermore, it is in continuing to cross boundaries that the community maintains its identity as church. Whether the boundary is that of another culture, another religion, another way of envisioning things, that of the "otherness" of another person or moving out of security in an option for the poor, crossing boundaries is what it means to share in the dynamic life of the God whose very nature is to go beyond and to gather in.

However, there is a new spirit in mission theology today that would preclude any kind of boundary crossing that would simply perpetuate the style of "cowboy missionaries" who would run roughshod into and over those boundaries. Like the *missio Dei*, Christian mission today must be exercised in a deep spirit of dialogue and respect; it must be carried out in a way that the one in mission be first evangelized by those that she or he intends to evangelize.⁴³ The Asian bishops speak of mission as a threefold dialogue with Asian cultures, Asian religions and the Asian poor;⁴⁴ here in North America our dialogue partners might include new immigrants, Generation X and Generation Next, politics, First World expansion in globalization and contemporary individualism. As Maryknoll Superior General Ray Finch has proposed, perhaps other Scripture texts besides

⁴²Lucien Legrand, *Unity and Plurality: Mission in the Bible* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1990) xii.

⁴³See DP 38, in Burrows, ed., *Redemption and Dialogue*, 103; See also Donald Dorr, *Mission in Today's World* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 2000) 16-25.

⁴⁴See *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Documents from 1970-1991*, ed. G. B. Rosales and C. G. Arévalo (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books; Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 1992).

Matthew's "Great Commission" (Mt 28:18-20) could serve as the biblical basis for mission in today's context. While that text certainly remains valid, a better text for today might be 1 Pet 3:15-16: "Should anyone ask you the reason for this hope of yours, be ever ready to reply, but speak gently and respectfully."⁴⁵

In sum, Christian mission is nothing more or less than "participation in God's existence in the world."⁴⁶ It is about a respectful, dialogical crossing of cultural, religious, personal, racial, class and even geographical boundaries; it is a "single but complex reality,"⁴⁷ of proclamation and witness, liturgy and contemplation, efforts at inculturation, participation in interreligious dialogue, commitment to justice, peace and the integrity of creation, and engagement in reconciliation.

Mission and Systematic Theology

Contemporary theological understandings of God as a communion-in-mission, of the church as the community that participates in God's saving presence in the world, and of mission's primary challenge as crossing the boundaries it encounters wherever it is go a long way to unravel the confusion that has surrounded the notion of mission in the past and point to the need to attend more closely to the "missiological imagination" in constructive, systematic theology. However, as Andrew Kirk has said, a second formidable obstacle is the lack of challenge to theologians to see mission as more than marginal to their disciplines. The final section of this paper will address this second challenge, with particular reference to how the "missiological imagination" might transform some of the methods and content of systematic theology. It might be important here to mention that my perspective on what follows is that of a white male reflecting in a North American context; other perspectives may very well change the

⁴⁵Ray Finch, "Preach Always; If Necessary Use Words," address at the Chicago Mission Congress, September 2000 (publication forthcoming). See also Claude Marie Barbour, Kathleen Billman, Peggy Desjarlait, and Eleanor Doidge, "Mission on the Boundaries: Cooperation without Exploitation," in *Beyond Theological Tourism: Mentoring as a Grassroots Approach to Theological Education*, ed. Susan B. Thistlethwaite and George F. Cairns (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books) 72-91; see also *The Healing Circle: Essays in Cross Cultural Mission, Presented to the Rev. Dr. Claude Marie Barbour*, ed. Stephen Bevans, Eleanor Doidge, and Robert Schreiter (Chicago: CCGM Publications, 2000).

⁴⁶P. Schütz, *Zwischen Nil und Kaukasus* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1930) 245. Quoted in Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 10, in Bosch's own translation.

⁴⁷RM 41, in Burrows, ed., *Redemption and Dialogue*, 47. For the components of mission that follow, see RM 42-60, in *ibid.*, 28-39; DP 2, in *ibid.*, 94. See also Stephen Bevans and Eleanor Doidge, "Theological Reflection," in *Dialogue: What Mission Confronts Religious Life in the U.S. Today?*, ed. Barbara Kraemer (Chicago: Center for the Study of Religious Life, 2000) 37-48.

methods and content that will be emphasized. I am not writing a "universal" prescription; my aim is rather to provoke thought from my particular social location.

Theological Method

Systematic Theology as Practical Theology. Over the last several decades the method of systematic theology has changed considerably from a discipline concerned with deduction—proving a proposed thesis—to one that proceeds by induction—moving from concrete questions or experiences and correlating these with the wisdom of the Christian Tradition, often with the aid of philosophy but increasingly with the aid of the social sciences. This shift might be seen in the documents of Vatican II. *Lumen Gentium*, though it "broke the spell cast by a one-sidedly clerical and juridical vision of the church,"⁴⁸ basically employed the deductive method of neo-scholasticism, achieving its important theological breakthroughs in a "backward gaze" "upon the original theology and order of the church in the first millennium."⁴⁹ *Gaudium et Spes*, on the other hand, looked more to the present "signs of the times"⁵⁰ and to basic trends in history and culture to speak about the church's role or mission in the world.

In 1968 the Latin American Bishops met in Medellín, Colombia in an effort to appropriate Vatican II in the context of Latin America. Following the more inductive method of *Gaudium et Spes* they laid the groundwork for the method of what became known as liberation theology, a method famously described by Gustavo Gutiérrez as a "critical reflection on historical praxis in the light of the Word."⁵¹ As Gutiérrez insisted, what was *new* about liberation theology was not so much the *theme* of liberation but the *new way* of doing theology.⁵² This meant that, even outside of the context of Latin America or even outside the context of poverty and oppression, theology could be done in a radically different way, starting not with doctrines or ideas or even scripture texts but with commitment, experience and practice. Here in the United States, Randy L. Maddox among others has called for a recovery of theology as a practical discipline. Theology needs, he says, to move out of the isolation of its overrationalized self conception

⁴⁸Hermann Pottmeyer, *Towards a Papacy in Communion* (New York: Crossroad, 1998) 111.

⁴⁹*Ibid.* That *Lumen Gentium* used the older neo-scholastic method is the thesis of my colleagues Dianne Bergant and Edward Foley in an essay on the theological method of Vatican II that is to be published in a collection of essays on the Council written by members of the faculty of Catholic Theological Union. The collection is still in preparation.

⁵⁰Vatican Council II, "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World" (*Gaudium et Spes* [GS]) 4, in Abbot, ed., *The Documents of Vatican II*, 201.

⁵¹Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1973) 13.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 15.

and back to being a theology that is holistic, rooted in praxis, accessible to ordinary Christians, and strongly contextual.⁵³

It is this method of practical theology—rooted in experience and practice, nourished by the Christian Tradition and moving to a more faithful practice in an unending spiral—that a systematic theology with a “missiological imagination” will employ. Theology will have as its starting point the life of the Christian community as it strives to discern what God is doing in human history and how the church might be the sign and instrument of that saving presence. In this way theology will regain its role as servant of the church as it engages in mission. Like the church that does not exist for its own sake but for the sake of the Reign of God, so theology will be done not for its own sake but in order better to preach, serve and witness to God’s Reign and the saving presence of its Lord.

Listening to All the Voices. Another aspect of theological method is how one uses sources. A theology that is attentive to the church’s mission will be one that is attentive not just to the “usual” sources—Scripture, obviously, the patristic witness, Aquinas, Barth, church teaching, contemporary European and American theologians, etc.—but to sources “beyond the boundaries” as well.

Since a sensitivity to mission includes a sensitivity to the church’s catholicity (the mark of the church that Robert Schreiter argues is *the* particular mark for our times)⁵⁴ systematic theology will pay particular attention to the voices of Christians from other local churches around the world. The documents of the Latin American bishops from Medellín, Puebla and Santo Domingo, for example, or those of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences, are rich sources for theological reflection not just for Christians in Latin America or Asia, but also for Christians in Europe or North America who are wrestling with understanding Christian life and Christian faith in their contexts. In the same way that feminist thought has enriched so-called “mainline” theology in the last quarter century, works by Asian, African and Latin American women and men can challenge us here in North America—and each other as well, of course—to think in new and creative ways. Theologians like Alois Pieris of Sri Lanka, Michael Amaladoss of India, Chung Hyun Kyung of Korea, José de Mesa of the Philippines, Teresa Okure of Nigeria and Benezet Bujo of the Republic of the Congo should be read as much as any theologians from the First World. And our multicultural church here in the United States would be enriched by Euro-Americans, African Americans, Asian-Americans and Latinos/as all reading each other and engaging each other in respectful and critical dialogue. In the past theologians were

⁵³Randy L. Maddox, “The Recovery of Theology as a Practical Discipline,” *Theological Studies* 51/4 (December 1990): 650-72. Others along this same line are Evelyn and James Whitehead, Patricia O’Connell Killen, James Poling, and Don Browning. See also Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1992) 63-80.

⁵⁴Robert J. Schreiter, *The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books) 116-33.

expected to study and master the theological classics of the First World; a "missiological imagination" would widen that expectation to include theologians from other countries and cultures as well.

Such an attitude of inclusion would lead not only to paying more attention to the subaltern voices in the wider Christian tradition. Rosemary Radford Ruether has suggested that theologians—and feminist theologians in particular—work to recover and radicalize the "prophetic principle" that runs through the Scriptures and to pay attention to "countercultural movements" in church history that witnessed to aspects of Christian truth that was suppressed or ignored by those holding power.⁵⁵ Dale T. Irvin has pointed out that besides the well-known expansion of Christianity westward through Asian Minor and Europe, Christianity also expanded to the east and South, into Persia, Armenia, India and Ethiopia. During the fourth and fifth centuries, as Christianity in the West became identified with the Roman imperium, Christianity in Persia developed its own, non-Roman, identity. It existed always as a small but thriving minority although persecuted by Zoroastrianism. Later, under Islam, Irvin writes, "If the burden of minority and oppressed status was difficult for the church within the new Islamic empire, it was not necessarily a new experience."⁵⁶ We find here a church that undertook a vigorous mission, and offers to systematic theology today immense theological resources, not the least is the practice of a church that has always lived as a minority in its context. It is to such neglected and forgotten traditions that a missionary systematic theology will attend.

Inculturation. Roger Haight has noted that "missiology is the laboratory of a historically conscious theology," in that the confrontation of Christianity with culture "brings to a focus in a dramatic way the universal problem of crafting an understanding of the faith that is contemporary, contextual and applicable."⁵⁷ A systematic theology that takes mission into account will have this same kind of sensitivity to culture and context; the great systems, of course, were always deeply reflective of their own *Zeitgeist*—think of Origen's *First Principles*, Aquinas' *Summae*, Schleiermacher's *Glaubenslehre* or Tillich's *Systematic Theology*—but a mission-informed theology will be a *conscious* effort of inculturation. Such a theology will never pretend to universality or timelessness, but will be rooted in cultural and historical particularity.

The consequences of this will be several. First, systematic theology will take on a strong interdisciplinary character, working not only in tandem with philoso-

⁵⁵Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology*, Tenth Anniversary Edition (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993) 20-37.

⁵⁶Dale T. Irvin, *Christian Histories, Christian Traditioning: Rendering Accounts* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1998) 110. Irvin, together with Scott Sundquist, is writing a two-volume church history from the perspective of the "multiple trajectories" of Christian tradition. The first volume is to be published in 2001.

⁵⁷Roger Haight, Review of Stephen Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1992) in *New Theology Review* 7/3 (August 1994): 92-93.

phy—Western and non-Western—but with the social sciences as well, both in terms of content and method. Second, systematic theology will take on a more “occasional” character; in other words, while comprehensive expressions of Christian faith will continue to be written, they “perhaps will not enjoy the pre-eminence of the *Summae* of the past.”⁵⁸ Much more important will be systematic reflection on particular questions of particular communities, and so questions that are merely “system generated”⁵⁹ will be left out or developed less extensively. For example, as Chilean theologian Ronaldo Muñoz points out at the beginning of his book *The God of Christians*, the “God problem” in Latin America is “not so much atheism”—the classic beginning of the treatise on God after the Enlightenment—“but idolatry,” whether one believes in a false God that soothes the consciences of oppressors or in the God who stands in solidarity with the poor.⁶⁰ A third consequence of a theology that takes inculturation seriously is that its questions might come from areas that a classical systematic theology has neglected or mined very little. Popular religiosity, witchcraft and healing, for example, might become major areas for systematic theological reflection within certain theological contexts, while issues of anthropology and ecology might be central in others. Fourth, as I have tried to develop in my book *Models of Contextual Theology*, theologians will be faced with various methodological options which the context calls forth: *translation* of traditional content might be appropriate; one may need to observe and listen closely to the culture to discern Christian values already operative there; one may only be able to engage the culture in a dialogue with his or her authenticity; or one may discover startling new images and understandings from faithful Christian practice. Fifth, *community* and *collaboration* may be more appropriate to the theological task. Finally, the *shape* of the theological reflection might change from one that is discursive to one that is more poetic, proverb centered or visually oriented.

The Content of Systematic Theology

Theological method informed by a “missiological imagination” challenges theologians to attend to different questions, to listen to, perhaps, different voices, and develop different themes. This, of course, means that theological *content* is affected as well. In what follows, neither time nor creativity will allow me to outline all the differences in content that mission might make in the entire field of systematic theology. All I hope to do is to suggest a few ways in which our “theological imagination” might be challenged, stretched and enriched by thinking theologically through the lens of God’s healing, reconciling and boundary-breaking activity in the world, an activity in which Christians are

⁵⁸Robert J. Schreiter, “Issues Facing Contextual Theologies Today,” *Verbum SVD* 21/3-4 (1980): 269.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Ronaldo Muñoz, *The God of Christians* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1990) 11.

privileged to share and make concrete in and through the church. In this exploratory presentation, I will confine myself to reflections on the doctrine of God, Christology and Ecclesiology.

God. I have already spoken of how our reflection on God's communal, overflowing trinitarian nature is the ground of any theological understanding of mission. That mission should be central to any constructive theology is based on the fact that mission is what God is and does. As my colleague Anthony Gittins puts it, mission is God's "job description," describing both what God does and so who God is.⁶¹ Although it certainly might still be useful in some contexts, therefore, it seems to me that the classic treatment of God in the two treatises of "De Deo Uno" (On the One God) and "De Deo Trino" (On the Trinity) is no longer really helpful; it is, in fact, misleading. As Walter Kasper has argued, the doctrine of the Trinity is the expression of the "Christian form of monotheism"—or, as Karl Barth put it earlier, "monotheism in its final form."⁶² The only God that exists is the God revealed by Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. And this God is a God whose essence is expressed in mission—"going forth within God's own self, and going forth toward the world for its redemption and fulfillment."⁶³

On the other hand, a reflection on the doctrine of God that is informed by mission will be influenced by the dialogue with other religious traditions. Part of reflection on God will be an attempt to see how conceptions of God from other religious ways might enrich and challenge our traditional Christian understandings. On the other hand, but still in a spirit of dialogue, Christian reflection on God might itself need to challenge doctrines and images of God from these traditions. Through such a mutually critical correlation our own faith in the God of Jesus Christ will reach new levels of understanding—and modesty. Particularly in reference to the doctrine of God, a "missiological imagination" will engage in the discipline of "comparative theology,"⁶⁴ the discipline which seeks "to inscribe within the Christian theological tradition theological texts from outside

⁶¹Anthony J. Gittins, "Mission: What's It Got to Do with Me?" *The Living Light* 34/3 (Spring 1998): 8.

⁶²Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ* (New York: Crossroad, 1981) 291. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics I: The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936) 401-404. See also, H. H. Farmer, "Monotheism and the Doctrine of the Trinity," *Religion in Life* 29 (Winter 1959-1960): 32-41.

⁶³M. Thomas Thangaraj, *The Common Task: A Theology of Christian Mission* (Nashville TN: Abingdon Press, 1999) 63.

⁶⁴See Francis X. Clooney, *Theology after Vedanta: An Experiment in Comparative Theology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993); Peter C. Phan, "Doing Theology in the Context of Mission: Lessons from Alexandre de Rhodes, S.J.," *Gregorianum* 81/4 (2000): 723-49.

it, and to (begin to) write Christian theology only out of that newly composed context."⁶⁵

Following on insights provided by Elizabeth Johnson, John V. Taylor and Frederick E. Crowe, I have tried to sketch out a trinitarian theology of mission which places particular emphasis on the pneumatological character of God's saving presence.⁶⁶ Crowe's ideas in particular are striking. He proposes to "reverse the order in which commonly we think of the Son and the Spirit in the world." His thesis is that, rather than understanding God first sending the Son and *then* the Spirit to complete the Son's work, "God first sent the Spirit, and then sent the Son in the context of the Spirit's mission" to bring God's mission to fulfillment.⁶⁷ From the first instant of creation, then, God has been present through the Spirit, breathing life, stirring up prophecy, bringing about healing and reconciliation. In Jesus, God's mysterious saving movement in history takes on a human face, and as Risen Lord sends the Spirit into the world not for the first time, but with new focus. Such a proposal of the priority of the Spirit gives, I believe, fresh validity to other religious ways and to Christian commitment in the world. Further, however—although I claim no great expertise in trinitarian theology—might not this *economic* reality of the mission of Spirit and incarnate word throw fresh light on the *immanent* reality of the trinitarian processions. If nothing else, might it not loosen the often rigid and hierarchical procession of Father, Son, Spirit, opening up an understanding of God's life as, in the words of Elizabeth Johnson, "giving over and receiving back, being obedient and being glorified, witnessing, filling and actively glorifying"⁶⁸

Such speculations about the Holy Spirit are not, I believe, merely "system generated questions," about which I have spoken before. Rather, in light of the fact that Pentecostalism is the fastest growing form of Christianity today, and in the light of a growing sense of "Christomonism" in some quarters, the question of pneumatology may well be one of the more urgent theological questions today.

Finally, the contemporary missiological conviction about the dialogical nature of mission might point to new ways to conceive the divine perfections—like those of omnipotence and impassibility. If God is truly a dialogical God, vulnerability, suffering and growth can hardly be conceived as imperfect qualities. A "missiological imagination" might lead systematic theologians to a new level of dialogue with "process" or "neoclassical" approaches to God's Mystery.

Christology. A first implication for the construction of a Christology which recognizes the importance of mission follows from the reflections on the nature

⁶⁵Clooney, *Theology after Vedanta*, 7.

⁶⁶See Bevens, "God Inside Out. . . ."

⁶⁷Frederick E. Crowe, "Son of God, Holy Spirit, and World Religions: The Contribution of Bernard Lonergan to the Wider Ecumenism," Chancellor's Address II (Toronto: Regis College, 1985) 8.

⁶⁸Johnson, *She Who Is*, 195.

of the trinity above. If the mission of the Spirit is conceived as prior to the mission of the Son, then some kind of "Spirit Christology" needs to be central to Christology. Such a Christology would not only highlight Jesus' missionary identity; it would also be more strongly rooted in the New Testament than a more classical "Logos Christology," offer "more intelligibility for an historicist imagination, and greater emotive power for the Christian life."⁶⁹

Second, following the lead of Latin American liberation theology in particular, a Christology constructed out of the "missiological imagination" would focus strongly on the historical, earthly Jesus, "not in a literalistic understanding of the gospels but in the total picture they give us of Jesus' 'program' revealed in his actions and words."⁷⁰ It will be in an understanding of Jesus' mission and ministry of preaching, serving and witnessing to the Reign of God that theologians will understand who Jesus is, and why he is "the place to meet God."⁷¹ Given this emphasis on the historical ministry of Jesus, Christology would most likely eschew what Elizabeth Johnson has characterized as "mythological" and "totalizing historical" narratives of the atonement in favor of a narrative that is "contingently historical." Jesus' death was not the result of "a preordained act of vicarious satisfaction but as part of his free, larger commitment to the flourishing of life in solidarity with others."⁷² Jesus died, in other words, as a result of commitment to his mission; his resurrection stands as God's seal of approval on Jesus' life and work.

This understanding of Jesus' death and resurrection points directly at the fact that at the center of Christian life is the cross—or, more precisely, the paschal mystery. "The cross," writes David Bosch, "is not accidental to Christian faith." It was no accident that when the gospels narrate the appearance of the Risen Lord to the disciples, he appears with his wounds. *Kenosis* is at the heart of Jesus' mission, and needs to be at the heart of the disciples that share and continue that mission. Japanese theologian Kosuke Koyama reflects on the significance of the fact that the Japanese character for "sacrament" is a combination of characters that mean "holiness" and "brokenness;" "when 'holiness' and 'brokenness' come together for the sake of the salvation of others,

⁶⁹See Roger Haight, *Jesus: Symbol of God* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1999) 23. Haight refers to Paul W. Newman, *A Spirit Christology: Rediscovering the Biblical Paradigm of Christian Faith* (Lanham MD: University Press of America, 1987). To my mind, the best introduction to Spirit Christology is Ralph del Colle, *Christ and the Spirit: Spirit Christology in Trinitarian Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

⁷⁰José Miguez Bonino, "Christologies, Latin American," in *Dictionary of Third World Theologies*, ed. Fabella and Sugirtharajah, 55.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Elizabeth A. Johnson, "Jesus and Salvation," in *Proceedings of the Forty-Ninth Annual Convention* 49, Catholic Theological Society of America (1994): 1-18; quotation from p. 14.

we have Christian sacrament."⁷³ If Christ is the "sacrament of the encounter with God," he exercises his Lordship in continued vulnerability; he calls people to self-emptying, service and solidarity with the world's marginalized and so leads them to new and more abundant life (Jn 10:10).

A third area that a Christology formed by a "missiological imagination" must deal with is perhaps the most burning question in Christian theology today: the question of the uniqueness and absoluteness of Jesus Christ. As Paul Knitter and others have raised the question, how can we speak about dialogue as integral to Christian life and mission if we have already made up our minds that only we Christians possess the whole truth? On the other hand, as Christians as diverse as Jacques Dupuis, Carl Braaten, Gavin D'Costa, and Joseph Ratzinger have insisted, how does one get around the very clear statements in the New Testament—e.g. Acts 4:12—which affirm Jesus as the world's *only* Savior?⁷⁴ Are all religions, including Christianity, simply different, ultimately converging paths up the one mountain? Or does there exist a real incommensurability among religions?⁷⁵ Is belief in Jesus as Christ worth dying for? These are all questions that have arisen out of reflection on the church's mission, and as we continue to live in a religiously pluralist society they are questions will surely increase in importance.

Ecclesiology. Ecclesiology is perhaps the area of systematic theology that would be most affected if the doctrine of the *missio Dei* were made more central to the theological enterprise. The mission of Jesus begins with the Spirit—already loose in the world since the dawn of creation—being poured upon Jesus (e.g. Lk 4:18) sending him forth to preach, serve and witness the imminent Reign of God (e.g. Mk 1:15). As Jesus lives out his mission, and in the face of a growing rejection which will culminate in his execution, he gathers a community of disciples, sets up what will become a structure of leadership, and commands his followers to celebrate a meal in his memory—all of which serves to gather and hold the community together after Jesus' death as Jesus is experienced as alive and risen from the dead. At Pentecost the Spirit is poured out upon the

⁷³David J. Bosch, "The Vulnerability of Mission," in *New Directions in Mission and Evangelization 2: Theological Foundations*, ed. James A. Scherer and Stephen B. Bevans (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1994) 79. Bosch quotes Koyama: *Mount Fuji and Mount Sinai: A Pilgrimage in Theology* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1984) 243.

⁷⁴Paul F. Knitter, *No Other Name?* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1985); Jacques Dupuis, *Towards a Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1997); Carl Braaten, *No Other Gospel! Christianity among the World's Religions* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992); Gavin D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 2000); Joseph Ratzinger, "Christ, Faith, and the Challenge of Cultures," *Origins* 24 (1995): 679-86; see also the document issued by Ratzinger's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on 5 September 2000: *Dominus Iesus*.

⁷⁵Robert J. Schreiter, "Cutting-Edge Issues in Theology and Their Bearing on Mission Studies," *Missiology: An International Review* 24/1 (January 1996): 90.

community in a way that it recognizes its call to share and continue Jesus' mission of preaching and witnessing to the Reign of God, and to Jesus as its fulfillment. Gradually, even painfully, the Spirit urges the community to include within itself "even the Gentiles" (Acts 11:18; see also 11:20) and moves it out from Jerusalem and Judea, to Samaria and the ends of the earth (see Acts 1:8). As the community becomes more and more conscious of its mission, it becomes more and more conscious of its identity as church. The church is literally "missionary by its very nature."⁷⁶ Mission is *prior to* and *constitutive of* the church, so much so that if it ceases to be missionary, it has ceased being church.⁷⁷

Ecclesiology, then, needs to be conceived as a "missionary ecclesiology."⁷⁸ As such, it will be rooted in a missionary consciousness, pointing to the church's nature as *subordinate to* and yet *participating in* the Reign of God that it shows forth and cooperates with God in bringing about. It needs to reflect on how the church in every local manifestation finds its identity by participating in the church's full evangelizing mission: proclaiming and witnessing, being involved in interreligious dialogue, being committed to inculturating the gospel, to justice, peace and the integrity of creation, and to worthy liturgical celebration and prayer.⁷⁹ The fullness of salvation offered by the church is precisely the opportunity to be engaged in God's life, and therefore God's mission. Salvation is found in service of God's Reign.

Secondly, while ecclesiology needs to continue to affirm the *communion* image of the church (and so emphasize the integrity of the local church as well as its essentially communal nature),⁸⁰ a missionary ecclesiology would develop

⁷⁶AG 2, in Abbot, ed., *The Documents of Vatican II*, 585. For a further development, see Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder, "Missionary by Its Very Nature: A Reading of the Acts of the Apostles," *Verbum SVD* 41/2 (2000): 199-234.

⁷⁷Kirk, *What Is Mission?*, 30. See also Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV.3.2 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1962) 795-96: "The Christian community is not sent into the world haphazardly or at random, but with a very definite task. It does not exist before its task and later acquire it. Nor does it exist apart from it, so that there can be no question whether or not it might have to execute it. It exists for the world. Its task constitutes and fashions it from the very outset. If it had not been given it, it would not have come into being. If it were to lose it, it would not continue."

⁷⁸Two recent—and excellent—attempts at this are Darrell L. Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2000) and Craig van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book Co., 2000).

⁷⁹See DP 2, in Burrows, ed., *Redemption and Dialogue*, 94. See also "Agenda for Future Planning, Study, and Research in Mission," in *Trends in Mission: Toward the Third Millennium*, ed. William Jenkinson and Helene O'Sullivan (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1991) 399-414.

⁸⁰See Susan K. Wood, "The Church as Communion," in *The Gift of the Church: A Textbook on Ecclesiology*, ed. Peter C. Phan (Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 2000) 159-76; Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (New York: Doubleday Image Books, 1978)

this image further and speak of the church as "communion-in-mission." Traditional images of the church like People of God, Body of Christ and Creation of the Spirit would thus take on a more dynamic character: the church is God's People whom God has called to preach and witness to the Reign of God; it is Christ's body, his presence in the world that continues his mission; it is brought forth by the Spirit as the Spirit urges it forward into the world; and it lives as a witness to the Spirit's saving presence in all peoples, cultures and religions. The way that the church exists as People of God, Body of Christ and Creation and Temple of the Spirit will differ, of course, from context to context. Here in North America the theologians who form the "Gospel and Our Culture Network" emphasize how the church needs to be a vital "contrast community" in the midst of our secularized and increasingly neopagan culture. A "missional community," writes Paul Dietterich, is one that strives to provide a "demonstration" of "a different way to be a society," through the quality of its common life, in the ways it shares power, shares wealth, deals with conflict, welcomes strangers, makes peace.⁸¹

Third, a missionary ecclesiology would reflect on the church's *apostolic* task of making itself and the world *one* in unity and *catholic* in diversity. It would speak of the church's identity as *holy*, as set apart for God's purposes and committed to constant reform so as to better witness to God's holy presence in the world.⁸² In addition, such a missionary ecclesiology would be thoroughly ecumenical and committed to efforts of common witness to the gospel. Questions about the nature of conversion and proselytism will be treated with respect and care.⁸³

Finally, a missionary ecclesiology will affirm organizing and leadership structures only to the extent that they serve the church's missionary purpose.⁸⁴ As Craig van Gelder develops it, for example, the nature, ministry and organiza-

51-66; Dennis Doyle, *Communion Ecclesiology* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 2000).

⁸¹Paul M. Dietterich, "Mission Programs or Missional Church?" Transformation (The Newsletter of the Center for Parish Development) 6/1 (Summer 2000): 7. The phrase "contrast community" is from Gerhard Lohfink, *Jesus and Community* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984). For an introduction to concerns of the Gospel and Our Culture Network, see *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, ed. Darrell L. Guder (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1998).

⁸²On the missionary character of the traditional "marks" of the church, see Charles van Engen, *God's Missionary People: Rethinking the Purpose of the Local Church* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book Co., 1991) and van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church*, 116-26.

⁸³See, e.g., Jean-Pierre Ruiz, "Naming the Other: U.S. Hispanic Catholics, the So-Called 'Sects,' and the 'New Evangelization,'" *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology* 4/2 (November 1996): 34-59; Cecil M. Robeck, "Evangelization or Proselytism of Hispanics: A Pentecostal Perspective," *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology* 4/4 (May 1997): 42-64.

⁸⁴See Mary E. Hines, "Community for Liberation: Church," in *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective*, ed. Catherine M. LaCugna (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993) 164-67. Hines's insights have been very seminal for my thinking in this area.

tion of the church need to be understood in the right sequence. First, he says, the missionary *nature* of the church needs to be established; second, the concrete *ministry* of the church needs to be determined—what the church *does* concretely is dependent on what it *is* in its missionary nature. In the third place, then, the church provides the structures for carrying out its ministry.⁸⁵ Thus structure, rather than being the central concern of ecclesiology, is contingent upon the church's identity as missionary and upon the missionary task of proclamation, witness, inculturation, dialogue, etc. An ecclesiology, in other words, that takes mission as central to its identity, might have some far-reaching contributions to make to discussions about reforming the papacy, the identity of ordained ministers, and the ministerial role of all baptized Christians.

CONCLUSION

The doctrine of mission, in the words of Wilhelm Andersen, is "the great agitation in the life of the church," or—to use Andrew Walls's words—what effects the church's "fortunate subversion."⁸⁶ As I conclude these reflections on the role of mission in systematic theology, it is with these words in mind that I suggest that what is at stake here is no less than our understanding of the nature and purpose of theology itself. Theology is faith seeking understanding, but not the understanding of faith for its own sake. Rather, faith seeks understanding so that Christians can more fully and faithfully follow Jesus, and more fully and faithfully acknowledge his Lordship by being conformed to his work of preaching, serving and witnessing to the Reign of God in particular times, in particular places, as particular people. And faith seeks understanding so that faith can be *understandable*—so that others can grasp "the breadth and length and height and depth" (Eph 3:18) of the love of God whose nature is expressed in sending and being sent forth into creation. If our faith is to fully understand and be understandable, that divine sending forth—and our own—needs to be at faith's center. My proposal in these reflections has been that it is the consciousness of that mission of the triune God, in which we are graciously called to share, that can challenge the imagination of theology—if it takes its wisdom not only from the familiar center, but from tradition's often-neglected and less-explored margins.

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⁸⁵Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church*, 155-56.

⁸⁶Wilhelm Andersen, "Further Toward a Theology of Mission," in *The Theology of the Christian Mission*, ed. Gerald H. Anderson (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1961) 313; Andrew F. Walls, "Missionary Societies and the Fortunate Subversion of the Church," *Evangelical Quarterly* 60/2: 141-55.